Artes liberales

Herausgegeben von
Horst-Jürgen Gerigk

Dostoevsky's Taboos

Olga Meerson

STUDIES OF THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE

DRESDEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

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As a masterpiece of practical criticism, *Dostoevsky´s Taboos* will be of interest not only to the general reader of Dostoevsky´s novels but also to the Dostoevsky scholar who will see many a well-known detail here in a new light.

Olga Meerson:
Dostoevsky's Taboos

Olga Meerson was born in 1959 in Moscow and emigrated to Israel in 1974, where she completed her high school education at the Hebrew University High School in Jerusalem in 1977. She subsequently moved to the United States and received the BA in Liberal Arts from Hunter College in New York City (1984) and the MA (1986) and PhD (1991) in Russian Literature from Columbia University. She is married (1977 – present) to an Orthodox priest and theologian and has three children (ages 14, 8 and 4). Currently she is an Assistant Professor of Russian at Georgetown University.

Dr. Meerson´s interests range from Old Testament exegesis (she is fluent in Hebrew) to Russian Orthodox liturgical poetics and musicology (she has served as a reader and choir director in a Russian Orthodox parish for twelve years) to Ilya Zdanevich, Andrej Platonov, and contemporary Russian women writers, especially poets. Her strongest professional asset is her ear. She is particularly interested in the hidden motivation for apparent non-sequiturs. Although she knows and likes to teach 19th c. Russian Literature, her interest in Dostoevsky stems from her fascination with 20th c.

Artes liberales

Beiträge zu Theorie und Praxis der Interpretation. Herausgegeben von Horst-Jürgen Gerigk

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1998. English. About 480 pp. Cloth with jacket.
ISBN 3-931828-71-9

DRESDEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

Zwickauer Str. 37 / D- 01187 Dresden / Phone +49 351 471 09 80 /
Fax +49 351 471 09 40 / E-Mail dup@dresden-unipress.com
http://www.dresden-unipress.com

Artes liberales

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Herausgegeben von
Horst-Jürgen Gerigk
Universität Heidelberg

Band 2

DRESDEN UNIVERSITY PRESS
1998

Dresden - München

STUDIES OF THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE
Columbia University

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Olga Meerson

Dostoevsky's Taboos

With an Introductory Note
by Horst-Jürgen Gerigk
and a Preface
by Robert L. Belknap

STUDIES OF THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE
DRESDEN UNIVERSITY PRESS
1998

Dresden - München

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Meerson, Olga:
Dostoevsky's Taboos / Olga Meerson. With an introductory note by Horst-Jürgen Gerigk and a preface by Robert L. Belknap. - Dresden : Dresden University Press, 1998
(Artes liberales ; 2) (Studies of the Harriman Institute, Columbia University)
ISBN 3-931828-48-4

Herstellungsleitung: Eckhard Richter
Umschlag- und Einbandgestaltung: Petra Sennfellner, Wien
Druck: Druckhaus Dresden GmbH
Bindung und Weiterverarbeitung: Kunst- und Verlagsbuchbinderei GmbH Leipzig
Printed in Germany

Dedicated to the blessed and eternal memory of Anatol Schnittke, my father and first taboo mentor.

Душа обязана одеться.
То, что высокому уму
На горнем месте веры тесто –
Иному – блажь и ни к чему.

Закрой признания письмо:
Твердят Гомер и Глостер купно,
Что нужно на глазу́ бельмо,
Чтоб зреть, *что* гла́зу недоступно.

И не ответ, а лишь вопрос –
Задача умной лиры звона:
"Зачем арапа своего
Младая любит Дездемона?"

Пусть музыка без слов поёт
О том, *че́м* сердце сердце жжёт,
Что́ шепчет Филемон Бавкиде,
Что́, окрылившись налету,
Икар, обжёгшись солнцем, видел
И канул камнем в пустоту.

"*Silentium* No. 3" (1994)

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Introductory Note

Olga Meerson's book, *Dostoevsky's Taboos*, ranks as one of the highlights of Dostoevsky criticism simply because it furnishes a key not only to Dostoevsky's idea of human subjectivity but to his narrative technique as well. The taboos discussed are, of course, not those of Dostoevsky himself, but those of his "heroes," haunted by traumatic insult, a psychic wound, something unspoken, yet needing to be covered up by action, "philosophy," and silence ...

For decades we have heard so much of Dostoevsky's "polyphony," that we should be grateful to hear now, and not without surprise, something special about Dostoevsky's "taboos." For these taboos refer to nothing more or less than the "depths of the human soul," on which Dostoevsky considered himself the authentic expert and therefore called himself "a realist in a higher sense." What Meerson calls Dostoevsky's tabooing lies at the heart of his art; nevertheless, up to now, it has never been explored systematically, or throughout his oeuvre. Olga Meerson has succeeded in filling this lacuna in a pleasant style that results from a rare aesthetic sensibility.

As a masterpiece of practical criticism, *Dostoevsky's Taboos* will be of interest not only to the general reader of Dostoevsky's novels but also to the Dostoevsky scholar who will see many a well-known detail here in a new light.

Heidelberg
September, 1996

Horst-Jürgen Gerigk

Preface

Meerson's approach to Dostoevsky's works does not yet have a convenient name, but it already offers scholars a way of answering some pressing questions. Many have asked what a work of literature means, and many answer by saying it means what it says. Some early Dostoevsky scholars carried out the implications of this formulation by summarizing Dostoevsky's plots or the statements of his various characters. Bakhtin challenged this second approach by saying that Dostoevsky uses no raisonneurs and that his meaning resides in the interaction of the words, philosophical positions, and actions of many characters, and his followers have often disagreed and sometimes given up in the effort to understand those interactions.

New Critics obsessed with irony go further and insist that books often say precisely the opposite of what they mean. And post-modernists often liberate meaning entirely from any relation, positive or negative, to authorial intent and even to the text, arguing that meaning resides entirely in the consensus of the critical community at any given time, if it exists at all. The only more extreme denials may be the romantic rejection of the propriety of meaning, the belief that a work of art should not mean but be, or the Tolstoian claim that his novels mean the experience of the work and not anything that can be said about it. Perhaps the most honest abdication of critical enquiry into the meaning of such texts was André Gide's admission that "Dostoevski ne m'est souvent ici que l'occasion d'exprimer mes propres pensées."

Reacting against this fashionable position of despair at or disregard for the possibility of discovering meaning, Meerson offers a new place to look for it: in the things Dostoevsky's nar-

rators and characters do not say. At first, such an approach seems intellectually dangerous. The number of things not said in Dostoevsky's works would fill a book, and one might claim that the real meaning of his works is a purple rhinoceros, since none ever appears in anything he wrote. To discipline her analysis of omissions in Dostoevsky's writings, Meerson turns to the anthropological concept of the taboo, which involves not only the exclusion of certain key words and behaviors from a society, but also the establishment of sanctions for infractions and of substitute ways to deal with taboo matters.

One can guess, for example, that bears were important in ancient Russia not only by the absence in the language of words related to the Indo-European Bear and Ursus roots, but also because the existing word, Honeyeater is plainly a circumlocution. She uses this technique to discover central elements in Dostoevsky's works which have sometimes eluded literalists, and she offers rigorous ways of measuring the importance of certain matters to a text or a character by studying how strenuously and conspicuously that text or character struggles to exclude that matter from discourse or even consideration. Within the text these exclusions protect and signal a "sore spot," but outside the text, in the reader's experience, they create a special sensitivity which Dostoevsky can exploit for literary or other purposes.

This dangerous but exciting approach will have implications for many other books, primarily those whose authors were able to construct systems of taboos as instruments for the manipulation of their readers, exploiting the "aha" that comes with the conscious and sometimes unconscious sense that one has participated in maintaining such a taboo. It may also throw light on the actual impact of taboos imposed externally, whether by the author's psychological identity, by governmental or ideological censorship or by fear of displeasing some hegemonic economic or social force. Meerson's book offers genuinely original, and tightly documented readings of Dostoevsky's texts but begins a discussion that will reach much further.

New York City
September, 1996

Robert L. Belknap

Acknowledgments

A whole community of scholars, friends, colleagues, relatives, guardian angels, and those who have been all or several of the above, has contributed to the formation and survival of this book. My life-long mentors Robert L. Belknap and Elizabeth K. Beaujour have exercised a truly kenotic ability to respect and actively cherish another person's approach to their own fields of interest. Elizabeth Beaujour has read the whole manuscript at least three times and made extremely valuable suggestions after each reading. My friend, colleague, and fellow student Deborah Martinsen has read the manuscript twice and has managed to make it considerably more readable and its author considerably less begrudged with the world. Ronald Meyer and Marcia Morris have read through the manuscript and made important suggestions. Jon Frederickson helped me with proofreading and provided great feedback and immense challenge in his capacity as a specialist in psychoanalysis.

At my dissertation defense, Helene Foley and Gillian Lindt suggested that I closely correlate my concept with Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, which gave my book a very definite disciplinary perspective. Ludmila Parts and Edilberto Soriano, my students at Hunter, urged me to compare and contrast taboos in Dostoevsky to those in Tolstoy—a challenge that caused me to be precise in my analysis of the narrator's role in tabooing. My fellow graduate students Svetlana Grenier, Maude Maisel, and Nancy Workman, who read portions of the manuscript or of its early dissertation version, made valuable and encouraging comments, as did my sister-in-law Ekaterina Schnittke. Deborah Martinsen, Marcia Morris, Nina Perlina, and Irina Reyfman

have often cited my ideas to their students and colleagues (an activity which has ultimately led to this publication).

Above all I have to thank Elijah, Elizabeth, and Simeon, my three wonderful children—of whom Simeon was even strong and supportive enough to gestate and be born together with the initial version of the book—and my truly saintly mother Flora Schnittke who has taken care of the children thus keeping them, me, and my husband sane. My husband Rev. Michael A. Meerson's support has been particularly precious because it has never been merely intellectual. Besides understanding and respecting my ideas, both he and my mother actually share my views and values—a blessing which today is rare even in the most fortunate families.

Washington, D.C.
November, 1996

Olga Meerson

A Note on Transliteration

I use the transliteration of the Library of Congress, with the following modifications:

I kratkoe = j—so as to avoid the confusion between such possessive pronouns as *tvoj* (masculine singular) and *tvoi* (plural). (In compound vowels I retain the Library of Congress spelling of ia and iu, since the letter i kratkoe is not their graphic component.)

I transliterate iat' with ie when it is necessary to refer to the prerevolutionary spelling, or when a contemporary author chooses to use this spelling (e.g., the title of Saraskina's book on *Demons* begins with *Biesy*, not *Besy*, although her book came out in 1990). Otherwise, all nineteen century sources are cited in contemporary spelling.

Hard sign = " .

Names commonly known to an English speaking reader are spelled in the most familiar way (Dostoevsky, Florensky, Verkhovensky, Evgeny, Tolstoy). In the bibliography authors' names are transliterated when the original source is in Russian.

Introduction

Style and Axiology in Dostoevsky: The Imperative of Correlation

This book addresses a theoretical problem which transcends the realm of Dostoevsky's poetics; namely, how to decode the ethical and philosophical message, or the underlying value system of a literary text. In some cases the biographical and ideological contexts of writers' poetics help, but often they are missing, unreliable, overabundant, or contradictory. Writers who avoid authoritative narrators, whose Dantes have no Virgils, deprive their readers of corrective guidance and rely on their style to manipulate the emotions of an intellectually disoriented reader. To decode the texts of such dialogic writers, critics need additional keys to the ways in which these texts signify. To discern how such texts are relevant to truth as the author sees it, one must examine how they are written. The fiction of such writers lies mimetically, by definition, but it tells the truth diegetically. While inventing facts, characters and events, fiction also invents ways of pointing to values in language that parallel the cognitive processes we use in everyday life. In his *Fictional Truth*, Michael Riffaterre has shown how literary techniques "point to a truth invulnerable to the deficiencies of mimesis or to the reader's resistance to it."[1] Consequently, if a given technique is prominent in a given writer's poetics, and if it steadily operates on the same set of ideas and values, these ideas and values must be prominent in this writer's world. As a great ideologist and at the same time a prototypical author with no vision of the

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[1] Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 33. Cf. also *ibid.*, xiii, 10, 31-33, *passim*.

truth that is accessible through a spokesman, Dostoevsky offers a perfect test for my theory. This book will examine one formal device and classify the motifs on which this particular device operates. The device consists of treating a topic as taboo. The tabooed topics signal the ideas and values which I consider more important for Dostoevsky's value system than those enunciated by his most exciting characters.

Dostoevsky's Taboos

> "Good-night, my—" He stopped, bit his lip, and abruptly left me.
>
> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, last sentence of Chapter 17

In his memoirs, Pavel Florensky recalls his upbringing and his sensibilities as a child as having been full of taboos, the unwritten laws defining for a child the realms of the unmentionable and the indecent.[2] He goes so far as to claim that the child regards the interdiction on the indecent as much more absolute and inviolable than the distinction between good and evil:

> [A particular] set of words [...][3] was excluded from the vocabulary of the household: government service, superiors, [...] awards, governors and ministers, money, salary, betrotheds, husbands and wives, births and deaths, funerals and weddings, priests and all sorts of theological terms, Jews and all kinds of touchy national issues, etc.; [...] these notions, as well as many others, were tabooed [*tabuirovany*], at least for the purposes of my consciousness as a child. No one formally forbade us to use these words or discuss the corresponding notions—except for the topics of money and salary, which were considered unconditionally inappropriate. But even without a formal interdiction, I discerned from certain ineffable family currents that some of these words were half-decent and

---

[2] Sviashchennik Pavel Florenskij, *Detiam moim. Vospominan'ia proshlykh dnej. Genealogicheskie issledovaniia. Iz solovetskikh pisem. Zaveshchanie.* Moscow: Moskovskij rabochij, 1992, 65-74.

[3] In my book I will constantly designate omissions from the texts I quote with three dots in brackets, in order to distinguish between what I omit and what Dostoevsky designates with his own use of three dots.

some indecent. Children have an absolutely true instinct, a canine sense of discernment about what is decent or indecent. There is no profound distinction between good and evil, and doing something bad is bad, of course, because it will upset the parents; but on the ontological level [*v sushchnosti*], why not do it? The distinction between the indecent and the decent, on the other hand, is absolute, and doing something indecent is worse than dying. And even worse than doing it is saying it. [...] There is nothing worse than the indecent word, except for one thing: the thought of/about it. [...] The indecent [...] has no external features that one can use to define its indecentness [*neprilichnost'*], or to explain it. It is rather akin to mystical notions; it is taboo; and only with some kind of higher sensibility did I grasp what was taboo and what wasn't.[4]

In this passage Florensky switches tenses from the historical to the actual present and back, and from there to the simple past. I prefer to preserve this shift of tenses in my translation because the sudden unanounced switches of temporal and stylistic perspective from that of Florensky-the-adult to that of Florensky-the-child suggest that long before mentioning Dostoevsky, Florensky has already introduced *erlebte Rede* of a specifically Dostoevskian kind. Bakhtin would call it "the double-voiced word"[5]—the peculiarly Dostoevskian switch, momentary and unanounced in punctuation, into the perspective of the cited character—in this case Florensky himself as a child. Florensky creates an ambiguity between two functions of the present tense: the present tense reserved for expressing universally and eternally true philosophical maxims on one hand, and the historical present which suggests that these were the truths to which he subscribed as a child, on the other. As a result he endows his childhood sensibilities with an aura of objectivity or universal validity. This objectivization (as opposed to objectification)[6] of a character's subjective opinion is very typical of Dostoevsky's polyphony. Dostoevsky's style, therefore, enters Florensky's text well before Florensky actually mentions him.

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[4] *Ibid.*, 65ff.

[5] Cf., for instance, Bakhtin's notion of *dvugolosoe slovo* in M. M. Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel', 1979, 214 ff., or Part 3 of V. N. Voloshinov, *Marksizm i filosofiia iazyka*, Leningrad: Priboj, 1930.

[6] Cf. Bakhtin (1979), 231. Cf. also Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin, Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990, 151.

Florensky continues to describe his childhood perception of taboos as something objective, existing beyond the realm of his childhood impressions:

> I remember well that this sense of the indecent was perceived by me not as my own shyness or shamefacedness, or in general as my own personal quality, but rather as a right and appropriate feeling—precisely as one usually [describes] conscience. The slightest violation of this verbal taboo [...] was harshly condemned by me inwardly. [...] Existence is fundamentally mysterious, and it does not want words to lay bare its mysteries. [...] As for possibly the most important thing, the roots of life, the darkness of the netherworld is their due [*korniam zhizni, mozhet byt', samomu glavnomu, prilichestvuet podzemnyj mrak*]. [...] This was essentially how I perceived the decent and the indecent at that time. I do remember well that that was the essence, although at that time I could not use these words to describe it; and it seems to me that this is not my individual [or] random feeling, and [...] that the set of taboo words is not subjective, but rather something incomparably more general for humankind [*nesravnenno bolee obshchechelovecheskoe*]. It also seems to me that possibly these same words are taboo among savages with whose psychology I feel great affinity even today.[7]

After talking for three pages about his childhood perception of the indecent as the inviolable subject of absolute interdiction, Florensky makes a sudden contrast between this sensitivity to taboos and Dostoevsky's poetics. With a typically Dostoevskian contempt for American values, Florensky nonetheless denies the writer any place in a world regulated by taboos:

> What I would like to convey about our family [...] is neither complacency nor an American sanity and satiety, and least of all is it a sectarian sense of self-righteousness. It is not that at all. But in our family, there would be no place for Dostoevsky. In our house, he would immediately cut out his hysterics [*oseksia*], of that I am quite sure. [...] [O]ur house was not safely ordered [*blagopoluchnyj*] at all; it was founded on fatalism and on the notion that everything beautiful was doomed. It is precisely for this reason that chaos had no access to this island: one could destroy it but could not disrupt it with a scandal. [...] In our house, pathos [...] would be undecorous [*neprilichen*]. Crying, wailing, exclamations—I cannot possibly imagine anything of the sort in our house. And if Dostoevsky had burst into the house with something of the sort,

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[7] Florensky (1992), 66.

> [...] Mom would have told us, the children: "Go, play in the yard, Fedor Mikhajlovich is unwell," [...] and all the adults would have exchanged glances and tactfully gone to their rooms. A quarter of an hour later my father would have told Mom or my aunt: "*Il faut lui donner un verre d'eau avec sucre. [...] Pauvre homme, il est tres nerveux*,"—and, pretending that nothing had happened, they would have gone on to announce: "Fedor Mikhajlovich, dinner is on the table" [...]
>
> Dostoevsky, therefore, had no place [in our house], and even his novels, although they were placed in the bookcase, were never read by anyone, not openly, at least—being regarded as something dubious (*kak chto-to somnitel'noe*); in contrast, Dickens, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Pushkin were considered decent/decorous through and through (*schitalis' naskvoz' prilichnymi*).[8]

I believe that Dostoevsky in fact had what Florensky and others have denied him, namely a sensitivity to the absolute inviolablity of unwritten laws, or taboos. The Florensky household, described as a "forbidden island" full of taboos, with its fragile well-being (*neblagopoluchie*), resembles the households of the Epanchins and of Varvara Stavrogina more than Florensky himself admits or realizes. Yet Florensky is right in one respect. In his work Dostoevsky desocializes absolute taboos, subjecting them to the ultimate tests of crime, sin and scandal which supposedly destroy them. Surprisingly, whatever is absolute in these taboos survives the test. Although the reader recognizes taboos in Dostoevsky by the same signals as one does in sociocultural interactions, in Dostoevsky's poetics taboos are not imposed by society but immanent to one's conscience.

Mine is therefore not a book about the innumerable taboos that Dostoevsky violates. Quite the contrary, I argue that the "unwell Fedor Mikhajlovich," this champion of scandalous revelations and scenes,[9] has actually created a very strict system of taboos which determine the systems of values in each of his works. Serious scholars have considered all attempts to reconstruct Dostoevsky's beliefs about truth from his fiction to be reductionist, and therefore taboo. I suggest that the first to share

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[8] *Ibid.*, 68-69.

[9] For an informative survey of the way Dostoevsky's contemporaries perceived his "scandalousness," cf. A. S. Dolinin, *Poslednie romany Dostoevskogo*, Moscow-Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel', 1963, 197-200.

this consideration was Dostoevsky himself. He, however, signaled this taboo on his own values so elaborately and tellingly that the investigation of the tabooing techniques that he used in his fiction actually reveals a lot about what he tabooed, i. e., the values held dear by him. I use the word "taboo" as a noun designating the interdiction on something to be "set apart and away from human contact, either as consecrated or accursed;"[10] as a noun designating the object of such an interdiction or as an adjective modifying a forbidden utterance ("certain issues are taboo," i. e., "disapproved, proscribed").[11] I also use the passive participle "tabooed," to designate the objects of taboos; the verb "to taboo" and the gerundial noun "tabooing" to designate the activity or the operation of putting something under taboo; and the active noun "tabooer" to refer to either the animate agent of tabooing or its inanimate instrument.[12] In some cases the tabooer is the same as the signaler of a particular taboo. In all of these cases, I do not treat the interdictions on doing something but rather only the interdictions on saying or even thinking something, which in Dostoevsky do not necessarily imply the interdiction on doing the same thing—be it even murder.

Anthropologists may study taboos on subjects of discourse which can never be mentioned. But they realize that the complete absence of something from a culture may not indicate the presence of a taboo on that thing. In fiction as in life, our failure to mention purple elephants proves little. When, however, a literary text "seems to hide something, that something is supposed to be true" (Riffaterre, 85)—whether the text succeeds in hiding it or fails. In society, the sanctions imposed in reaction to the occasional mention of a tabooed subject establish the existence of a taboo. In literature, the most interesting ways of establishing the existence of a taboo also involve reactions to its violation. In this respect, the difference between murder mysteries and tabooing in Dostoevsky's murder novels is especially illustrative. In a murder mystery, the plot depends on the fact that until the denouement of the story, the murderer or some

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[10] Compare the definition in *The New Webster Dictionary*, New York: Avengel, 1980, 853.

[11] *Merriam-Webster*, G.+C. Merriam Co., 1976, v. 3, 2325, entry no. 1 on "TABOO/ TABU." As I have mentioned, however, taboos in Dostoevsky are imposed by one's conscience, not by society.

[12] *Ibid.*, entry no. 2.

circumstances of the murder remain unmentioned. In Dostoevsky's four murder novels, on the other hand, murder plots depend on the fact that the murderer or some circumstances of the murder are treated as unmentionable, even though they are known, and most importantly, even when they are actually mentioned.[13] My examination of Dostoevsky's tabooing techniques will prove that he found a means of communication which enabled his message to penetrate the noise of disorder and depravity around him more effectively than any non-tabooed utterances could penetrate this noise. I hope my book will help refute the popular idea that Dostoevsky enjoyed sadomasochistic scenes, was hysterical and scandalous, and tried to drive his readers crazy for the sheer pleasure of it.[14]

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[13] Compare the plot of *Crime and Punishment* to Agatha Christie's *Five Twenty Five* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Discussing these two stories, Roland Barthes labels omission in them as "cheating" (cf. Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," in *New Literary History* vol. VI no. 2, Winter 1975, 263). Christie omits information on some aspects of the narrating protagonist's discourse—e. g., the fact that in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* the narrator is the murderer. In *Crime and Punishment*, on the other hand, Dostoevsky, having omitted nothing important from his account of the murder, nonetheless makes us suppress what the murderer suppresses in his internal discourse.

[14] Elizabeth Dalton, for instance, maintains that in *The Idiot*, "the need for suffering is imposed on all the significant life of the novel by the sadomasochistic conception of the sexual act." (Elizabeth Dalton, *Unconscious Structure in "The Idiot"*, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1979, 107. Freud, in *Dostoevsky and Parricide*, is mostly interested in Dostoevsky's "masochism." N. K. Mikhajlovsky, on the other hand, elaborates on Dostoevsky's alleged "sadism" ("Dostoevsky. A Cruel Talent"), (cf. also Maria Kravchenko, *Dostoevsky and the Psychologists*, Amsterdam: Verlag Adolf Hakkert, 1978, 41, 106). Bitsilli comments on the correlation between sadism and Dostoevsky's poetics in his "DeSade, Laclos and Dostoevsky" ["De Sad, Laklo i Dostoevskij"] (cf. Donald Fanger, ed., *O Dostoevskom: Stat'i*, Providence: Brown University Press, 1966, 58-64).

Gary Cox juxtaposes a reading of the significance of unwritten laws in Dostoevsky to these sado-masochist approaches. But he is interested in unwritten laws only when they concern hierarchies of power. Cf. Gary Cox, *Tyrant and Victim in Dostoevsky*, Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1984, 10-12 ff.

G. M. Fridlender argues that Dostoevsky could not prefer unhealthy esthetics and disharmony to sanity and beauty, because he was fascinated with the esthetics of Pushkin and Raphael, considered by Russians the paragons of esthetic sanity and harmony. Cf. G. M. Fridlender, "Estetika Dostoevskogo" in *Dostoevskij - khudozhnik i myslitel'*, Moscow: Khudlit, 1972, 101.

Introduction, Part Two

> If there is no God then everything is permitted.
>
> F. M. Dostoevsky
>
> Ergo: If some things are not permitted then there is a God.
>
> Olga Meerson, "The Dostoevsky Taboo Law"
>
> "What's the matter, after all, explain it, for Christ's sake! Don't you understand that this concerns me directly?" [...]
> "Aglaia Ivanovna...," Lebedev began immediately.
> "Be quiet, be quiet!" exclaimed the Prince, beside himself and all blushing from rage and, possibly, from shame as well.
>
> *The Idiot* (VIII:260)

The Question of Dostoevsky's Authorial Intention

To what extent was Dostoevsky himself aware that he used the technique of tabooing for rhetorical purposes? I find my own presumption of the presence of Dostoevsky's authorial intention heuristically useful for deciphering his rhetorical purposes. The myth about the inadvertence of his style, however, has been very persistent. Likhachev mentioned the prominence of this

myth,[1] as did Remizov in the essay "The Hidden Thought,"[2] and recently, Richard Pevear, Larissa Volokhonsky and Andrei Navrozov.[3] Discussing Dostoevsky's contemporaries, Terras also notes that when "critical opinions deal with [*The Brothers Karamazov*'s] style and structure, [...] they do so in a patronizing and condescending manner."[4] As Belknap demonstrates, readers like D. H. Lawrence have unwarily presumed that the fiction of an author like Dostoevsky often prophesies truths of which the writer is not aware or which he opposes (a feature common to both prophets and idiots).[5] Even the warning of Bakhtin and other critics about confusing Dostoevsky's ideas with his characters' opinions may further confirm the idea that Dostoevsky did not understand what he was doing so brilliantly. My theory resolves the problem which these critics raise precisely because tabooing in Dostoevsky is too consistent a device not to betray authorial intention. Theoretically, the easiest way to deduce the intentionality of some texts is to examine their formal and structural makeup.[6] Extrapolating this intentionality of the text upon the author's philosophical intention, one Russian poet and critic says: "in the final analysis, the study of the device is the study of the artist's worldview."[7]

In Dostoevsky's case, this claim can be supported by two kinds of extratextual evidence—first, what Dostoevsky said about his rhetorical tasks, and second, what one knows about his biography. Dostoevsky found direct statements rhetorically ineffective. In his non-fiction Dostoevsky complained that he was urged to make "mean little concessions to the reader" in his

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[1] D. S. Likhachev, "O nebrezhnosti stilia Dostoevskogo" in Vasilij G. Bazanov, *Dostoevskij. Materialy i issledovaniia pod red. V. G. Bazanova*, vol. 2, Leningrad, 1974, 39 ff.

[2] Aleksej Remizov, "Potaennaia mysl'," in *Ogon' veshchej*, Paris, 1950, 306.

[3] Cf. Andrei Navrozov's review of the Pevear-Volokhonsky translation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, "Dostoevsky with All the Music," in the *New York Times*, November 11, 1990, 62.

[4] Victor Terras, *A Karamazov Companion. Commentary on the Genesis, Language, and Style of Dostoevsky's Novel*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, 35.

[5] Robert L. Belknap, *The Genesis of "The Brothers Karamazov": The Aesthetics, Ideology, and Psychology of Text Making*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990, 4, 127 ff.

[6] Cf., for example, Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, 6, and Riffaterre, *passim*.

[7] Vladislav Khodasevich, "Pamiati Gogolia," in *Izbrannaia proza*, New York: Serebrianyi vek, 1982, 69 (first published in *Vozrozhdenie* no. 3221 (March 29, 1934).

fiction in order to convey his message—rather than stating it directly (this did not work in fiction).[8] In her book on *The Idiot*, Robin Feuer Miller demonstrates that the narrative discoveries in *The Idiot*, too, resulted from the basic presupposition that direct statements are not effective in fiction. To Dostoevsky, the realization of this truth was rather tormenting; it was his own sore spot. It took him a whole novel—*The Idiot*—to come to terms with this idea. Miller calls this the discovery of "the narrative imperative."[9] I find Miller's term applicable to Dostoevsky's technique of tabooing. Dostoevsky's creative process involved the emergence of this narrative imperative, i. e., the transformation of his repressed sore spots into the consciously suppressed objects of taboos intact in his poetic world. Dostoevsky tabooed with suggestive consistency, obeying the inviolable "narrative imperative." For heuristic purposes, this consistency of obeying the narrative imperative is tantamount to conscious awareness.

In his notebooks to *The Possessed* (better rendered as *Demons—Besy*, in Russian) Dostoevsky actually specifies that at least one element of his narrative imperative consists of avoiding explanations or giving too many details: "The tone [should consist of] not explaining Nechaev or the Prince [i. e., Peter Verkhovensky and Stavrogin]" (XI:261). This entry suggests that Dostoevsky was intuitively yet persistently searching for ways of conspicuous non-telling, or non-explanation of core issues. Such is the rhetorical evidence for the fact that Dostoevsky ascribed significance to the technique of tabooing. The other, biographical evidence for the same assertion merits a separate section in this introduction.

Factors in Dostoevsky's Biography that Prompted Him to Taboo

The research of Igor' Volgin, a Dostoevsky scholar and a leading Russian archivist, and of Robert Belknap, who investigates the ways in which Dostoevsky processed his sources in *The*

[8] Cf. Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky and "The Idiot,"* Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 1981, 13.

[9] Miller (1981), *ibid.*, Chapter 1. "The Narrative Imperative" is also the title of this chapter.

Brothers Karamazov, confirms my proposition that tabooing had unique status for Dostoevsky himself.[10]

Without resorting to Freudian analysis, Volgin demonstrates that Dostoevsky had certain personal "sore spots" that he rhetorically treated as tabooed even in his non-fiction writings. (In these pre-fiction stages, Dostoevsky's own, untransformed "sore spots" may be regarded as repressed, not yet suppressed). In this connection Volgin cites Dostoevsky's letter to his brother Mikhail, which Dostoevsky wrote after his school friendship with Berezhetsky mysteriously collapsed: "I will remain eternally silent concerning the issue" (*budu vechno molchat' ob etom*).[11]

According to the letters and memoirs of Risenkampf, one of Dostoevsky's associates and roommates in the early 1840s, Dostoevsky was secretive (*skrytnyj*) concerning his sore spots, physical, fiscal or, possibly, sexual. Thus on March 10, 1881, Risenkampf wrote to A. M. Dostoevsky that thirty seven years ago his brother Fedor had concealed physical pain even from his closest friends:

> When I became his roommate in September 1843, it took me a while to find out that he was suffering from certain diseases [...] and very burdensome ones, at that. He adhered to the rule of revealing his concern only to the one who could help him. With stoic endurance would he go to work, experiencing unbearable suffering because of his abscesses [*stradaia ot naryvov; naryvy* literally means "sore spots"], while even his best friend Grigorovich would know nothing about this.[12]

In the manuscript version of his memoirs, Risenkampf also wrote that "Fedor Mikhajlovich loved to conceal [*liubil skryvat'*] not only his bodily faults but monetary problems as well."[13] O. F. Miller also cites Risenkampf telling him of Dostoevsky's sexual secretiveness:

> Young men in their twenties usually chase after a female ideal [*goniatsia za zhenskimi idealami*], get attached to pretty women. Fedor Mikhailovich, quite remarkably, revealed no such traits. He always seemed indifferent to ladies' company and even almost had some aversion to it. [...] It is possible that in this respect he was concealing something [*skryval koe-chto*]. At least, I was sur-

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[10] Belknap (1990). Igor' Volgin, *Rodit'sia v Rossii*, Moscow: "Kniga," 1991.
[11] XVIII:69, Jan. 1, 1840 (Volgin, 244, 295).
[12] *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 86, 550 (also, Volgin, 342).
[13] *Ibid.*, 331 (also, Volgin, 343).

prised that he was greatly interested in the verses which the enamored Sushkov addressed to the actress Asenkova, and also [that he] especially loved the love song "Forgive Me, O Charming Creature"—which he would constantly hum to himself.[14]

Here Dostoevsky taboos his personal concerns. He refuses to speak of them directly, substituting in their place a non-subjective literary reference, a cliché literary motif. Eventually he will taboo the concerns of his characters (and possibly his own concerns as well) by using taboos as literary motifs or as the motives for his characters' behavior and speech, or for the development of his plots.

Tabooing by turning the sore spot into a literary motif is the first step in the development of Dostoevsky's tabooing techniques. Some people become writers because they want to be able to talk about important things, but they sound too pretentious if they do talk about them with their friends. As a mature writer Dostoevsky legitimized being silent about the important things. But when he was a beginning author (in the period described by Volgin in the book I cite), he desperately wanted to fit in with critics and other writers, especially with Belinsky and those around him.[15] Perhaps for this reason, at that time Dostoevsky still tried to rework his own sore spots into literary motifs—rather than tabooing these motifs.

Dostoevsky's interest in tabooed cultural motifs was, however, also awakened during the same period, while he was a student and lived in the very building where the Emperor Paul was murdered with the silent consent of his son. It was also there that Dostoevsky learned about his father's death. Volgin argues very convincingly that Dostoevsky's impressions from living in the building where Paul was murdered prompted the future writer to project the circumstances of the Emperor's death on those of his father's—especially since many of these circumstances not only corresponded but were unmentionable. As Volgin states, "in both cases the circumstances of death were no secret to anybody, but it was not the thing [*bylo ne priniato*] to talk about them out loud."[16] Even if Volgin is wrong in claiming that Dostoevsky believed that his father was brutally murdered

[14] Volgin, 271, 346.

[15] Cf. Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky. The Stir of Liberation*, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1986, also Volgin, 379-385, esp. 384, 461-476.

[16] Volgin, 260, also 260-261, 323-330.

by his peasants, it is still likely that Dostoevsky ascribed some importance to this version of the story of his father's death, since at that time he was particularly affected by the story of the emperor Paul's murder.

Paul's murder, and the possible complicity of his son Alexander in this murder, was a cultural or historical (i. e., culturally "literarized") fact for Dostoevsky. This nationwide "collective sore spot" may have provided Dostoevsky with a model for dealing with his personal sore spot: the circumstances of his father's death. Volgin believes that Dostoevsky had guilt feelings about his own father's death, but specifically about being his heir (i. e., what Alexander was to the Emperor Paul), rather than as a typical "Freudian" son who wishes his father to be dead:

> [Dostoevsky] could be tormented by his conscience, but in a [...] specific way. After all, it was for his sake that the peasants' last drop of substance was wrung out of them—so that he could have [his parents'] last coppers [*ved' eto dlia nego vyzhimalis' iz muzhikov poslednie mednye den'gi*]. (Volgin, 252).

Volgin's perception of cause and effect is therefore the reverse of Freud's. Volgin traces Dostoevsky's perception of his father's death to a Russian cultural myth concerning parricide and regicide (Paul and his son Alexander)—rather than tracing this cultural myth to an allegedly universal oedipal urge to see one's king and father dead.

Volgin argues very persuasively that Dostoevsky's personal concern about the circumstances of his father's death was reflected only in his fiction, specifically in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In Dostoevsky's real life, since his father's death was a major sore spot, it was therefore tabooed, i. e., possibly not even suppressed but rather repressed. Dostoevsky, indeed, never mentions the circumstances of his father's death in any of his personal writings. Volgin writes:

> The death of the father (or rather, the circumstances of this death)—is one of the most obscure spots in the son's biography. Dostoevsky himself never said a word about it, intentionally or inadvertently [*ne obmolvilsia ob etom ni slovom*]—neither directly, in any written texts still available—nor indirectly, as testified by memoirists (*ibid.*, 250).

Volgin demonstrates that the writer's deep concern about the circumstances of his father's death was not the only factor in

shaping the parricide motif in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Equally important was the tabooed cultural motif of Paul's murder (*ibid.*, 260-261, 327-328). Describing how Dostoevsky transformed both his own tabooed sore spot and the cultural taboo on monarchial parricide into a literary motif, Volgin does not investigate the further literary treatment of this motif in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Actually, this literary treatment, in turn, involves tabooing. In my chapter on *The Brothers Karamazov*, I will demonstrate how Dostoevsky taboos certain circumstances of the motif of the father's murder. These circumstances concern everyone's complicity in the murder.

According to Volgin, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky transforms a national, collective "sore spot" (parricide concerning a Tsar) into a matter of personal concern for very private people. Many writers exorcise their personal sore spots by turning them into important literary motifs, but only Dostoevsky turns collective, cultural or national sore spots into the personal concern of one or more of his characters. As we will see, this transformation also characterizes the bathhouse passage in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*. I will also show that Dostoevsky subjects most of the universal or collective taboos that appear in his novels to this transformation, especially those in *Crime and Punishment*.

Robert Belknap suggests that Dostoevsky transformed another Tsar's sore spot into a particular element of the parricide motif in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The Tsar was Nicholas I, also a son of the assassinated emperor Paul. The parricide which bothered him in the case described by Belknap, however, was not the one commited against Paul, but rather one that was never commited. Citing the passage about Il'insky (the prototype of the alleged parricide in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, and eventually of Mitia Karamazov)[17] in the memoirs of P. K. Mart'ianov who was in the prison camp with Dostoevsky,[18] Belknap writes that even though "the court found insufficient evidence to convict [Il'insky], Emperor Nicholas I himself, coming upon the record of this case, had him sentenced to twenty years in prison camp because parricide was too

[17] Cf. also Leonid Grossman, *Dostoevskij*, Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1965, 552-554.

[18] P. K. Mart'ianov, "Na perelome veka," *Istoricheskij vestnik* 11, 1895.

horrible a crime to go unpunished, even if unproved" (Belknap, 1990, 61). According to Belknap, Nicholas "overreacted" to this mere shadow of parricide because he saw "his status as a father figure sufficiently threatened by a case like this to warrant intervention" (*ibid.*, 62). The suspect was therefore convicted because of this monarchial sore spot which was treated as taboo: the court and everybody else were silent about Il'insky's story. This silence even becomes a motif in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*. Gorianchikov tells us off-handedly, in a subordinate clause, that among the prisoners, nobody ever mentioned the parricide's crime: The convicts despised him not for his crime, which no one even mentioned, but for his willfulness [...]" [*Arestanty prezirali ego ne za prestuplenie, o kotorom ne bylo i pominu, a za dur'*] (IV:16).

At first it seems that the convicts tactfully omit the mention of the crime. Since, however, Il'insky's sentence was twenty years, not life, and prisoners knew best what sentence meant what, it is likely that Il'insky's fellow-prisoners actually doubted that he was guilty.[19] This suggests that everybody around the "parricide" actually omitted not the mention of the crime but the mention of its absence. This new unmentionable resulted from the transformation of Nicholas's sore spot into every prisoner's taboo.

For Il'insky, Nicholas's unmentionable sore spot became extremely personal. He had to pay for it with years of prison camp, never trying to prove to any of his prisonmates that he was innocent. Even if he did not know that he was sentenced because of Nicholas' personal interference, he still knew that he was innocent; yet he knew firsthand that whatever caused his sentence was powerful and inviolable enough not to be discussed or appealed, i. e., that the cause of his sentence involved a taboo. This taboo concerned Il'insky's personal sore spot (his fate), which in turn was transformed into Dostoevsky's personal sore spot, evoking his guilt feelings, for he at least partially suspected Il'insky of parricide. Dostoevsky then attempted to exorcise the sore spot of his own guilt. He created the figure of Gorianchikov who did not believe that his prisonmate might have

[19] Robert Belknap suggested this to me in conversation.

been guilty of parricide despite the "evidence"[20]—but nevertheless dissociated himself from this figure by introducing momentarily the figure of the publisher. Part 2, chapter 7 of The *Notes from the House of the Dead* begins with the note from the publisher who reports on the convict's innocence. Gorianchikov was dead by then. This way Gorianchikov, not Dostoevsky, would become guilty if he ever had suspected the innocent and the slandered (Belknap, 1990, 59-61).

Ultimately Dostoevsky exorcised this repressed sore spot, which thus was transferred to him all the way from the Emperor Nicholas I, by creating the figure of the slandered yet innocent Mitia Karamazov.[21] Again, as in the case of Emperor Paul's assassination discussed by Volgin, Nicholas's monarchial sore spot was also first transformed into a matter of personal concern for people who knew but did not talk about it; then this concern was transformed into Dostoevsky's own sore spot (guilt, but this time about suspecting the innocent, not about his complicity in his father's death); and eventually Dostoevsky's repressed sore spot became a suppressed sore spot in a fictional provincial family chronicle, which concerned Mitia Karamazov, a character with an extremely non-monarchial fate. Thus at least two collective taboos in Russia—each concerning a monarchial obsession with parricide—were transformed by Dostoevsky into something that concerned his characters privately. This argument is very powerful if Dostoevsky knew about Nicholas' direct interference. If he did not know, it is still likely that he was as puzzled by the mysterious silence about the cause of Il'insky's unjust conviction as Il'insky himself was. Unlike Il'insky, however, Dostoevsky also felt guilty for condemning Il'insky, i. e., for becoming implicated in the taboo on discussing or appealing Il'insky's case.

Belknap develops his argument about Nicholas's I paranoia in order to trace Mitia Karamazov's plot line back to the Il'insky affair. What matters for my purposes is that besides being a motif in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the issue of suspecting the ones who are not yet proved guilty becomes an important taboo in several of Dostoevsky's fiction works. As I will show, suspi-

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[20] Cf. Horst-Jürgen Gerigk, *Die Russen in Amerika. Dostoevskij, Tolstoj, Turgenjew und Tschechow in ihrer Bedeutung für die Literatur der USA*, Hürtgenwald: Guido Pressler, 1995, 108.

[21] Belknap (1990), 58.

ciousness is one of the Adolescent's shameful secrets which many characters in *The Adolescent* teach him to treat as taboo; and Myshkin and Razumikhin try to suppress and taboo their suspicion against the murderers Rogozhin and Raskolnikov respectively. Alesha Karamazov also forbids himself to succumb either to slander or to any "objective" evidence against Mitia, Zosima and even against Ivan whom he tries to convince that he was not the murderer (by telling him, "you were not the one who murdered the father" [*Ubil otsa ne ty*]: XV:36, 40).

Thus treating suspiciousness as a violation of a taboo in his fiction, Dostoevsky was possibly not only exorcising his personal guilt about Il'insky but also, as Belknap's argument suggests, suppressing the tabooed guilt of the paranoid Nicholas I. Although one may find this suggestion a bit farfetched, Belknap and Volgin provide substantial evidence that in 19th-century Russia, few people still could afford to exclude monarchial paranoia from their personal concerns.[22] Discussing concrete novels, I will further elaborate on Dostoevsky's transformation of collective taboos into private and idiosyncratic ones. Here it suffices to show that this feature of Dostoevsky's poetics has historical and biographical roots.

Another very important sore spot in Dostoevsky's own life was an episode with a raped nine-year old girl, which in *Crime and Punishment* he turned into one of Svidrigajlov's suppressed crimes, and in *Demons* into one of Stavrogin's crimes, suppressed in one version and scandalously confessed in the other. Many people ascribed the crime of Svidrigajlov or Stavrogin to Dostoevsky himself—a terrible accusation which Dostoevsky never tried to refute or prevent, apparently because he preferred the risk of slander to any discussion of the topic. If Dostoevsky was slandered only after his death, because of Strakhov's letter, this means that Dostoevsky suffered posthumously because of having tabooed this episode of his own life. As Volgin writes in his vividly dramatic style,

> [A]s a result [of Dostoevsky's refusal to mention any circumstances of the rape], the ominous shadow would be cast over [Dostoevsky] himself. Strakhov, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Grigorovich, and a multitude of other persons, worthy and respectable, would

[22] Judging by "Regicide" [*Tsareubijtsa*], Karen Shakhnazarov's 1991 film, regicide still is a national taboo and easily becomes a matter of both personal and group paranoia for many Russians.

> be informed (with varying degrees of plausibility) about the horrible deed of which the proponent of the humiliated and the offended allegedly boasted. With modest celebration, gossip would accuse him of sodomizing an underage girl. Nicholas Stavrogin's deed [...] would be ascribed to the author (Volgin, 128).

Volgin proves that the girl was Dostoevsky's friend when both of them were nine years old, and that he learned about it when he was called to fetch his father (the doctor). According to Volgin, the whole episode was probably the strongest shock Dostoevsky received in his early childhood—and not a crime of which he was guilty as a mature man.[23] Although the motif of the raped girl is prominent in *Crime and Punishment* and *Demons*, talking about the actual episode was so difficult for Dostoevsky that he mentioned it only once, in a conversation with Filosofov.[24]

Volgin never claims that these episodes in Dostoevsky's life determined the narrative technique of tabooing in his work. This Dostoevsky scholar, however, supports my claim in a rather unexpected capacity: as a mimicker of Dostoevsky's style. When talking of a sore spot of Dostoevsky's, Volgin finds it most natural to use a Dostoevskian narrative technique of tabooing. Describing the long-term effects of Dostoevsky's shock (at finding out about his childhood friend being raped), Volgin replaces the referent of the traumatically painful episode with an italicized pronoun—thus using a tabooing technique which was very important for Dostoevsky himself, especially in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Adolescent*:

> There, in [his] childhood, something is gaping, something which Dostoevsky will never mention [*obmolvitsia*] directly. But this thing [*eto*] will have a mighty influence on his whole creative fate: this theme will return again and again, like a boomerang (Volgin, 128, 135. Emphasis on *eto* is Volgin's).

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[23] Volgin, 128 ff., 135, 180-182. Cf. also V. N. Zakharov, "Fakty protiv legendy" in his *Problemy izucheniia Dostoevskogo*, Petrozavodsk, 1978, 75-109. Z. A. Trubetskaia cites her uncle Filosofov's recollection of Dostoevsky's account of the episode (*Russkaia literatura*, 1973, no. 3, 117). Volgin (p. 184) also notes that Suvorin traced Dostoevsky's epilepsy to this episode. Even though most probably Suvorin was wrong, the myth about the origins of Dostoevsky's epilepsy, which he (Suvorin) accepts as truth, stresses the fact that Dostoevsky treated the whole episode as a personal offense. He even called the incident "his personal offense" [*moe lichnoe oskorblenie*]. (Cf. notebooks for *Crime and Punishment*, VII:138; Volgin, 180, 184).

[24] Cf. the previous note.

By italicizing *eto* in this passage Volgin willingly or involuntarily demonstrates that a reference to Dostoevsky's sore spot may require very specific narrative techniques, such as the substitution of an italicized pronoun for the tabooed referent. These techniques in Dostoevsky should be considered important criteria for deciphering both his sore spots and the specific system of values which generates them.

The Types of Taboos Discussed in This Book

Dostoevsky taboos what matters in his works, and possibly even what matters to him. As I indicated in the beginning, in literature one signals the existence of a taboo not so much by observing it as by presenting scenes where characters violate it and other characters (or the reader) react to this violation as specifically the violation of a taboo. Even though many "temporary" taboos exist in Dostoevsky's novels (i. e., taboos which are perceived as such only in a short episode in a novel)—notably in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*,—I concentrate on relatively consistent and structurally important taboos. It is surprising how few inconsistencies one can find if one examines a taboo central enough for a given Dostoevsky novel.

Using taboos as the criterion for determining Dostoevsky's own system of values, however, presents another problem. Just as different narrators and characters have different ideas that do not coincide with Dostoevsky's own, so different characters and narrators might have different taboos. *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, for instance, do not have a taboo common to all of their characters and narrators. Yet these two novels trace *the emergence* of taboos (together with values) in the psychological and moral development of their main characters (Raskolnikov and Myshkin)—and thus allow Dostoevsky to stress the importance of these values.

Some taboos on particular characters' sore spots may be very conspicuous, or even constitute important motifs, but I will not dedicate separate chapters to them because they do not govern or shape the structure of a given work as a whole. Thus Mme. Epanchina in *The Idiot* tells Myshkin offhandedly that rather than crying about or for him, she "has her own sorrow, a differ-

ent one, eternal and ever the same" (*U menia svoe, drugoe gore, vechnoe i vsegda odno i to zhe.* VIII:265)—without ever specifying whether she means her husband courting Nastas'ia Filippovna, or her concern over Aglaia (whom the narrator, eight pages later, calls "her main and permanent torment" [*No glavnym i postoiannym mucheniem ee byla Aglaia*] VIII:273)—or something that the text of the novel does not mention at all. The motif of "one's own sorrow, a different one, eternal and ever the same" appears in many works of Dostoevsky. Raskolnikov's mother, Svidrigajlov, Dunia, Razumikhin, Alesha Karamazov—all have their own unmentionable concerns or sore spots which Lise Khokhlakova and Alesha call "some special sadness, possibly a secret one" (*osobennaia kakaia-to grust', sekretnaia, mozhet byt'* XIV:200-201).

Even Zosima has such a "secret," which plays a key role in his fate and attitude to life, but also an important structural and philosophical role in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Describing the impression The Book of Job left on his soul, he never mentions a key motif in the book: Job's friends rationalize the righteous man's misfortunes by doubting his righteousness and slandering him (XIV:264-265). This motif is so prominent in The Book of Job that Zosima's silence on this point becomes conspicuous. But this omission becomes even more conspicuous once Zosima's body begins to stink (XIV:296) and as a result people begin to doubt his righteousness. The motif of doubting a man's righteousness because of his misfortune gains further prominence with the unfolding of the main drama, where all the obvious evidence points to the innocent Mitia as the murderer. Nathan Rosen suggests that the Book of Job is the structural model of *The Brothers Karamazov*.[25] The central motif of the Book of Job, about which Zosima is so conspicuously silent, raises the issue of God's apparent injustice toward His righteous—and thus, in fact, concerns theodicy, an issue considered by many to play a central role in *The Brothers Karamazov*.[26] The motif of Job's innocent suffering that provokes slander, so meticulously omitted by Zosima, is therefore central to the whole novel. It

[25] Nathan Rosen, "The Book of Job in the Structure of *The Brothers Karamazov*" (in manuscript form, cited in Terras). Cf. also Terras, 21, and 21 n. 47.
[26] Cf. in Terras, 47-59.

motivates many key turns in the plot—and therefore must be meticulously omitted from the narration.[27]

Besides its structural importance, this tabooed motif also has theological implications. As Malcolm Jones demonstrates, the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor enters into a dialogue with Zosima precisely through this motif in the book of Job. Reinterpreting the Gospel story of Christ's three temptations, the Grand Inquisitor suppresses Divine Grace. The Inquisitor presents the relationship between God and His righteous as purely mechanical (magic), rather than personal (religious). The opposition of these two types of relationship with God links the Legend to the Book of Job, and through this link it engages the Legend in an ongoing, structurally cohesive dialogue with Zosima (Jones, 170-178). For the purposes of this dialogue, not only is it important that Zosima omits or even taboos any mention of the motif of God's apparent injustice in the Book of Job, but also that the dialogue between Zosima and the Grand Inquisitor, important as it is structurally and ideologically, must remain implicit: Zosima does not know about the existence of Ivan's Inquisitor. Jones' interpretation of the Grand Inquisitor's suppression suggests that the Gospel idea that one's relationship with God must be personal rather than mechanical is central to *The Brothers Karamazov*. The wrong, mechanical relation to God indeed appears as a motif several times in the novel (e. g., when Zosima stinks, Mrs. Khokhlakova says with indignation that she "did not expect such an act of the elder"; Mitia seeks morally implausible miraculous "devices" which would help him to first find money and eventually escape prison, etc.). But neither the narrator nor the characters ever say: this is magic, not religion, for it is written "do not tempt thy God." If indeed these words were uttered, the idea behind them would have been marginalized, for the reader would not have been implicated in expecting the same "miracles" as Khokhlakova or Mitia; and an important function of taboos in Dostoevsky is to implicate the reader.[28]

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[27] The idea of omitting segments of information because they are structurally important, or because they constitute the protagonist's "sore spot," is closely related to Gerard Genette's interpretation of *paralipsis*. Cf. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (orig. *Discours du récit*), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980, 52, 195-197. Cf. also Riffaterre.

[28] On implicating the reader, cf. Robin Feuer Miller, *The Brothers Karamazov: Worlds of the Novel*, New York: Twayne, 1992, 4, 131, *passim*.

These and many other examples show that Dostoevsky's work teems with structurally and philosophically important taboos. I will analyze in detail only a fraction of them, treating the cases that best illustrate the varieties and functions of tabooing. The chapters of this book are organized according to ways of applying and signalling taboos. Although several ways may occur within one work, I use each work to exemplify a different type of tabooing, the one that determines the structure of the work in question. Sometimes, however, cross references are inevitable or desirable. Thus I will need to refer more than once to Dostoevsky's taboo on judging one's neighbor, since its various expressions permeate all of his works, different as they may be technically. I also will refer to similar tabooing techniques used for different purposes in different works. For each work I will discuss how Dostoevsky sets up a different combination of techniques of tabooing and tabooed issues, and also distributes the roles of tabooers or taboo violators differently among the characters, the narrator, the reader, and the author. Dostoevsky's poetics in each work may be described in terms of this limited number of variables, which produces an almost infinite variety of ways to present systems of values through taboos. These taboos can help resolve the argument which became particularly important after Bakhtin, namely: do various opinions in a polyphonic novel have different degrees of authoritativeness?

Taboos and Polyphony: The Imperative of a Meta-Narrative Criterion

In Chapter 2 of his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin correlates what he calls "the large dialogue" with the absence of an authoritative narrator in Dostoevsky's work. Bakhtin's argument implies that in Dostoevsky's poetics such an authoritative narrator or an author figure, who would assess "from above" what he describes, is not only absent but impossible:

> The "large dialogue" of the novel as a whole [...] is not a report on some kind of a completed dialogue which the author by now has abandoned and above which he would be at the moment, as if assuming a higher and decisive position [toward it]. [...] The dia-

> logic attitude toward the hero is realized by Dostoevsky at the moment of the creative process, and at the moment of its completion; it is part of the plan. [...] In Dostoevsky's novels, the author's word about the hero is organized as a word [uttered] about someone present, who hears the author and is able to respond to him. [...] The author uses the whole construction of his novel to talk *to* his hero, rather than *about* him. (Bakhtin's italics.)[29]

Bakhtin, of course, was neither the first nor the only critic who raised the problem of establishing the criteria for the system of values in a work with no authoritative narrator. His correlation of this problem with the polyphonic approach to Dostoevsky, however, made it look especially odious if a reader or critic attempted to deduce what Dostoevsky himself, rather than his characters, wanted to state in his works. Among various critics who concerned themselves with literary works with no authoritative narrator, Bakhtin was particularly effective in warning Dostoevsky's readers against confusing Dostoevsky's own ideas with those which his many narrators and characters express in their own right—precisely because Bakhtin emphasized that in his fiction Dostoevsky often purposely *provoked* that confusion by making the ideas of his ideological opponents look particularly compelling. Bakhtin writes: "According to Dostoevsky's plan, the hero is a carrier of a full-valued word, not a dumb, voiceless object of the author's word."[30] As Dostoevsky's readers know, an Ivan Karamazov may often sound more convincing than an Alesha, whose ideas Dostoevsky shares.

For all his narrative pluralism and polyphony, Dostoevsky tried very hard to impose his own ideology and system of values on his readers—and sometimes succeeded (some radicals, for instance, could not help experiencing the very strong impact of *Demons*, which they nonetheless considered an ideologically incorrect novel).[31] On the one hand, Bakhtin convinced most of Dostoevsky's readers that Dostoevsky wrote his fiction according to the laws of narrative pluralism and polyphony—which he indeed composed and conducted, but silently. On the other

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[29] Bakhtin (1979), 74, translation mine, unless indicated otherwise.

[30] *Idem.*

[31] Of Dostoevsky's contemporaries, the most interesting is V. P. Burenin's ambiguious reaction to *Demons* (in Russian, *Besy*). Cf. his reviews of the novel in *SPb. Vedomosti*, Oct. 11, 1871, no. 250; *ibid.*, Jan. 15, 1872, no. 15; Dec. 16, 1872, no. 345; Jan. 6 1873, no. 6, and Jan. 13, 1873, no. 13. (Also: XII:260-261).

hand, we know that in his non-fiction Dostoevsky himself insisted that in his fiction he expressed his own strong philosophical and religious convictions.[32] How can a writer do both in a piece of fiction? How can one avoid relativism in a polyphonic novel? In what manner does one compose and conduct a polyphonic piece where all the parts are subjugated to the composer-conductor's will and creative intention?

Bakhtin states that Dostoevsky did manage to avoid the relativist pitfall. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin defines the ethical implications of Dostoevsky's polyphony apophatically, as non-relativist, i. e., in terms of what this polyphony is not:

> We do *not* find it at all necessary [*neobkhodimym*] to specifically discuss the fact that the polyphonic approach has *nothing* in common with either relativism or dogmatism [*ni s relativizmom, ni s dogmatizmom*]. [...] Both relativism and dogmatism *eliminate any* possibility of an argument, a genuine dialogue—making it either *un*necessary (relativism) or *im*possible (dogmatism). Polyphony—being an artistic method—is situated on a *different* plane altogether.[33]

In this passage, which teems with negative constructions, Bakhtin neither specifies on what "different plane" polyphony "is situated," nor defines the ethical or ideological function of this plane cataphatically, in terms of what it is, rather than what it is *not*. Saying that Dostoevsky was not a relativist, Bakhtin apophatically suggests that Dostoevsky's polyphony was built on a system of values, but in the cited passage Bakhtin does not specify any criteria for deducing this system from Dostoevsky's polyphony. At the same time, by the very fact of applying the musical term "polyphony" to Dostoevsky's poetics, Bakhtin has succeeded more than anyone else in invalidating the singular

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[32] Thus on May 10, 1879 (cf. also XV:423-424), he wrote to Liubimov that he intended to use the figure of Zosima to refute Ivan's "blasphemy" (*bogokhul'stvo*). Of course, one may explain this formulation as strategic. Dostoevsky needed to convince Liubimov that the "blasphemy" was not his own. But there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his conviction that his *Notes from Underground* was a religious work, since he expressed his distress about being misunderstood on this matter in a letter to his brother Mikhail with whom he was open. (Cf. his letter to Mikhail of March 26, 1864, also referred to in V:375, 381. On the validity of *Notes from Underground* as a religious text, cf. my article "Old Testament Lamentations in 'Notes from Underground'," *SEEJ* vol. 36 no. 3, Fall 1992, 317-322).

[33] Bakhtin (1979), 81, emphasis mine.

authoritativeness and ideological predominance of any particular voice or "musical part" in this polyphony.

In the same book on Dostoevsky, Bakhtin also examines the implications of Dostoevsky's polyphony for such ethical notions as the "unfinalizedness"[34] of human personality, which entails the fact that "the equation of identity A=A does not apply" to the human personality in Dostoevsky.[35] According to Morson and Emerson, Bakhtin regards Dostoevsky's heroes' "ability to sense the inner dialogues of others in all their unfinalizability" as "the only truly ethical [approach]."[36] Interestingly, however, both the notion of "unfinalizedness" [*nezavershennost'*] and the statement "A=A does *not* apply" are negative. They specify something Dostoevsky was trying to prevent from happening: judging one's neighbor. They do not, however, explicitly state what Dostoevsky wanted to happen, what ethical goal he had in mind when he tempted and provoked his readers to agree with such his opponents as Ivan Karamazov, and in general, to jump to conclusions which he himself considered patently false or unforgivably finalizing.

Analyzing Socratic dialogues, Bakhtin says that the dialogic view of truth presupposes that truth cannot be monopolized by a single voice but "is born *between people*, who search for it together, during the process of their dialogic interaction."[37] This dialogic concept specifies how one gets at truth, not what it is. Although this concept of truth is by no means relativist, it still leaves room for ideological abuse, partiality, and misinterpretation of Dostoevsky's truths. Ironically, precisely because Dostoevsky's truths are "born between people," the voices of his narrators and characters have been so compelling that many thinkers have adopted them *selectively*—sincerely believing that they have also adopted Dostoevsky's own philosophy. Such thinkers

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[34] Cf., for instance, Bakhtin (1979), 67-73, 85, 117.

[35] *Ibid.*, 69. For a very insightful discussion of these and related ethical issues in Bakhtin's understanding of Dostoevsky, cf. Morson and Emerson, 265-267. Bakhtin had theological predecessors in Russia, who discussed the same concept of personality in the context of trinitological and christological problems. Cf., for instance, Pavel Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny*, Moscow: Put', 1914, 35-36, 47-48, 79-80. On p. 80 of *Stolp*, Florensky writes: "Christian philosophy, i. e., [...] the philosophy of personality, [...] relies precisely on the possibility to overcome the law of identity." Cf. also Robert Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky: a Metaphysics of Love*, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1984, 109 ff.

[36] Morson and Emerson, 267.

[37] Bakhtin (1979), 126.

monologized Dostoevsky in precisely the way Bakhtin was trying to prevent. In Russia, for example, criticism of all kinds has been ideologically partial in its interpretation of Dostoevsky's theodicy in *The Brothers Karamazov*. As Victor Terras notes,

> Critics with little sympathy for Orthodox Christianity have generally said that Dostoevsky's theodicy is a resounding failure. Some critics, among them we find Rozanov, have felt that such failure reflects Dostoevsky's own incapacity for true religious feelings, combined, to be sure, with a burning thirst for it (Rozanov, *Dostoevsky and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, 174-175, 189-190). Some critics are in doubt as to whose side Dostoevsky is really on: Berdiaev is one of them, it would seem (see Nikolai Berdiaev, *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo*, [Prague, 1923], 195). Critics who are in sympathy with Orthodox Christianity generally accept the theodicy in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Among them we find Volynsky, Lossky, and Mochulsky.[38]

I would make two small amendments to Terras's assessment. Berdiaev did not doubt that Dostoevsky "was on the Christian side." Calling Dostoevsky's Christianity "anthropocentric," he also insisted that Dostoevsky's anthropocentrism was Christian.[39] (Berdiaev indeed contrasted Dostoevsky's specifically "anthropocentric Christianity" to traditional Orthodoxy, but he did not necessarily imply that Dostoevsky rejected Orthodoxy.) Leo [Lev] Shestov, on the other hand, should be added to Terras's first list which includes Rozanov. In *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, Shestov passionately argues that the only sincere voice of Dostoevsky appearing in any of his works is that of the Underground Man, and that Dostoevsky, therefore, was a desperate Existentialist.[40] Bakhtin's polyphonic approach to Dostoevsky's poetics—more cautious and less partial than the approaches of Volynsky, Berdiaev, Shestov, D. H. Lawrence,[41] the nationalists, the conservatives, the liberals or the democrats—therefore revolutionized Dostoevsky studies, although it is of

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[38] Terras, 48, n. 34. Cf. also Ronald Hingley, *The Undiscovered Dostoevsky*, London: H. Hamilton, 1962, esp. 222.

[39] Cf. Nikolaj A. Berdiaev, *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskogo*, Paris: YMCA-Press, 1968, and "Problema lichnosti v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo."

[40] Cf. Lev Shestov, *Dostoevskij i Nitshe, Filosofiia tragedii*, St. Petersburg, 1903/ Paris: YMCA-Press, 1971, 47 ff.

[41] Lawrence automatically equated the Grand Inquisitor's voice with Ivan's, and both of them with Dostoevsky's. Cf. D. H. Lawrence, "Introduction" to *The Grand Inquisitor*, trans. S. S. Koteliansky, London: Elkin Matthews & Marrot, 1930, iv.

course important that Bakhtin was not the only one who was concerned with non-authoritative narrators. And yet, because the polyphonic approach delineates Dostoevsky's ethical values mostly negatively, as non-relativist, unfinalizing, or those which no single voice may express in their completeness, many Dostoevsky scholars have been trying to respond to Bakhtin's challenge by working out some positively formulated criteria for what Dostoevsky held dear. V. E. Vetlovskaia, for instance, tries to find some narratological criteria for the different degrees of authoritativeness with which Dostoevsky endows different characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*.[42] She also believes (*ibid.*) that such criteria testify to the fact that Dostoevsky "really" did not like Ivan (thereby she, unlike D. H. Lawrence, at least, avoids the danger of citing Ivan's "Legend" as Dostoevsky's own words). Victor Terras shares Vetlovskaia's approach to the problem of the validity of Ivan's voice in the overall polyphonic context of the novel and also doubts the sincerity of this voice.[43] Robert Belknap and Robin Feuer Miller believe that a partial criterion for what Dostoevsky thinks about his own characters is what he makes them do in the plot or the rhetoric of the novel, rather than what he makes them say.[44] Terras too believes that Dostoevsky "verifies" the validity of his characters' ideas by revealing their "practical" outcome in the overall development of the plot. He says of Ivan's "fate" in *The Brothers Karamazov*: "The plot of the novel is as much a destruction of Ivan the human being as it is a refutation of his philosophy."[45] In all of these instances the scholars try to determine what Dostoevsky thinks of his characters and narrators, rather than what he makes them think—which, according to Bakhtin, is a wrong approach to Dostoevsky's poetics or ethics.[46] To a greater or lesser degree,

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[42] Cf. V. E. Vetlovskaia, *Poetika romana "Brat'ia Karamazovy*, Leningrad: Nauka, 1977.

[43] Terras, 90-93.

[44] R. F. Miller (1981). Cf. also Robert Belknap's article in William Mills Todd ed., *Literature and Society in Imperial Russia*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978.

[45] Terras, 48-49.

[46] Cf. M. M. Bakhtin, *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*, e. g., in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1986, 194-195: "From the first pages of his fiction to the last, [Dostoevsky] followed the principle of not objectivizing and finalizing another's consciousness through the means of anything that would be inaccessible to this consciousness, anything that would be located beyond its scope. [...] In Dostoevsky's works, there is literally not a single word of any importance said about any character, that the character himself would not

these scholars answer Bakhtin's challenge by refuting his proposition that weighing the authoritativeness of one character, narrator, or plot line against another is impossible or futile in Dostoevsky's poetic system. Thus what Bakhtin described as polyphony in Dostoevsky's works still provokes the arguments which Bakhtin tried to prevent, i. e., those arguments in which the opponents can appeal to the same text, drawing opposite and "finalizing" conclusions from it.

Many critics have accepted Bakhtin's proposition that Dostoevsky presents the truth dialogically, and they also have encountered problems as to whether this truth itself is dialogical for Dostoevsky. Dostoevskian truth may be presented dialogically but I believe that there is at least one less ambiguous way of getting at it, an important criterion for finding out what "Dostoevsky himself thinks" of his characters, of situations in his novels, and of their messages. I accept the proposition that one cannot answer, or even address, this question by citing Dostoevsky's various narrators and characters, or even by tracing separate plot-lines in his works. Instead one should try to examine *how* Dostoevsky incorporates his own system of values into his works—so that this "encrusted" system of values might influence the reader subliminally, without being overtly declared. This system of values obviously finds its expression in the characters' interactions—both in word and in deed. Yet one should not jump to any conclusions as to who expresses Dostoevsky's ideas and who opposes them, until one first discerns the criteria for Dostoevsky's own system of values in a given interaction. One such criterion—very important for Dostoevsky—is the same one used by Mary Douglas and Emil Durkheim to reconstruct the systems of values of the societies which they study: often a culture taboos that which matters most.[47] The "sore spots," i. e., the painful and unmentionable issues of a given culture tell more about its values than the conscious thought verbalized by the representatives of this culture. By

be able to say." Cf. also Bakhtin (1979), 74-76, and the passage on p. 74 which I cited earlier. According to this concept, not a single deed of Dostoevsky's characters can characterize them unless and until they realize the significance of this deed in their consciousness.

[47] Cf.: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London, Boston and Henley: Ark, 1966; also: Emil Durkheim, *Lecons de sociologie: physique des moeurs et du droit*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950; also Isidore Epstein, *Judaism*, London: The Elmworth Press, 1959.

applying this anthropological principle of tabooing, we can ascertain the particular systems of values that Dostoevsky establishes in most of his major works of fiction. Paradoxically, the apophatic behavior of Dostoevsky's characters and narrators—their *in*ability to mention something—enables Dostoevsky to signal his system of values cataphatically.

Taboos as Absolute Negative Imperatives

Mary Douglas maintains that every religion—"primitive" or not—has not only magic (i. e., mechanical) regulations but also "ethical" ones (Douglas's term). In Chapter 8 of *Purity and Danger* she examines some patterns of correlation between ethical systems and taboos. She observes that in primitive societies the retribution for violating a taboo (a calamity such as an illness or being possessed by an evil spirit) usually covers those cases to which that society's legal regulations do not apply. Thus the more rigid the legal system, the "looser" the system of taboos in the tribe, and vice versa. In his non-fiction writing, discussing Anna Karenina, Dostoevsky ascribed great significance to the distinction between the legal aspects of moral regulations and those aspects not governed by law but subject to one's conscience.[48] In Dostoevsky's own works this "taboo law" applies to the behavior of such characters as Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, and Ivan Karamazov. In *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov places himself outside the law of his society but still has to suffer the consequences of violating a taboo: he becomes physically, psychologically and spiritually ill. Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov do not have to face any conflicts with the legal system of the Russian Empire, but the retribution of madness, possessedness, or both is visited upon them for ignoring or suppressing their consciences. Thus, in Dostoevsky as in Shamanism (the way Mary Douglas describes it), Raskolnikov, Stavrogin and Ivan are ill and/or possessed by an evil spirit as the result of violating a taboo in the realm of their conscience or will, a realm for which the legal system of their society cannot hold them responsible.

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[48] *Diary of a Writer*, July-Aug. 1877, Chapter 1, Subchapter 1 (XXV:200).

In his *Lonely Thoughts* ("Uedinennoe"), Vasily Rozanov offers suggestive evidence that Dostoevsky knew about the function of taboos. Rozanov writes that Judaism treats as indecent (and therefore unmentionable: *neprilichnoe*) that which it actually regards as sacred and sublime.[49] Others link the sacred and the indecent or the unmentionable[50] but Rozanov had to look no further than Dostoevsky—his mentor and idol—in using this link for his own rhetorical purposes. Discussing the taboos in Judaism, Rozanov shares not only Dostoevsky's ideas about the importance of the unmentionable but also his rhetoric. As the demiurge of the universe of his own works, Dostoevsky encoded his system of values—negative *and* positive—in a series of idiosyncratically "Dostoevskian" taboos. Dostoevsky may therefore be one of the writers about whom Barbara Herrnstein Smith writes: "It may be among the historically determinate intentions of some 'authors' that we not take them to mean what they 'say'"[51]—but with one important modification. Rather than not meaning what he "says" (sometimes he does mean it), Dostoevsky frequently means what he "does not say"—provided, of course, that the reason for not saying it is a particular taboo, rather than the fact that the utterance simply does not belong in the context. Among the strongest signalers of taboos are instances of their marked violations—rather than cases where characters merely omit the discussion or the mention of a tabooed topic.

Violators and Signalers

Very often, therefore, Dostoevsky signals the existence of a taboo by a typical interaction: a character mentions some issue carelessly and another character has a "strange" reaction to this mention—he/she pretends not to have heard it or not to understand it, leaving the comment hanging in the air. (Svidrigajlov, for example, behaves in this way when Raskolnikov asks him

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[49] Rozanov, "Uedinennoe," in *Izbrannoe*, Munich: Neimanis, 1970, 26-27.

[50] Cf., for instance, Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New York, 1958, 14-15.

[51] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse*, Chicago, London: Chicago University Press, 1978, 147.

personal questions which concern not only Raskolnikov's sister but also Svidrigajlov's own suicide.) Sometimes the reacting interlocutor actually chastises the speaker for treating the topic he/she raises carelessly. Unless the reader realizes that the reacting interlocutor signals a taboo (sometimes quite idiosyncratically), the reader may suspect that these interactions are annoyingly unmotivated and testify to the fact that Dostoevsky has lost control of his material, that he is a bad, clumsy, and messy writer. In other words, people annoyed by Dostoevsky object to his narrative style and composition for the same reason they object to the "strange behavior of the savage man." In both cases the operative system of taboos seems idiosyncratic and unmotivated to someone who perceives these taboos from outside the system, and who therefore does not acknowledge their absolute validity within the system.

Selection and Recombination: Fictive Recontextualization of Social Taboos

In his *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Wolfgang Iser maintains that the best way to deduce authorial intention is by examining how the author's fiction actively transforms and fictionalizes reality through the selection and recombination of its elements (Iser, 4-10). As regards selection, Iser states: "The whole process brings to the fore the intentionality of the text, whose reality comes about through the loss of reality suffered by those empirical elements that have been torn away from their original function by being transposed into the text" (*ibid.* 6). This statement applies to Dostoevsky's poetics of taboos. Dostoevsky indeed selects elements from the system of taboos as we know it in empirical reality, but in his new contexts he subjects the functions of these taboos to immense transformations. In Dostoevsky, the less observed the accepted social contexts for taboos, the more "real" (in Iser's sense of reality) the idiosyncratically Dostoevskian ones. While operating in a different realm, therefore, Dostoevskian taboos are signaled in the same way as taboos in society. Thus, to paraphrase another scholar, taboos in Dostoevsky differ from social taboos mimetically, while corresponding

to them diegetically.[52] Freud's (and the common) understanding of totem and taboo, for example, is applicable to Dostoevsky's poetics only in a very limited way, because Dostoevsky often establishes taboos on issues that seem harmless outside his poetic world, while he abolishes many taboos that are usually maintained in conventional social situations. Gary Cox provides an example of such Dostoevskian redefinition of the realm of taboo. Using Freud's terminology, Cox maintains that "vulnerability is totemic in Dostoevsky's work" (Cox, 76). Paradoxically, according to Cox, in Dostoevsky vulnerability makes one invincible. In some ways Cox's paradoxical interpretation of taboo in Dostoevsky corresponds to mine: I believe that in Dostoevsky's works taboos appear where they are least expected. But unlike Cox or Freud, I am interested only in taboos on subjects of discourse or on verbal interaction between characters, rather than taboos on actions *per se*. Consequently, here I will discuss only those ways in which Dostoevsky transforms these taboos.

Dostoevsky's transformation of common taboos on subjects of discourse can be described in the following terms. In "the real world" even those taboos that operate exclusively on subjects of discourse usually:

(a) apply to rules of social interactions, rather than to one's private thoughts, emotions or psychologically reppressed issues; one does not mention the tabooed because others should not hear about it;

(b) are taken for granted, rather than developing over the course of one's life: as Florensky testifies, children have a much keener sense of the unspeakable than adults;

(c) make the people who observe them look discreet: murderers and harlots are rarely paragons of verbal discernment and decorum; and

(d) are carefully observed by those who narrate events *and* by those who participate in conversations.

In Dostoevsky's poetics, each of these four rules is only a variable which may or may not be observed. The violation of any of these rules often tells more about the value system of a particular work than does the observation of the rest of them. Thus in *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov observes taboos only in non-

[52] Cf. Riffaterre, 33.

social or even anti-social circumstances, thereby violating rule (a). Myshkin in *The Idiot* and Arkady Dolgoruky in *The Adolescent* violate rule (b) because they do not take taboos for granted but rather learn about them as they learn about values. Raskolnikov, on the other hand, violates rule (b) requiring that taboos be taken for granted, by learning about values the hard way—only after he learns about the inviolability of taboos. In Dostoevsky's works, characters or narrators who observe taboos or signal them may be as socially indiscreet as Rogozhin or Trusotsky—thereby violating rule (c) specifying that taboo signalers should be discreet. Dostoevsky's characters may leave the narrator and the reader behind in understanding the taboo system that all or many of them share, and thus violate rule (d)—as do the characters in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, in contrast to the narrator who does not understand their taboo. Finally, a single character may alone observe the right taboo, leaving behind the rest of the characters, the reader and the narrator—as happens with Smerdiakov in *The Brothers Karamazov* (also a violation of rule (d) specifying that taboos should be held in common). These are but some ways in which taboos in Dostoevsky differ from those in real life.

In some ways, however, Dostoevsky's taboos only *seem* to differ from those in real life. This illusory difference stems from the fact that in Dostoevsky the characters who observe taboos and signal them to others are sometimes not those whom we would expect, neither are the circumstances in which these characters observe the taboos. Thus among those characters who meticulously observe a taboo we find the boisterous and unruly Rogozhin after he has murdered Nastas'ia Filippovna (*The Idiot*); the drunken and cursing Trusotsky (*The Eternal Husband*); the horrible serial killer Petrov (*The Notes from the House of the Dead*); the murderers Raskolnikov and Smerdiakov (*Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*); the insane and "unpolished" Maria Lebiadkina (*Demons*); and the hysterical and scandalous Katerina Ivanovna (*Crime and Punishment*).

Dostoevsky also seems to apply certain taboos more selectively than they are applied in real societies. Thus, as I said, even in the cases where certain criminal actions themselves seem to be permitted or justified by circumstances, passion, or ideology, the mention of these crimes remains forbidden. This is especially important for Raskolnikov's and Rogozhin's verbal

treatment of their own murderous crimes. As Mary Douglas shows in Chapter 8 of *Purity and Danger*, however, this "selectivity," i. e., the split between permitted crimes and forbidden mentions of them, is common to legal regulations in many societies. But in Dostoevsky, the split between the permissibility of a crime and the unmentionabbility of the same crime occurs within the criminal's mind, rather than in social conventions.

While those who observe taboos and the circumstances in which they observe them in Dostoevsky's works are, or at least seem to be, different from the observers and circumstances surrounding taboos on subjects of discourse in real societies, the taboos themselves are still traditional and universally recognized. They range from taboos on speaking of love, or death, or murder, to interdictions against speaking about (and thereby summoning) the demonic powers in our lives. They may concern everyone's unmentionable worry or the idiosyncratic unmentionable worry of the speaker or his/her interlocutor, or the sins of one's neighbor or oneself. The signals for taboos are also conventional: an interlocutor finds a way to show the violator that he has commited a *faux pas;* an interlocutor pretends to ignore the comment which has violated a taboo; or the interlocutor tries to rephrase it in more decent terms. Thus the taboos themselves and what signals them are traditional, but the *circumstances* of violation or observation are unexpected.

Dostoevsky's idiosyncratic approach to taboos did not develop overnight. Early in his writing career he locates taboos in traditional, conventional social contexts; the incest motif in "The Landlady" and in the Varia-Bykov-Pokrovsky subplot of *Poor Folk* exemplify this trend. Even at these early stages, however, Dostoevsky begins to redefine the notion of decorum in idiosyncratic terms. Dostoevsky's contemporaries could not pinpoint these terms and naively believed that rather than redefining decorum, Dostoevsky simply abolished it. Dostoevsky's contemporary P. S. Beliarsky, for example, criticizes *The Double* for this "lack of decorum": "One cannot behold without being surprised how in this novella, the characters' discourse has transcended all limits of decorum [*zashel za vse granitsy prilichiia*]."[53] As I will show in my chapters on *The Idiot* and *The*

[53] *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia*, 1846 no. 7, section VI, 104. (Cf. also Volgin, 508).

Eternal Husband, Dostoevsky responded to this criticism not by adhering to what his critics would term "decorum" [*prilichie*] but rather by redefining the notion of decorum in his subsequent work. In my terms, the proverbial scandalousness of many scenes in Dostoevsky can be called "zero-tabooing," where taboos are absent conspicuously. "Zero-tabooing" functions in literature just as zero-devices function in the Formalist view of art and zero-endings function in grammar. (A zero-ending in a Russian noun indicates second declension nominative singular as adequately as an -a -ending would indicate first declension nominative singular. Zero-endings, therefore, function as grammatical endings. Similarly, zero-taboos indicate the violation of a taboo as conspicuously as taboos, and they function as taboos, not as their absence). Dostoevskian scandal scenes can be described in musical terms as dissonances that demand a resolution. As I will show in the chapters on *The Idiot* and *The Adolescent*, these scandalous "dissonances" are resolved by the "consonances" of taboos that subsequently develop around them. This need to develop taboos around the initially scandalous proves that in *The Idiot* and *The Adolescent*, the initial absence of taboos in the scandalous scenes is conspicuous.

Dostoevsky's handling of the incest taboo in his early work anticipates the future non-Freudian development of his taboos. Already in *The Humiliated and the Offended*, the two fathers (Smith and Ikhmenev) refuse to mention their love (or jealousy) for their daughters, not because of any suppressed incestuous desires, but simply because they love their daughters as daughters, and their love motivates their behavior. Their purely fatherly love for their daughters acts as a perfectly legitimate personal concern or sore spot.

Beginning with *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, Dostoevsky develops the activity of tabooing into a rather idiosyncratic signal of his own attitude to such matters of universally acknowledged significance as love, death, hell, and redemption. By opposing the universally acknowledged significance of these tabooed matters themselves (i. e., the traditional "what" of his tabooing activity) to the new way or to the plot context in which he signals the taboo (the innovative "how" of tabooing in his works), Dostoevsky manages to defamiliarize the tabooed value without cancelling its universal significance. As I will show,

Raskolnikov and Myshkin both take an entire novel to become conscious of their internally manifested taboos.

Dostoevsky's system of taboos is distinguished from his characters' systems by authorial intention. The characters—including narrators, of whom the best example is the inconsistent narrator in *Demons*—may either (consciously) suppress or (unconsciously) repress that which they taboo. Dostoevsky himself, however, always consciously suppresses what he taboos—or such, at least, is my working hypothesis. While I regard the subconscious of both Dostoevsky's characters and readers as an important factor in his poetics, I do not consider his subconscious mind as one of such factors.

The Notes from the House of the Dead as the Beginning of Specifically Dostoevskian Taboos

According to Gary Cox, Dostoevsky at one point engaged in an ethnological experiment akin to those of Mary Douglas, Emil Durkheim, and other anthropologists and sociologists. In the introduction to his book on power structures in Dostoevsky's work, Cox suggests that one may read *The Notes from the House of the Dead* "as an ethnological treatise" (Cox, 10). Cox writes:

> So rigidly separate were the classes in nineteenth century Russia that for an upper class intellectual from St. Petersburg to spend four years living with convicted criminals in Omsk was almost equivalent to his travelling to an aboriginal island to observe the behavior of the natives. [...] Dostoevsky found in Siberia a [...] hierarchy in which roles and behavior were determined by a rigid but unwritten code based on personal dominance and submission (*idem*).

If Cox is right, then *The Notes from the House of the Dead* is a very appropriate book for Dostoevsky to begin developing his system of taboos.[54]

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[54] It is, however, important to note that already in 1849, as a prisoner in the fortress, Dostoevsky read *Jane Eyre*—a novel full of idiosyncratic taboos. Thus as a taboo writer he was probably first influenced by a reading experience and only subsequently by his sojourn with the criminals of "the House of the Dead," a sojourn which he, in turn, hastened to transform into a literary experience.

N. M. Chirkov also considers *The Notes from the House of the Dead* an exercise in anthropology which eventually determined the anthropology in Dostoevsky's "philosophical" novels. He says that "in *The Notes [from the House of the Dead]* Dostoevsky's anthropology for the first time unfolds in its entirety."[55] According to Chirkov,

> [Dostoevsky's prison] was a specific kind of an experiment in research on people and life [...] *The Notes [from the House of the Dead]* combine the artistic investigation of a whole stratum [...] of social life [...] with the study of [...] hidden motives for the behavior of individual persons [...] (*ibid.*, 16-17). [*In The Notes from the House of the Dead* Dostoevsky attempts to] study the nation, its "soul" (*ibid.*, 19).

Chirkov distinguishes between two subjects of investigation in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, the theme of social criticism and the theme of any person's hidden psychology, i. e., of studying the human being as "a universum."[56]

Dostoevsky's experiment in *The Notes from the House of the Dead* can be termed anthropological since it examines the universal paradigm of human interactions and laws that are common to all people. To learn about these anthropological universals, both Dostoevsky and the anthropologists need to study previously unfamiliar societies—in order to be able to step outside their own social convictions and prejudices. This meta-social, universal approach to human nature both constitutes what Chirkov calls "Dostoevsky's anthropology" in *The Notes from the House of the Dead* (Chirkov, 20ff.), and determines the development of this anthropology in the writer's subsequent works:

> *The Notes [from the House of the Dead]* stress those key [...] features of the human being which are revealed especially sharply in the conditions of prison life, and which later would become central in the writer's works (*ibid.*, 25).

Thus both Chirkov and Cox suggest that Dostoevsky became an anthropologist of sorts in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*. For studying the evolution of Dostoevsky's development of tabooing techniques, however, Chirkov's definition of Dostoevsky's anthropology is too broad and Cox's too narrow. Cox's

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[55] Nikolaj M. Chirkov, *O stile Dostoevskogo*, Moscow: Nauka, 1967, 25.

[56] *Ibid.*, 25. Chirkov also discusses further implications of this distinction in *The Humiliated and the Offended*, *ibid.*, 36 ff.

interest in what he calls Dostoevsky's "preoccupation with power hierarchies" (Cox, *idem*) reflects only part of the "ethnological" discovery made by Dostoevsky in the Siberian prison. Chirkov's definition of *The Notes from the House of the Dead* as the origin of Dostoevsky's anthropology is too general. It is not concerned with the specific role of taboos. Below I offer a reading of the bath-house episode from *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, which suggests that while he was writing the book, Dostoevsky based his anthropology *specifically* on "rigid but unwritten codes"—which narrows down Chirkov's delineation of Dostoevsky's anthropology—and yet that he was interested in *any* kind of "rigid but unwritten code," not only in so far as it might concern power structures—which broadens Cox's approach. The bathhouse episode also illustrates a very important way in which he transforms commonly acknowledged taboos into uniquely Dostoevskian ones. In it Dostoevsky defamiliarizes values by transforming them from issues of great social significance to matters of personal importance for the participating interlocutors, and therefore for his reader. Such a transformation of values, in turn, entails a particularly Dostoevskian way of tabooing them. In this bathhouse episode the narrator compares the prison bathhouse to hell (IV:98-99). Moisej Al'tman, Leo Shestov, Joseph Frank, Robert Jackson, and many of Dostoevsky's readers, both his contemporaries and ours, have found this comparison appropriate.[57] When, however, the same narrator, in his capacity as the protagonist, makes this comparison while addressing Petrov, another character in the book, Petrov does not find it appropriate. He seems to dismiss it without any comment. Gorianchikov (the narrating protagonist) says:

> It occured to me that if all of us together ever turned up in the infernal furnace [*v pekle*], it would very much resemble this place here. I could not restrain myself from imparting this guess of mine to Petrov; he only looked around and remained silent [*on tol'ko pogliadel krugom i promolchal*] (IV:99).

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[57] Cf. *ibid.*, 16; also: IV:294-296; also: Moisej Al'tman, "Pestrye zametki" in Bazanov, vol. 3, 18 ff. Al'tman discusses the symbolism of bathhouse in Dostoevsky's other works as well; also: Shestov, 44; also: Frank, 225. Cf. also: Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky. Deliriums and Nocturnes*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981, 35-40; also: R. L. Jackson's article in the *Festschrift to Joseph Frank*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991.

Petrov reacts to Gorianchikov's comment with silence and gesture, but his reaction is a very important communication. As David Danow persuasively argues,

> In dialogue authored by Dostoevsky, the import of what remains unuttered or only gestured [...] may even exceed the semantic weight of what is actually said.[58] [...] [Gesture or silence] may occasionally achieve primacy as the principal means for getting at the truth (*ibid.*, 34). [...] Often pivotal, moments [of silence] [...] require interpretation on the part of both interlocutor and reader (*ibid.*, 17).

Petrov's silence and eye gesture are therefore conspicuous, and Dostoevsky intends them to be considered conspicuous both by Gorianchikov and by the reader. Petrov refuses to comment on what is "in the air," i. e., on what is every prisoner's "sore spot."[59] The fact that Gorianchikov "cannot restrain himself from imparting his guess" suggests his insensitivity to the implication of his comment for his listener. It also suggests the inappropriateness of this comment: "could not restrain" (*ne uterpel, chtoby ne soobshchit'*) implies "should have restrained." These two features—the inappropriateness of the speaker's absolutely valid and logically relevant comment and the listener's rather unexpected dismissal of the inappropriate comment—create the scenery of a typical and marked taboo violation. In social encounters, the more sensitive one is to obscene (or simply unutterable) words, the more one pretends not to hear them. This suggests that silence and gesture in Dostoevsky specifically serve the language of taboos, rather than merely acting as powerful tools of communication. Danow maintains that in Dostoevsky's fiction silence and gesture often "articulate what cannot or should not be communicated in words."[60] Petrov's si-

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[58] David K. Danow, *The Dialogic Sign. Essays on Major Novels of Dostoevsky*, New York: Peter Lang, 1991 (vol. 2 of the Middlebury Studies in Russian Language and Literature), 52.

[59] Cf. also *ibid.*, 20: "Dostoevsky has consistently endowed his characters engaged in dialogue [...] with the ability to interpret not only verbal utterances but gesture as well, as though it were also a highly formalized (that is, codified) system of communication."

[60] *Ibid.*, 13. Danow's argument about non-verbal communication in Dostoevsky is pertinent to mine. Thus, for instance, Danow regards Smerdiakov as the expert euphemizer and the best non-verbal communicator in *The Brothers Karamazov* (*ibid.*, 49 ff.), and I believe that these two rhetorical skills prove that Smerdiakov is the main tabooer in the novel. Danow interprets the silence and gestures used by Rogozhin and Myshkin to "talk" about the knife which would serve Rogozhin as the instrument of murdering Nastas'ia

lence and eye-gesture pinpoint and define what precisely should not be communicated in words; he thus uses these means of non-verbal communication to signal both the presence of a taboo and its significance.

What is the taboo that Petrov cannot bear Gorianchikov to violate? The title of Dostoevsky's book suggests the importance of after-death imagery. Turgenev, Herzen, Robert L. Jackson and others consider the whole book Dantesque and consider Dostoevsky's comparison of prison and hell to be valid and important.[61] Petrov, however, does not react to Gorianchikov's comment as "appropriately" as these writers do. The fact that Petrov treats this comparison as taboo also strengthens rather than refutes the validity and importance of Gorianchikov's observation—but through the means of turning it into Petrov's personal "sore spot." When the narrator compares prison to hell *addressing the reader*, he creates a powerful simile. The narrator says to the reader that the bathhouse in his prison resembles hell as one usually depicts it, and therefore, that prisons in general might resemble hell. When, however, as the character Gorianchikov, he addresses a fellow inmate, he hazards a guess about "us," i. e., the prisoners as a group with a distinct identity of which he partakes (*my vse vmeste*). To Petrov he says: "*Our* hell is going to be like our prison's bathhouse." The thought about one's personal hell, and the degree to which this earthly prison embodies it, apparently haunts the minds of prisoners like Petrov—and thus testifies to the existence of a conscience in their hearts. After all, Petrov ended up in Siberia because of homicide. Another character, M., describes Petrov as a horrible murderer. Petrov impresses M. as

> [T]he most resolute and fearless of the prison mates, [...] capable of anything. He would not stop at anything if a whim came to him.

Filippovna as substitutes for the referent which Myshkin considers unmentionable and unconsiderable (*ibid.*, 36). Danow, however, never interprets these and other important moments of conspicuous silence as intended specifically to establish or signal taboos. To him both gestures and verbal substitutes are important as alternative means of communication between characters, not as the means of signaling Dostoevsky's value-system to the reader.

[61] Cf. the reference to the Academy Edition commentary earlier in my notes, as well as the reference to Robert Jackson's article. Jackson distinguishes very carefully between the two layers of hell-symbolism in the passage, and in the book as a whole—the purely social, as opposed to the metaphysical. Cf. also Jackson, 35, 37, 40.

> He would butcher you too, if he happened to feel like it, just for nothing, deadpan; and he would never repent for it (IV:84).

Gorianchikov states his agreement with M., despite his personal feeling that Petrov is friendly to him.

Petrov's identity as a horrible thief and his sensitivity to the issue of eternal damnation suggest parallels between his story and the Gospel episode of the Wise Thief who says on the cross that he deserves it and immediately asks Christ to remember him in the afterworld.[62] In part 2, ch. 5, the narrator refers to this Gospel intertext directly, specifically mentioning that the prisoners as a group experience an affinity with the Wise Thief (IV:177). This Gospel reference to the Wise Thief provides the reader with a personal, rather than a social perspective on both the prisoners' conscience and the notion of heaven and hell. It strengthens the motif of personal retribution for one's deeds even more than the other, Dantesque reference does. Petrov and the rest of the prisoners identify with the Wise Thief because they dread *real* hell.

Petrov's sore spot, therefore, is not the *metaphor* of hell for the prison house *per se* but the fact that he probably does believe that he personally deserves eternal damnation, as well as this hell on earth. By mentioning Petrov's sore spot, Gorianchikov behaves tactlessly. The fact that the narrator's insensitivity about an issue might concern himself as well does not change the matter greatly: Petrov perceives even this insensitivity better than does the narrator himself.[63] As the Wise Thief intertext suggests, many prisoners probably feel as Petrov does, secretly believing that in their lives, subjectively, prison is the hell which

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[62] "Wise Thief" (*razbojnik blagorazumnyj*) is an Orthodox liturgical term originating with the Holy Friday Mattins Exapostilarion.

[63] Dostoevsky points out that Gorianchikov also has murdered his wife, but Gorianchikov's preoccupation with the class alienation between him and the "simple folk" often lets in the voice of a political prisoner resembling Dostoevsky himself psychologically. When the narrator violates the taboo to which "simple folk" (i. e., murderers and robbers) are sensitive, his voice begins to resemble the voice of a political prisoner like Dostoevsky himself rather than a murderer from the class of the nobility. (The transparency of masking his main character as a non-political prisoner suggests that he made a point of paying merely lip service to censorship). Shestov, among other authors, also discusses the problems of the inconsistency of Gorianchikov's persona (Shestov, 51-54). I believe that Dostoevsky wanted his readers to forget that, technically, he made Gorianchikov a murderer, although he also needed to distinguish between Gorianchikov and his relatively omniscient "publisher" (cf. Belknap (1990), 59, and also my reference to Belknap's argument later in this chapter).

they have received as the immanent retribution for their deeds. But no narrator should *enunciate* this feeling, making it into a social, expressed definition instead of a matter of one's personal self-condemnation. Gorianchikov as fellow-prisoner should not have said to Petrov what he said as narrator to the reader because treating the two addressees equally implies an equality between social criticism ("Nicholas I's prisons resemble hell") and ontological insight ("you and I deserve hell").

In Part I, chapter 11 of *The Notes*, Dostoevsky uses the conventions of the dramatic genre to further confirm the importance of the taboo on the infernal. "Kedril," the second play staged by the prisoners, an aberration of the finale of "Don Juan," freely and boisterously narrates the story of a master and his servant who are dragged to hell after dinner (IV: 125-127). None of the prisoners, including Petrov, regard this carnivalesque treatment of hell and retribution as a taboo violation. The reason is that at least since Shakespeare's "Hamlet," a play within a play has been used as an effective and recognizable euphemistic device, that mention of the unmentionable which signals and *confirms* its unmentionability.

Unlike his Gorianchikov, Dostoevsky carefully distinguishes between social criticism and ontological speculation on the issue of divine retribution for one's sins. This distinction between Dostoevsky and Gorianchikov as his unwary narrator probably determines the specific character of the narration in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*: to quote Joseph Frank, "there is very little close analysis of interior states of mind."[64] The narrator *cannot* analyze people's interior states of mind if what is on everybody's mind (i. e., hell) is taboo to think and speak about. The narrator Gorianchikov is further hindered in this task because the taboo applies equally to him as a character though he is not consciously aware of it. After all, he too is a murderer. (Interestingly, when it comes to Gorianchikov's own capacity as murderer, he is a seasoned tabooer, someone very different from the novice who carelessly mentions hell to Petrov in a rather diletantish manner. By carefully listening to the story of "Akul'ka's Husband," and by seemingly carelessly using it to interrupt his own storyline, Gorianchikov signals his personal sore spot in a manner typical of a tabooer—dissociating himself

[64] Frank, 224.

from this sore spot as much as possible. In fact, the main signal of its importance for Gorianchikov is that he dissociates from it too much: the insert seems somewhat unmotivated in the structure of his "notes".[65]

The distinction between the social issue of a hellish prison and every convict's meta-social taboo on mentioning real hell parallels Mary Douglas's distinction between the realm of the law and the realm of absolute taboos in primitive societies (Chapter 8 of *Purity and Danger*). This distinction, as I have said, permeates all of Dostoevsky's taboos. It also entails another specifically Dostoevskian taboo, the only taboo that occurs in various forms in all of his novels: thou shalt not judge.[66]

The gap between Gorianchikov's social and Petrov's metasocial understanding of Gorianchikov's comment reveals a very important feature of Dostoevsky's poetics: what Bakhtin identified as the "double-voiced word"[67] may contain two messages at once, the social and the meta-social. Dostoevsky's social message shows that particular human vices may be prompted by the defects of the particular society described by him (such as Nicholas's Russia) but his meta-social message reveals the aspect of these vices which has become common to all people after the fall of Adam.[68] It is this meta-social message that Dmitry Chizhevsky defines as Dostoevsky's "Patristic anthropology," which consists of the understanding of the many-storiedness of

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[65] I am indebted to Horst-Jürgen Gerigk for my interest in the story of "Akul'ka's Husband" as a signal of tabooing. In a letter (April 1996) Gerigk thus formulates his view of the inserted story: "the narrator's crime is presented in a hidden way, when he is listening to the story of 'Akul'kin muzh'."

[66] A very marked violation of this taboo—and in literature even more than in life, a marked violation signals the presence of a taboo—occurs in *The Gambler*. Despite the scandalous behavior of virtually all of the characters in this novel (with the exception of Mr. Astley whose good manners shock one as a form of scandalous acceptance of other people's scandalous behavior) two characters mark (by mocking) the impropriety of another's behavior only once. When the General completely (clinically) loses his mind over Mlle. Blanche, he suddenly starts lecturing the gambler about morality and its degradation among young people. This moralizing causes both the gambler and Mlle. Blanche herself to laugh sincerely. Here Dostoevsky signals the taboo on judging others by making its violator look scandalous and buffoonish even compared to the other scandalous characters in a book full of scandalous scenes.

[67] Cf. Bakhtin (1979), 214 ff.

[68] Cf. Chirkov, *idem*.

any human soul.[69] This anthropology pertains to the ontological realm and has nothing in common with social criticism. Like the Divine and the Human nature in Christ, in Dostoevsky's poetics these two approaches to human nature—the universally anthropological or meta-social, and the historico-social—are *unconfusedly yet inseparably united.*[70] Interestingly, G. M. Fridlender argues that Dostoevsky was not an anthropologist because anthropological concerns supposedly are too universal to be compatible with Dostoevsky's interest in the place of man in history.[71] I do not agree with Fridlender that the anthropological (i. e., meta-social) and the historical (i. e., social) explanations of human behavior are incompatible, in principle or in Dostoevsky. But Fridlender's response as a reader makes it especially clear that in Dostoevsky's poetics these two approaches never fuse even when they coexist in the same textual instance, as they do in Gorianchikov's comment. By operating exclusively in the meta-social realm (which activates the non-metaphoric, literal meaning of such words as hell), taboos in Dostoevsky do not exclude the social aspect of the problems described by him, but rather ensure that the meta-social realm never fuses with the social one. This consideration will become especially relevant to my discussion of the two "unconfusedly united" genres of *Demons*: the political pamphlet and the spiritual treatise.

The Notes from the House of the Dead illustrates another trend of tabooing in Dostoevsky, which will become especially important in *Crime and Punishment*. The interdiction on mentioning an already committed crime is applied selectively. Discussing *The House of the Dead*, Robert Louis Jackson notes some convicts' occasional urge to remain silent or to refer to their crimes through pronominal euphemisms. Jackson believes that this urge is contradicted and annulled by the convicts' cynicism made manifest when they do refer to their crimes with apparent

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[69] Cf. Dmitry Chizhevsky (Dmitrij Chizhevskij), "Dostoevskij-psikholog" in *O Dostoevskom*, A. L. Bem, ed., vol. 2, Prague, 1933, 51-72, esp. 53.

[70] Cf. "The Fourth Ecumenical Council. The Council of Chalcedon. A. D. 451," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids (1983) Second Series, vol. 14, pp. 264-265. Cf. also the definition of the Chalcedon statement of faith in Elizabeth A. Livingstone, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 99.

[71] Fridlender, 102-103.

lack of emotion. With respect to this apparent contradiction, Jackson shares Gorianchikov's bewilderment:

> The narrator Goryanchikov does not reproach the convict for his crimes. But the question of conscience is very much on his mind. He is acutely interested in how the convicts respond to their crimes as well as to their punishment [...: "]But there were also morose people who were almost always silent. [cited from IV:11. O. M.]" What were these silent ones thinking about their crimes? Or were they thinking about them at all? [...] The convicts, [Goryanchikov] asserts, spoke little of their past; "they did not like to talk about it and, clearly, tried not to think of it." One convict's story [...] was shouted down by the whole barracks; but this was not out of "indignation," Goryanchikov notes; it was simply that "there was no need to talk about that [...], it was not the thing to talk about that [*govorit' pro eto ne priniato*].[72]

(While Jackson translates the expression *ne nado bylo pro eto govorit'* (IV:12) as "there was no need to talk about that," it is better translated as "one should not," or even "one would better not talk about that"—with an element of threat presented by a taboo violation).

Jackson then infers that "certainly, there were no feelings of guilt or sqeamishness on the part of the convicts" (*idem*)—proving his point by some convicts' bold and cynical pronouncements made about their crimes. Jackson, probably correctly, adduces that the convicts do not *feel* guilty. But by excluding their crimes from the subjects of their discussion, they *behave* as if they were guilty, thereby proving that their taboos are entirely beyond their control. Were it up to the convicts to be or not to be able to refer to their crimes, Jackson certainly would be right inferring that their inconsistency in so doing proves their cynicism. But the taboo on mentioning one's already committed crimes limits one's free choice. The convicts may choose when, where and if they commit their crimes, but they may not choose if and when they will be able or unable to refer to these crimes. Rather than consciously suppressing the tabooed mention of their crime, they unconsciously repress it.

In *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, as in Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* and in *Crime and Punishment*, the taboo on mentioning one's crime is not a preventive legal measure

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[72] Jackson, 116. I include the original Russian in those cases where it is central to my argument about Dostoevsky's tabooing rhetoric.

against this crime but the immanent punishment for it. It visits upon the criminal randomly, when *it* pleases, not when he does. This explains why in Dostoevsky's works, from the point of view of common logic and psychology, the taboo on mentioning one's committed crimes seems to be applied randomly and without sufficient motivation: in psychological terms, it is not a matter of suppression but rather of unconscious repression. The selective application of the inviolable taboo on mentioning the crime seems strange, but it shapes both Gorianchikov's and Dostoevsky's prison impressions, *and*—as I will demonstrate—Dostoevsky's *poetics* after *The House of the Dead*.

The Authoritative Narrator vs. the Character-Narrator

As I have mentioned, Gorianchikov - the authorial narrator addresses the reader without seeming to violate a taboo, while Gorianchikov - the unwary character, interacting with another character Petrov, commits a *faux pas* by metaphorizing hell. In this respect Gorianchikov prefigures Dostoevsky's later narrators in *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, who fluctuate between near-authorial omniscience and character-like rhetorical carelessness and clumsiness.[73] This fluctuation is directly relevant to tabooing: like Gorianchikov, the later narrators signal taboos by violating them not as authorial narrators, but as non-omniscient characters.

Herein lies the main difference between taboos in Dostoevsky and in Tolstoy. Describing how Natasha Rostova and Princess Mary could not talk about the deceased Prince Andrew because he meant so much to both of them, Tolstoy's narrator violates the taboo that he himself describes and understands because he is "above" and "ahead" of the two women who observe it. Tolstoy's narrator is thus more authoritative than the characters described by him. Dostoevsky's narrator, on the other hand, may violate a taboo that other characters observe

[73] On the narrator in *Demons*, cf. Vladimir A. Tunimanov, "Rasskazchik v 'Besakh' Dostoevskogo," in V. V. Vinigradov (ed.), *Issledovaniia po poetike i stilistike*, Leningrad, 1972, 87-162, and in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Diane Oenning Thompson, *"The Brothers Karamazov" and the Poetics of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 26-51.

only in his capacity as a non-omniscient character-narrator who "lags behind" the other characters in understanding the taboo in question.

Heuristics vs. Hermeneutics

The Gorianchikov-Petrov interaction suggests a methodology for reading taboos in Dostoevsky. In order to understand passages where taboos operate, the reader must often engage in hermeneutic analysis prior to approaching the heuristics of the passage. In the Gorianchikov-Petrov interaction we first learn how Gorianchikov characterizes his urge to mention hell to Petrov: as lack of restraint (*ne uterpel*). Only after interpreting this "how" can we discover what "hell" signifies for Petrov. In the same passage we first learn how Petrov reacts to Gorianchikov's "lack of restraint," and only afterwards what has provoked Petrov's reaction. This pattern of interpretation obtains in Dostoevsky's subsequent works. Often one must interpret *how* Dostoevsky taboos prior to discovering *what* he taboos, i. e., prior to discovering his system of values. This chronological priority of the hermeneutic approach implies the importance of the formal analysis, or close reading, of precisely those passages where the interaction between characters does not seem motivated. In these passages the "how" is the only clue to the "what."[74]

Often lack of awareness of the hermeneutic priority in Dostoevsky leads to gross misreadings. Thus in "Dostoevsky and Parricide" Freud writes that Zosima bowed down to Mitia because he secretly worshipped parricides. Freud treats as unimportant what he knows perfectly well: Mitia in fact did not murder his father. What is interesting is why Freud prefers to ignore such an obvious fact about the plot of *The Brothers Karamazov*. He does not pay much attention to *how* Dostoevsky tells, or rather, does not tell his readers Mitia would be slandered. As a result of ignoring the hermeneutics of Dostoevsky's style, Freud does not distinguish between the opinions of the slanderers and the facts in the plot. (After all, if it only mattered

[74] This approach in many ways parallels that of Riffaterre in *Fictional Truth*.

that Mitia was psychologically predisposed to parricide, then it remains unclear why Zosima did not bow down before Ivan who definitely wanted his father dead and had repeatedly said so. Clearly, Zosima bowed down to Mitia as a *non*-parricide).

Demons presents a relatively simple combination of the factors which I just have described. The narrator, most of the characters and, consequently, the reader—all observe the major taboo of this novel, which prohibits mentioning devils or referring to anyone's possessedness. When the narrator or characters signal the prominence of this taboo to the one who violates it most frequently (Stavrogin), their signals are very clear. Stavrogin is a relatively simple case of a violator, since the taboos which he violates are common to most societies, not unique to the world of Dostoevsky. Immediately recognizable as a typical taboo-violator, Stavrogin therefore can indicate very clearly what is taboo in *Demons* when such an indication is necessary, i. e., when he violates the taboos less obvious than those on pulling people's noses, committing adultery or marrying a cripple without considering her a human being. One such less obvious taboo is the taboo on easily mentioning demons. By violating this taboo Stavrogin proves its importance.

Demons also presents a useful paradigm for those signals of taboos which Dostoevsky plants in characters' or narrators' discourse—rather than merely in characters' dramatic interactions. In this novel, as in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Adolescent*, the tabooed notion may be replaced with an italicized pronoun; or the root of the tabooed word (i. e., *-bes-*) may appear in an idiomatic expression with seemingly dormant etymology. Though seemingly irrelevant to the idiomatic meaning of the expression, the root would actually point to the tabooed issue without violating the taboo. (A variant of this technique characterizes the rhetoric of the main tabooers in *The Eternal Husband* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, who refer to certain notions while pretending that they do not refer to them, a technique I call pseudo-euphemisms). The other works of Dostoevsky which I discuss may be considered important complications and modifications of the relatively pure model of tabooing in *Demons*.

Crime and Punishment alters this simple model by internalizing its chief taboo, making it a private matter of Raskolnikov's subconscious, and only eventually, of his conscious mind. This modification affects the manner in which characters converse

and interact, and in which Dostoevsky conveys to us the distinction between the commandment "thou shalt not kill" as an absolute and inviolable verdict of one's conscience on the one hand, and the relative, partial and formal expression of this commandment in the realm of social law on the other. (This distinction is also prominent in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*).

In *The Idiot* Dostoevsky presents *taboos in the state of becoming*, as they emerge simultaneously with emerging values. In the beginning of the novel he creates a hypothetical situation where there are no taboos and shows that this situation implies a total lack of values. This modification encourages the reader to mistake the initial absence of taboos for *the norm* in the novel; the reader then responds emotionally to this novel's poetic world as unbearably scandalous. Whether the reader eventually discovers a method in this scandalousness depends entirely on how carefully s/he reads. Here, as often elsewhere, Dostoevsky takes the risk of being misunderstood. Further modifications of the pure paradigm in *The Idiot* also contribute to this risk: in this novel, the characters most scandalous by the standards of society are the chief signalers of uniquely Dostoevskian taboos, and most scandalous situations develop according to very strict unwritten rules. For instance, it is not the well-bred Totsky but the ill-mannered murderer Rogozhin who reacts squeamishly to the open discussion of the important issue of death.

In this respect *The Adolescent* is very close to *The Idiot*. Its narrator (not merely a character) eventually discovers the true meaning of values by discovering the importance of taboos. In *The Adolescent*, as in *The Idiot*, the initial scandalousness may initially appear to the reader to be the norm of the novel. This novel, therefore, risks annoying the reader in the same way as *The Idiot*. In both cases the risk is the price Dostoevsky is willing to pay for distinguishing between values as self-evident and mechanically perceived on one hand, and values discovered through painstaking effort on the other. This distinction is also the eventual outcome of tabooing in *Crime and Punishment*, where Dostoevsky takes the risk that the reader will find Raskolnikov hysterical rather than scandalous.

In *The Eternal Husband* the only consistent observer of the chief taboo is *not* the narrator and *not* a positive character. Here Dostoevsky experiments with a rhetoric of tabooing that even-

tually will become very important to him in *The Brothers Karamazov*. This rhetoric aims at implicating the reader, together with the narrator and most of the characters, in the guilt which results from their shared insensitivity to the key taboo of the book.

Tabooing in *The Brothers Karamazov* is similar to tabooing in *The Eternal Husband*, with one significant modification. Since both works have only one tabooer and many people who neglect the importance of the tabooed issue even if they instinctively avoid mentioning it, the importance of the taboo in question needs some confirmation. What confirms this importance in *The Eternal Husband* is the eventual development of the plot, or a belated explaining utterance of the tabooing character—in other words, some *intra*-textual evidence. What confirms the importance of the tabooed issue in *The Karamazovs*, on the other hand, is mostly *inter*textual evidence, which I will examine in detail. The intertexts that pertain to the chief taboo will often reveal only that part of them which *does not* pertain to this taboo. However, minimal associative extrapolation reveals that they *conceal* the same motif. This motif is what the tabooer in *The Brothers Karamazov* taboos consciously and the rest of the characters repress unconsciously. I will, therefore, discuss *The Eternal Husband* immediately before *The Brothers Karamazov*. Otherwise, I will discuss Dostoevsky's works in the same order as he wrote them.

CHAPTER 1

How Dostoevsky Inscribes "Thou Shalt Not Kill" in a Killer's Heart. The Decalogue Taboo Internalized: The *It* of "It"

> "How, then, do you know about it?" [...] she asked after [...] almost a whole minute of silence.
>
> "Might it not have been some future Napoleon who bumped off our Alyona Ivanovna with an axe last week?" Zamyotov suddenly blurted out from his corner. [...] A moment of gloomy silence passed.
>
> *Crime and Punishment (VI: 315,204)*

Raskolnikov's Victory

The plot of *Crime and Punishment* can be summarized in terms of tabooing. Raskolnikov violates the taboo on murder in thought and in deed: first he develops an ideology which justifies murder and then he becomes a murderer. When, however, he is not engaged in "thought" or in "deed," and gets a chance to come into contact with his own conscience, he finds this taboo still inviolable: he cannot refer to the murder directly in his own mind or in talking to Sonia. His violation of social taboo becomes his own *personal* taboo: deep down, he regards as unmentionable

that which he himself proclaimed and did. Since Raskolnikov always observes this personal taboo unconsciously, it is only in the epilogue that he comes to *recognize* it or its implications for his ability to speak or act. But as a seed, as Raskolnikov's personal mental idiosyncrasy, or his "sore spot" unmentionable in private rather than in public, this taboo has always been present in the plot.

Raskolnikov's interactions with other characters make this "seed" grow by challenging it, for the other characters in the novel have their own idiosyncratic taboos, or personal "sore spots," symptomatic of their systems of values. As Raskolnikov interacts with other characters, his system of values thus clashes with theirs. The system of values in *Crime and Punishment*, therefore, emerges *not* from an interaction among characters' utterances or intellectual speculations (as Bakhtin believed), and not from the interplay of different reactions to a central taboo (as in *Demons*) but rather from the collision among the value systems underlying different characters' idiosyncratic taboos. Although Raskolnikov's *ideas* "lose" (to those of both Porfiry and Svidrigajlov), the values underlying his personal taboo "win," and he emerges as the victor in his own personal moral battle.

Besides the battle with other characters' taboos, Raskolnikov's absolute moral voice is engaged in another battle, with his own rationalizing voice. In this battle Raskolnikov's absolute moral voice also emerges as the victor. Raskolnikov himself feels defeated for as long as he identifies with his rationalizing voice, rather than this absolute moral voice within him. As L. D. Opul'skaia writes, "the dramatic [component] of the conflict is strengthened by the fact that outwardly, rationally [*logicheski*], Raskolnikov will turn out to be the victor, but morally [he will be] defeated."[1] By "morally" Opul'skaia means Raskolnikov's own inviolable standards.

[1] Cf. VII:321.

Who Taboos What in *Crime and Punishment*?

Although no conspicuous word or notion in *Crime and Punishment* is consistently omitted, the tone of avoiding the mention of what is important permeates the novel. Different characters have different "sore spots" which they taboo in their discourse or behavior. Besides Raskolnikov, the most important tabooers are Katerina Ivanovna, Raskolnikov's mother, his sister Dunia and Svidrigajlov.

Katerina Ivanovna's sore spot is Sonia's profession. This sore spot motivates her suicidally aggressive behavior at Marmeladov's wake, and yet she is ready to kill anyone who would dare to refer or allude to it (VI:298-9).

Raskolnikov's mother stubbornly "blocks" her awareness of her son's crime and punishment (VI:412-13, 415), even though she is interested in his article which provides, through its ideology, an indirect and yet insistent reference to the tabooed subject of his crime. At the end of the novel, in her delirium, she reveals that "she knew much more than anyone ever suspected" (VI:415), thereby confirming that she had from the beginning blocked this awareness.

One of Dunia's sore spots, at a certain moment, is that she has sold herself to Luzhin. Speculating on this sore spot, Raskolnikov lays out, almost programmatically, the significance of the issue of taboos in the novel:

> It would be rather interesting to clarify one more issue: to what extent were they open with each other that day and that night, and throughout the whole period that followed? Were all *the words* [Dostoevsky's emphasis] between them enunciated or did both of them understand that both one and the other had the same thing in their hearts and thoughts—so there was no point in putting everything into words and letting things slip out in vain [*tak uzh nechego vslukh-to vsego* ***vygovarivat' da naprasno progovarivat'sia***] [...] the naive maman started bothering Dunia with her comments. And [Dunia], of course, was enraged and "responded with annoyance." Sure! Who would not be enraged when everything is clear even without naive questions and when all's decided upon and there's nothing to talk about (VI:35-36).

Svidrigajlov dismisses Raskolnikov's questions about his reason for coming to Saint-Petersburg because this reason is his secret sore spot: he wants to make one last attempt to win Dunia's

love. Yet when Raskolnikov raises this issue, Svidrigajlov feigns disinterest, "not answering the main point of the question" (*ne otvechaia na glavnyj punkt*—VI:217). Of course, Svidrigajlov might be trying to put him off the scent because Raskolnikov is Dunia's brother. But Svidrigajlov acts the same way regarding another issue that has no personal significance for Raskolnikov—the issue of Svidrigajlov's own suicide. In this case, the form of the dismissal signals the importance of the dismissed issue: asking Raskolnikov not to mention suicide, Svidrigajlov lays aside "all the buffoonery which characterized all of his previous words," and it even seems that "his countenance underwent a great change." (VI:362). In a conversation with Sonia (VI:384) and just before his suicide (VI:394), Svidrigajlov refers to this suicide as "going to America." Earlier, in his first conversation with Raskolnikov, he refers to his suicide as "a certain... voyage" (VI:223, 224). He also tempts Raskolnikov himself with "going to America" (VI:373). Svidrigajlov's euphemisms are as perfect for the suicide taboo as, for example, the traditional totemic euphemism "honey connoisseur/ eater" (*medvied'*) of some Slavic cultures is for "bear."[2]

Svidrigajlov impatiently dismisses Raskolnikov's mention of his deceased wife's (and apparent victim's) "apparitions" (VI:362) and refers to what most likely is his upcoming meeting with Dunia as "just a woman, a certain random occurence" (*Da, zhenshchina, tak, nechaiannyj odin sluchaj... idem*), adding after three significant dots: "...no, that's not what I was referring to" (*...net, ia ne pro to.—idem*). Then he adds, rather apophatically: "There is another circumstance which has really perked me up (*montirovalo*) but concerning which I... [Dostoevsky's ellipsis] will remain silent" (*idem*). Throughout this conversation Svidrigajlov insistently and conspicuously dismisses what matters to him.

In this respect Svidrigajlov's tabooing behavior mirrors Raskolnikov's, apparently because the non-ideological aspects of their crimes (which also are their sore spots) are comparable. Raskolnikov's concern about Lizaveta, his non-ideological victim, parallels Svidrigajlov's concern about Martha Petrovna. When Nastas'ia "blurts out" [*briaknula*] that Lizaveta was also

[2] Cf., for instance, Max Vasmer, *Etimologicheskij slovar' russkogo iazyka*, Moscow: Progress, 1986, vol. 2, 589.

murdered, Raskolnikov loses his voice (VI:104). When Sonia mentions Lizaveta to him, Raskolnikov's reaction resembles Svidrigajlov's even more: Raskolnikov changes the subject "after a moment of silence and dismissing the question" [*pomolchav i ne otvetiv na vopros* VI:245].

Raskolnikov dismisses references to Lizaveta in a Svidrigajlovan manner because her murder disturbs him irrationally. He remains as "armless" against this sore spot of his as Svidrigajlov is against his own. Lizaveta's murder cannot be justified by Raskolnikov's theory. It was so unplanned that it became the beginning of his punishment, rather than the completion of his ideological crime. Unlike her sister, Lizaveta could in no way fit the rationalizing category of "a louse" whose slaughter may benefit the rest of humanity. In Raskolnikov's personal combat between his rationalizing voice and his absolute moral voice, Lizaveta's murder cannot be "defended," even temporarily, by the rationalizing voice. Since in Lizaveta's case, Raskolnikov's absolute inner voice does not have to compete with any other voice within him, Lizaveta's murder, unlike the other, "ideological" murder, becomes Raskolnikov's totally irrational unmentionable sore spot immediately after it is committed.

Important as it is, however, the taboo on Lizaveta's murder cannot become the central taboo in the novel precisely because it "wins" immediately, bypassing the stage of the ideological combat. The polyphonic interaction of taboos in *Crime and Punishment* requires that the central taboo in this novel must be agonistic; it must withstand and overcome an opposition, and only Raskolnikov's *ideological* murder entails such an agonistic taboo. Just as Bakhtin believes that in Dostoevsky there is "a dialogue of antagonistic truths,"[3] I believe that in *Crime and Punishment*, there is a dialogue of antagonistic taboos.[4]

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[3] In Russian, *dialog protivoborstvuiushchikh pravd*, cf. Bakhtin (1979), 88: "No important act, no essential thought of any leading character is realized outside of this dialogue of "antagonistic truths."

[4] Beside this dialogue of taboos in *Crime and Punishment*, as well as the Bakhtinian dialogue of ideas and personal discourses, Dostoevsky's novels exemplify other types of dialogues. Thus, as Diane Thompson maintains, the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*, as well as its narrator, engage in an ongoing dialogue of personal memories (Thompson, 19 ff., *passim*). The reader is also engaged in this dialogue, as Belknap suggests and R. F. Miller maintains in her book on *The Brothers Karamazov*. Cf. Belknap (both 1967 and 1990), *passim*; R. F. Miller (1992), esp. 131, also 23, 74, 79, 107-8, also 4, 19-21, 127, 133.

ages his readers to perceive the latter as the *dispelling* annulment of the taboo signaled by the former. Dostoevsky thereby reveals that while intact this taboo was as inviolable as a magic spell. Only Raskolnikov's confession could break this spell. That it succeeds is obvious: following the confession, there are no more italicized deictic pronouns. *It* can no longer haunt Raskolnikov.[6]

The tabooing function of italicized deictics/pronouns is most obvious in the scene of Raskolnikov's confession to Sonia. This scene is especially important since Sonia embodies Raskolnikov's conscience, i. e., the way he speaks of things to himself rather than to others. Despite his numerous promises to himself and to Sonia to "tell her who killed Lizaveta" (VI:253, 311, 312, 314), in this conversation he never actually says that he murdered the old woman and Lizaveta. Nonetheless, he refers to the murder through italicized demonstrative pronouns which point to the message more conspicuously than if he had verbalized it directly:

> Suddenly a strange unexpected feeling of some vitriolic hatred toward Sonia crossed his heart [...] That was not it [...] It only meant that *that* minute came (VI:314). [...] "How do you know who killed Lizaveta?" [...] "I know." [...] "Did they find *him* or what?" [...] "No [...]" "So how do you know about *it*?" [...] "Guess. [...] That means I am great friends with *him* [...] So you can't guess, can you?" [...] "N-no—" whispered Sonia. [...] "Have you guessed?—" he whispered finally. "Oh, Lord—" a horrible cry came forth from her bosom. [...] She wanted to find and seize the last hope for herself [sic: *pojmat' sebe posledniuiu nadezhdu*]. But there was no hope; no doubt was left; everything was *so/thus*. [...] "You're strange, Sonia: you hug and kiss me when I've just told you *about this/it* (*pro eto*). [...] And *that* money... I actually don't even know if there was any money." (VI:315-317).

Here Raskolnikov's repeated injunction "guess!" strengthens the tabooing effect of the italicized pronouns referring to the

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[6] Dostoevsky italicizes one more pronoun referring to the murder in the epilogue, but in a non-mysterious way. Actually, this pronoun refers not to the murder itself but to the mysterious and oppressively haunting effect it once had had upon Raskolnikov, and to the subsequent dispelling of this effect: "Besides, after all, what worth are they all—all the torments of the past! *Everything*, including even his crime itself, even his sentence and exile—now seemed to him [... something] that even happened to another person" (VI:422).

murder and its various circumstances. The italicized pronouns convey the emphasis on their tabooed referent.

The Circumstances of Observing or Violating Raskolnikov's Taboo

Raskolnikov's inability to speak of the murder is a very private matter. He can mention it to Zametov or Razumikhin but not to his Sophia, or even to himself when he is alone. In real life people tend to observe taboos more when they are with others than when they are alone, but this murder is not a *conventional* taboo of the kind that Dostoevsky's scandal scenes violate so strongly and so frequently in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*. Rather than annulling the conventional taboos by violating them, Dostoevsky moves the observation of conventional taboos to the realm of unconventional circumstances; he thereby defamiliarizes them and focuses his reader's attention on their importance. In *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky transforms the social and accepted ways of observing taboos to idiosyncratic and seemingly unmotivated ones. In *Crime and Punishment*, he removes taboos from the social realm to the intimate, i. e., he internalizes them.[7] Entering Raskolnikov's mind, the narrator thus describes his innermost thoughts:

> But about *that* thing—about *that* thing (*no ob tom, ob tom*...) he forgot completely; and yet, he remembered every minute that he forgot about something which one should not forget; he tormented himself, suffered, tried to recall [it]... (VI:92).

What Values Underlie Raskolnikov's Taboo

Raskolnikov taboos most when he is most honest with himself about the tabooed issue—i. e., when he has no one else to cheat.

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[7] L. D. Opul'skaia and G. M. Fridlender suggest that in *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky internalized several other motifs related to Raskolnikov's taboo, such as the "internal aspect of crime" and Raskolnikov's conflicting interactions with other characters. Cf. VII:320-321, 334.

He is not honest when he addresses others, and then he uses the word "murder" or even calls himself a murderer relatively easily—as he does in his conversation with Zametov. When the taboo on "murder" is moved from the social realm to the personal, or "internalized," its observation, on the literary level, no longer signifies the observer's adherence to social norms, since the observation cannot possibly be conditioned by any social conventions: no one (except God) sees the murderer when he is alone. The only plausible literary motivation for such non-social observation of the taboo is one's *inability* to violate it. Such an inability presupposes—and signals to the reader—the absolute sincerity of the one who observes the taboo. Raskolnikov's non-mention of the important is not his device but Dostoevsky's; it is not a device to deceive a Zametov but the way to talk sincerely to himself or to his Sophia. Disappearing as a social regulation, the taboo on mentioning the murder emerges as a factor in Raskolnikov's inner, non-social system of values. The fact that Raskolnikov obeys this taboo unconsciously makes it all the more inviolable.

The distinction between public circumstances where the taboo on mentioning murder is neglected and private circumstances where it is observed structures the novel by creating two realms, or energy fields in its plot. In the first, public realm Raskolnikov actually violates the taboo on murder by committing it. But in the second, private realm of Raskolnikov's thoughts, this taboo remains inviolable, no matter what Raskolnikov does.[8] In this second realm—the realm of his conscience—he cannot *utter* what he himself did. When he actually does utter what he did—as in his conversation with Zametov or with Porfiry (about his article), he does not violate the taboo in his private realm in which the deed is unutterable; he merely shifts himself into the public realm where language functions as a form of communicative manipulation. The realm of his conscience itself remains inviolable and invincible. Raskolnikov believes that if he "transgresses the border" (*prestupit chertu*) by

[8] My conviction that in *Crime and Punishment* what one does matters less than what one cannot utter somewhat challenges the proposition of Robert Belknap and Robin Miller, both of whom contend that Dostoevsky's characters' deeds—as opposed to their words—signal their "true worth" to the reader. (Cf. the introduction). Deeds matter more than uttered words, but unutterable words matter even more than committed deeds.

committing the murder, he will violate this realm. But the more he "transgresses the border" with the old woman and Lizaveta (in deed) and with Zametov or Porfiry (in words), the less he is capable of violating this realm within himself. Significantly, he cannot violate the taboo in this internal realm when he is with Sonia who, etymologically and theologically, embodies Sophia, the Wisdom of God within his heart. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky defines the realm and nature of human conscience apophatically: in terms of the *in*violable *un*mentionable.

Dostoevsky's notebooks reveal that the tabooing function of the italicized pronouns in Raskolnikov's external or internal discourse developed over time. At first the italics designated merely an intonational stress. An example of this intonational stress from the preliminary notes to the novel provides an illustrating contrast to the *mental*, tabooing stress on demonstrative pronouns, which predominates in the final version. Describing his first visit to the district police office (still in the first person), Raskolnikov says about his own bravura: "I myself am amazed how I could even *then* exercise such bravura" [*I sam udivliaius', kak ia mog <u>togda</u> eshche v ambitsiiu vojti*] (VII:18, n. 12). This use of the italicized pronoun is clearly intonational: the "then" here stresses the idea of the particular danger of exercising bravura at the police office—and refers to the time of being in the office, rather than of the murder. Dostoevsky subsequently removed this comment, even from the same variant of the text (VII: *idem*), apparently because Raskolnikov's own intonational stress on the *togda* obscured the motif of the murder and its circumstances, which this italicized pronoun eventually came to signify whenever it pertained to Raskolnikov's inner self-analysis. Thus as Dostoevsky internalized Raskolnikov's taboo by making him commit the murder in deed but unable to refer to it in thought, the writer also inevitably internalized the tabooing element itself: the stressed pronouns moved from the realm of Raskolnikov's speech intonation to the realm of his innermost thoughts.

Who Does the Tabooing for Raskolnikov's Conscience?

Although in the passage which labels murder as "*that* thing" (VI:92, cf. above) it is the narrator—rather than Raskolnikov—who refers to the murder as *that* [thing], he clearly conveys Raskolnikov's own state of mind, using Raskolnikov's terminology and observing those taboos which are important specifically to Raskolnikov. The narrator talks "from inside" Raskolnikov, using the type of discourse known as *erlebte Rede*, or "double/free indirect discourse," i. e., what Bakhtin called "the double-voiced word," or "another's speech" (*chuzhaia rech'*).[9] The reasons for the *erlebte Rede* obtain here as they do throughout the novel. Dostoevsky originally conceived the novel as a first-person narrative and then changed it to third-person[10] for a reason: describing one's subconscious in the first person presumes the identity of the described and its describer. First-person narration blurs the boundary between the narrator's conscious and subconscious, for any description is filtered through the describer's conscious mind, thereby obscuring from view any elements of the subconscious that distinguish it from the conscious. The use of third-person narration allows the narrator to describe Raskolnikov's stream of consciousness. By creating a distance between the describer and the described the narrator

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[9] Cf., for instance: Wolfgang Kayser, *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk*, Bern & Munich: Francke (first edition 1948), 1967, 146-147, 412. Kayser considers *erlebte Rede* to be a way in which the 19th century rebelled "against the supreme rule of grammar." (He calls this rebellion "den Kampf gegen die Regeln der Grammatik," ibid., 147). I believe, however, that Dostoevsky uses this type of discourse to subjugate all of grammar's power to his own expressive needs. Cf. also Marguerite Lips, *Le style indirect libre*, Paris, 1926; Melvin J. Friedman, *Stream of Consciousness*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955; R. Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience*, London: Chatto & Windus, New York: Random House, 1957. Langbaum's title explains why I prefer to use the German term: the idea that a narrator has a momentary empathy with his character's experience is more concrete than the notion of a discourse somewhere between the direct and the indirect.

For empathy as a grammatical shifter and, potentially a dialogizer of a monologic discourse, cf. also Olga Yokoyama, "Shifters and Non-verbal Categories of Russian" in *New Vistas in Grammar: Invariance and Variation*. ed. Linda R. Waugh and Stephen Rudy, Amsterdam-Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1991.

For *erlebte Rede* specifically in Dostoevsky, although with examples only from *The Brothers Karamazov*, cf. Terras, 90, 135 n. 108, 463, and many more. Cf. also Bakhtin (1979), 214 ff., 252-3, 277. Also, Voloshinov, 3. Also Morson and Emerson, 161-170, esp. 169.

[10] VII:399-401 gives a detailed history of the evolution from the first-person narrative to the third. (Cf. esp. 400).

can demonstrate that Raskolnikov taboos the notion of his crime most when he is least aware of so doing.

The function of the narrator's *erlebte Rede* as a specific designator of Raskolnikov's inner realm emerges especially clearly in the argument presented by M. L. Kovsan, since Kovsan discusses the correlation between marked pronouns and Raskolnikov's self-consciousness.[11] Kovsan notes that when alone or absorbed in his theory, Raskolnikov is called "he," rather than Raskolnikov. This is partially understandable because there are no other possible referents for this pronoun under the circumstances. Raskolnikov, however, is called by his name even when he talks to a "she," unless this "she" is Sophia. Kovsan explains this usage by claiming that the referent is alienated from the signified: "His "I" is replaced with the generalized/abstracted "he" (*ibid.*, 79), and "'he' is a step toward creating a double for Raskolnikov" (*ibid.*, 81). I assess this usage differently: I believe that the pronoun "he," like the italicized pronouns in *Crime and Punishment*, refers to an aspect of Raskolnikov's true *inner* self, not a false, external double. When the narrator refers to Raskolnikov as "Raskolnikov," he does so only to technically differentiate him from other individuals. When, however, the same narrator refers to Raskolnikov as "he," he thereby translates the "I" of Raskolnikov's innermost voice into *erlebte Rede*—as if introducing himself as an empathizing character who contemplates Raskolnikov's person from within.

In *Crime and Punishment*, however, the frequent use of *erlebte Rede* by characters other than the omniscient narrator creates a special problem which makes it harder for the reader to determine the borders of the realm of Raskolnikov's inviolable unmentionable. On the one hand, this type of discourse externalizes Raskolnikov's conscience or state of mind, however idiosyncratic and introverted, by voicing it through other dramatic personae. On the other hand, other characters' speeches intrude into the voice of Raskolnikov's conscience—or rather are involuntarily dragged into it—and use italicized pronouns as Raskolnikov does. Instead of the principal authorial narrator, *they* begin to cite Raskolnikov through the *erlebte Rede*, being (unlike the author) totally or partially unaware of it themselves. (Their

[11] M. L. Kovsan, "Prestuplenie i nakazanie": "vse" i "on," in Bazanov, vol. 8, 74, 76, 79.

intrusion into Raskolnikov's inner voice is what Bakhtin describes in Chapter 5 of *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.[12]) These characters include "the man from under the earth" (*chelovek iz-pod zemli*, the *meshchanin*), Porfiry, Razumikhin, Dunia, and Sonia. All except "the man from under the earth" break into Raskolnikov's inner voice in order to make it one with his social voice: Porfiry and Sonia, who believe he is guilty, want him to confess and Razumikhin and Dunia, who believe that he is psychologically ill, want to heal him (although I will show below that Razumikhin has yet another purpose in mind).

"The man from under the earth" who says "thou art the murderer" (VI: 209) does not have any such special purpose or mission concerning Raskolnikov. His function turns out to be more mechanical than what Raskolnikov expected it to be. The man stresses the "thou" intonationally, with an air of omniscience. But he is not all-knowing as a plot character: he prophesies a truth of which he himself is unaware. (The man's eventual apology to Raskolnikov reveals his objective lack of omniscience.) Nonetheless, the man's lack of awareness does not actually relieve Raskolnikov of his worry, since Raskolnikov perceives him as an extension of his own stream of consciousness. This isolation of the man's symbolic function from all his human and social features scares Raskolnikov: he encounters a person with whom he has nothing in common socially, and yet this person speaks Raskolnikov's own idiosyncratic language, italicizing "*his*" pronouns. The man uses *erlebte Rede* to express not Raskolnikov's word (the italicized *thou*) but Raskolnikov's *attitude* to this word (the italicizing itself). The man's lack of awareness regarding his own function as the summoner of Raskolnikov's conscience reveals a particular feature of *erlebte Rede* in the novel: when characters other than the authorial narrator use this discourse, they are often not aware of Raskolnikov's "reading" of their own speech. Their motivation for stressing "his" pronouns might greatly differ from Raskolnikov's; they may even use "his" pronouns to refer to another thing, thus creating the effect of dramatic irony.

This use of *erlebte Rede* or the "double-voiced word" for dramatic irony allows Dostoevsky to express the idea that one cannot judge one's neighbor: unlike the judged, God, or the

[12] Cf. Bakhtin (1979), 252-53 and, specifically about Raskolnikov, 277.

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boos not the notion of the actual murder but rather his suspicion that Raskolnikov is the murderer. Elsewhere he condemns himself for suspecting Raskolnikov as if this suspicion were his own secret vice: "What a disgusting, crass, base thought it was on my part!" (VI:341). Later, in *The Idiot*, Myshkin will echo this self-condemnation, being ashamed of his (justified) suspicion that Rogozhin attempted to kill him. Similarly in *The Adolescent*, Versilov, Akhmakova, the old Prince Sokol'sky, and eventually Arkady will actively refuse to learn others', or each other's, shameful secrets, sensing that learning these secrets will somehow bring shame upon them, the listeners. In *Demons*, Liza refuses to listen to Stavrogin's confession for the same reason. In Razumikhin's *it*, Raskolnikov and Razumikhin himself perceive two different and seemingly mutually exclusive taboos. For Raskolnikov the taboo is the mention of his actual crime, and for Razumikhin it is the suspicion that his friend has committed this crime. Both of these taboos are important in Dostoevsky's system of values. Raskolnikov's taboo reveals what is important for the murderer. (In *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky will reintroduce this motif as Rogozhin's conspicuous silence or tongue-tiedness concerning the issues of murder and death.) Razumikhin's taboo, on the other hand, suggests the overarching taboo of Dostoevsky's poetics everywhere: it is forbidden to condemn even the one who is "objectively" guilty.

The difference in the meaning which two interlocutors may ascribe to the same italicized pronoun comes out especially strongly, and with a twist of irony, when Dunia tells Raskolnikov: "Brother, I know *everything* [...] They persecute and torment you because of a stupid suspicion... [...] I won't tell Mother anything about *it* [...] " (VI:326). For Raskolnikov the *it* (*eto*) and the *everything* (*vsë*) still refer to the tabooed motif of the murder, while for Dunia they do not. Like "the man from under the earth," Dunia does not know the *everything* she is talking about. Only Raskolnikov himself does. The fact that Dunia and the man are not omniscient adds irony to the situation, but it still does not deprive their inadvertent reference to Raskolnikov's own taboo of the meaning Raskolnikov perceives in it.

Raskolnikov, therefore, does "italicize" the pronouns referring to the murder when he addresses others, and even others themselves "italicize" these pronouns. But instead of depriving these pronouns of their function of tabooing what is important

to Raskolnikov, these two facts actually "drag" the dramatic personae involved in the italicizing into the realm where the values of Raskolnikov's conscience are unmentionable and therefore hold true: Sonia, Razumikhin and Dunia, "the man from under the earth" and—to some extent—Porfiry acquire some access to the field of Raskolnikov's conscience where the taboo on "murder" remains inviolable, whereas Zametov or Il'ia Petrovich will never "make it" to that realm. The realm, therefore, is not superscribed dramatically: others may enter it occasionally (although for Raskolnikov's purposes, not their own—as the cases of "the man from under the earth" and Dunia clearly show), and Raskolnikov himself may leave or betray (but not violate) it occasionally through the demagoguery which he uses to deceive himself or Zametov. Most interestingly, Sophia, not Raskolnikov, can never escape this realm, and Raskolnikov senses that being with her will determine him to stay in it. ("Sonia presented a sentence without appeal." [*Sonia predstavliala soboiu neumolimyj prigovor*] VI:354).

In addition to italicized pronouns Dostoevsky uses puns on roots as signalers of the violation of Raskolnikov's personal taboo—just as he will use them in *Demons* to provide euphemistic, or rather pseudo-euphemistic substitutes for the root *-bes-*, which signal the taboo on the literal meaning of this root. Like pronouns italicized "in Raskolnikov's sense" by his unwary non-omniscient interlocutors, these puns also involve dramatic irony, or "a double-voiced word," i. e., a discrepancy between the ways the speaker and the listener understand the same expression. After Raskolnikov murders the old woman and Lizaveta, he gets out to the street, and people outside say, taking him for a drunk: "*Ish', narezalsia!*" ("Look, here's one who has had a drop too many taken!"—VI:70). The literal, etymological meaning of this rather common expression is "had his full share of butchering." That Dostoevsky deliberately used this expression is clear: the pun appears, in the same context, in the very first paragraph of the first draft to *Crime and Punishment*, still narrated in the first person (VII:5).

Certain other accentuating episodes turn the pun on this root (*-rez-*) into a motif: when Dunia says, "I haven't butchered anyone yet" [*Ia eshche nikogo ne zarezala* VI:179]—Raskolnikov almost faints. Like Petrov in conversation with Gorianchikov, or later Stavrogin with Liza, and unlike Dunia herself, Raskol-

nikov reacts to the literal rather than the metaphoric meaning of this expression; he takes it as a violation of his personal sore spot. Svidrigajlov uses two verbs of the same root *-rez-* when telling Raskolnikov of his love for Dunia: "In short, I fell for her so hard (*tak vrezalsia*) that if only she said 'butcher [*zarezh'*] Martha Petrovna,' it would have been done right then" (VI:367). Although Svidrigajlov is to blame for Martha Petrovna's death, he did not butcher her. He uses the *-rez-* root here metaphorically, whereas Raskolnikov, his listener, takes it literally, at least to some extent. As in *Demons*, or *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, the discrepancy between the tabooed and the "innocent," taboo-violating use of the same expression, amounts to the discrepancy between the literal and the metaphorical realization of its meaning or root (in this case, *-rez-*). By metaphorizing the meaning of some roots, Dostoevsky's characters may inadvertently violate an actual taboo on these roots' *literal* meaning. In *Crime and Punishment*, "the blame" for violating the taboo by metaphorizing the tabooed expression is not on the violators (as it was with the unwary Gorianchikov and will be in *Demons*) but on Raskolnikov, the only one sensitive to the taboo which is caused by his unclean conscience. This notion of "blame," however, is relative. As we saw with Petrov or Svidrigajlov and will see with other Dostoevskian crooks sensitive to taboos, their sensitivity has a redeeming merit of its own. Having sore spots maintains a certain level of humanity even in villains and criminals.

Paradoxically, Raskolnikov's amazingly private taboo on killing is sometimes signaled (to us and him) by other characters' invasions of his private realm, and occasionally even through means other than italicized pronouns (e. g., the root *-rez-*). The italicized pronouns are also sometimes used in other ways in the novel, or for the purposes of other people's unmentionables—as when Sonia calls her family *they* [*oni, te*].[16] But Raskolnikov's motifs—and therefore the taboo he observes—predominate in the novel. Consequently, italicized pronouns are also used predominantly (although not exclusively) to signal this taboo. Tracing how italicized pronouns or puns taboo the notion of the already committed murder in the murderer's own mind (without having the same meaning for the others)

[16] Cf. earlier in this chapter, the reference to VI:248-252.

helps one understand the way in which Dostoevsky subliminally yet insistently imposes on the reader his own system of values—in which conscience (even the conscience of a murderer) is absolute, inviolable, uncompromising and invincible.

Raskolnikov's Idiosyncratic Taboo Translated into Philosophical Terms

Viacheslav Ivanov, a poet and a religious thinker, maintains that the distinction between the inner, absolute realm of consciousness and the outer, relative realm of empirical behavior, characterizes all Dostoevsky's post-prison work. In his *Dostoevsky: Tragedy—Myth—Mysticism*, Viacheslav Ivanov observes that after the mock execution, Dostoevsky started not only to define the borders between the internal ("immanent") and the external ("transcendent") aspects of human personality and of crime—but to redefine these borders in a uniquely Dostoevskian way:

> The entire work of the insightful writer became the [further] internalization of the inner man born from the Spirit—[of the man] in whose world-perception **that which we consider transcendent often became the immanent in some sense, and our immediate internal givenness, on the other hand, was partially transfered to an [external] sphere.** For the personality was split into [two:] the empirical or external on the one hand, and the higher and freer, the metaphysically significant, on the other.[17] [...] Dostoevsky's inner experience taught him the distinction between the empirical and the metaphysical aspects of man, [...] which was philosophically defined by Schopenhauer following in the footsteps of Kant. The same distinction is implied in Dostoevsky's utterances about the nature of crime.[18]

Ivanov's philosophical categories correspond to the elements of Raskolnikov's taboo. Raskolnikov's metaphysical, inner man is the one who cannot mention the murder when alone (or with

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[17] Viacheslav Ivanov, *Esse, stat'i, perevody*, Brussels: D. Ivanov and Foyer Oriental Chrétien, published as *Logos* 45, 1985 (the chapter "Roman-tragediia, II. Tragicheskij printsip mirosozertsaniia," the end of section 4, in "Dostoevskij. Tragediia - mif - mistika"), 27.

[18] *Ibid.*, 28 (the beginning of section 5 of the same chapter).

his Sophia) and thus substitutes italicized pronouns for this mention. His empirical, outer man is the one who violates the taboo "thou shalt not kill" in practice, by rationalizing this murder, committing it, and then teasing Zametov and trying to escape from Porfiry. The same distinction between the transcendent (outer) and the immanent (inner) realms applies to the the crime itself. Dostoevsky taboos only the immanent, inner aspect of this crime. On the outer, empirical level Raskolnikov succeeds in violating the taboo against this crime. But on the metaphysical level, within himself he still experiences this taboo as inviolable and absolute. By establishing Raskolnikov's taboo only on an unexpectedly *non*-social level, Dostoevsky manages to defamiliarize the distinction between the social, "transcendent," and the meta-social, "immanent" aspects of this taboo.

Dostoevsky not only established or defamiliarized but indeed *shifted* the border between the outer and the inner realms of both the crime and the criminal's personality. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky achieved this shift by introducing unexpected interference and/or overlapping of Raskolnikov's taboo with others' taboos or sore spots. The instances of *erlebte Rede* in *Crime and Punishment* suggest that the realm of Raskolnikov's inner life may at times encompass others and yet exclude Raskolnikov himself. Dunia, Razumikhin, Sonia, Porfiry, and even "the man from under the earth" occasionally speak in Raskolnikov's inner voice whenever they observe or signal "his" taboo.[19] "The external" Raskolnikov himself does not speak in his own voice when, teasing Zametov or any of his interlocutors, he violates his own taboo on mentioning the murder. Thus, in order to redefine and defamiliarize that which Ivanov considers the distinction between the outer and the inner realms of the human being, Dostoevsky (a) unexpectedly limits the applicability of Raskolnikov's taboo to his inner realm, and (b) reshapes this realm itself by shifting the borders between Raskolnikov's inner voice and the voices of others. This border-reshaping can be defined in Bakhtinian terms as "the double-voiced word," the characters' ability to speak in

[19] In his theology of the antinomy of God's mercy and just punishment, Pavel Florensky interprets one's subjective hell as the loss of one's true personality to others. Cf. Florensky (1914), the chapter "On the Judgment" ("*O sude*").

each other's inner voices.[20] In the specific case discussed here, it is important that the characters penetrate into that aspect of Raskolnikov's inner voice which concerns his personal taboo.

Ivanov does not apply his distinction between the immanent and the transcendent realms to tabooing in *Crime and Punishment*, but this distinction can and should be correlated with the system of tabooed values in the novel. Taboos are the best signalers of the distinction between the outer and the inner realms in both a human being and a crime. In *Crime and Punishment*, it is not "Dostoevsky's utterances about crime" (Ivanov) that imply the distinction between the empirical/ transcendent/ outer realm and the metaphysical/ immanent/ inner one—but rather his character's peculiarly conspicuous non-utterances about the crime, his inability to mention this crime under particular circumstances.

In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky explores the relation between these inner and outer realms by pursuing the effects of conscience and law in Raskolnikov's mind. Like Mary Douglas, I believe that taboos can regulate those aspects of human conscience which formal social law cannot regulate or even approach. In the societies Mary Douglas studied, the "jurisdiction" of taboos is considered complementary to that of the law because their violation does not subject the violator to any legal punishment, and yet it seems to bring about an immanent, mystical punishment, such as paralysis, possession or illness.[21] I correlate Douglas' distinction between taboos and social regulations with the split between the inner and outer minds and crimes of Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, and Ivan Karamazov. Of these three, Raskolnikov best exemplifies the distinction between the inner and the outer crime, because in his case, not only is this distinction a motif but it is also marked as central to "his" novel by his idiosyncratic taboo which, in Douglas's terms, marks this distinction better than any pronouncements, legal or literary.

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[20] Cf. Bakhtin (1979), Ch. 5.
[21] Cf. Douglas, Chapter 8.

The Correlation Between Raskolnikov's Napoleonic Idea and his Main Sore Spot

In the introduction I speculated on the ways in which Dostoevsky may have transformed the sore spots of two public figures, tsars Paul I and Nicholas I, into the idiosyncratic taboos of private people (Raskolnikov, for one) in his fiction. In this chapter, I have described how Dostoevsky transformed a universal taboo, expressed in the Decalogue as "thou shalt not kill," into Raskolnikov's private sore spot. Raskolnikov failed to recognize the universality of this commandment in the first place because he had caught the disturbing idea that the violation of this commandment never seemed to cause any sore spots for a truly great public figure like Napoleon, or even for a merely extraordinary person (VI: 199-200). The theory that the truly great are allowed to behave immorally and are immune to the pangs of conscience, was originally formulated by Napoleon III, a great apologist of Napoleon I. Since Napoleon III rationalized and theorized this idea in a book (*The Life of Julius Caesar*), rather than merely naturally living by it the way his great model Napoleon I did, it is likely that while Napoleon III tried to practice this idea, it was not self-evident for him, but rather a sore spot which *required* a theoretical apology. This monarchial sore spot, although it consists of the monarch's vehement argument that great monarchs should have no sore spots, nevertheless typologically resembles the sore spots of the Emperors Paul and Nicholas, which I have linked to parricide. Dostoevsky manages to internalize yet another monarch's sore spot by tabooing the product of Raskolnikov's realization of Napoleon III's theory in a very idiosyncratic way. The product of Napoleon III's theory is the murder that Raskolnikov has committed, and the taboo on it operates only in *non*-social circumstances.

At first Raskolnikov fully adheres to Napoleon III's theory. He actually theorizes this sore spot in his own article, as Napoleon III theorized it in a book.[22] Even after committing the murder he continues to believe that his murder of the old "louse"

[22] On the influence of The Life of Julius Caesar by Napoleon III on Raskolnikov's theory, cf. VII:338-339; also F. I. Evnin, "Roman 'Prestuplenie i nakazanie,'" in *Tvorchestvo Dostoevskogo*, Moscow: AN SSSR - Nauka, 1959, 153-157.

has become his privately unmentionable taboo only because he is no Napoleon (VI:211).

Porfiry also seems to agree with Raskolnikov (and with Napoleon III) that Raskolnikov's problem is that he is no Napoleon. He likens Raskolnikov's ideological defeat to General Mack's strategic defeat by Napoleon. According to Porfiry, both Raskolnikov and the general were "seduced by mental games"—to which the blissfully non-reflective Napoleon himself was apparently immune:

> A playful sharpness of wit and the abstract arguments of reason are what seduce you, sir. Which is exactly like the former Austrian *Hofskriegsrat* [...] on paper, [to be sure], they had Napoleon crushed and taken prisoner, it was all worked out and arranged in the cleverest manner in their study, and then, lo and behold, General Mack [there] [*general-**to** Mak*] surrenders with his entire army, heh, heh, heh!" (VI:263).[23]

Thus for Porfiry, just as for Raskolnikov himself, Napoleon's main strategic advantage over Raskolnikov (or over Mack) was the emperor's lack of excessive reflection, a peculiar virtue which Raskolnikov describes in the following terms:

> [T]he true master [*vlastelin*], to whom everything is permitted, sacks Toulon, makes a slaughterhouse of Paris, forgets an army in Egypt, expends half a million men in a Moscow campaign, and gets off with a pun in Vilno; and when he dies they set up monuments [idols: *kumiry*] to him—and thus everything is permitted. No, obviously such men are made not of flesh but of bronze! (VI:211/ P&V 274)

This theory of the problem of excessive reflection still cannot cure Raskolnikov of his Napoleonic idea, because it allows him to elevate himself over Napoleon intellectually. Only when he realizes that his Napoleonic "idea" is actually a sore spot that possesses him, can he exorcise it. (The epilogue vision of ideas infecting people's minds as bacteria marks the arrival of this exorcism). Only Sonia, being suspicious of ideas that poison one's mind, can help Raskolnikov to begin exorcising this sore spot. Paradoxically, she does it by regarding his Napoleonic idea as something purely mental, and therefore dismissable. By the time Raskolnikov describes his Napoleonic theory to Sonia, she

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[23] P&V, 341 (cf. above 58, n. 5).

lets him feel that the Napoleonic rationalization for his crime is somewhat faulty. She regards Napoleon not as Raskolnikov's philosophical role model, but as a mere allegory that actually prevents her from perceiving his real reasons for committing the crime: "You'd better tell me straight out... without examples [*bez primerov*]" (VI:319/ P&V 415). Until Sonia makes this request, Raskolnikov believes that Napoleon's (or any great man's) lack of a sore spot concerning his conscience serves him, Raskolnikov, as the basis of his *ideology*. The eventual development of his idiosyncratic taboo on mentioning murder to himself or to Sonia, however, reveals that the emperor's lack of scruple actually affects Raskolnikov's "gut-feeling," becoming his sore spot rather than a rational idea. Consequently, only Sonia, who instinctively realizes this distinction, can cause Raskolnikov to overcome the distorting rationalization of his sore spot, i. e., to overcome reasoning as a form of possession—and thus, eventually, to repent.

A temporary *taboo* on mentioning the parallel between Raskolnikov and Napoleon proves the validity of Sonia's intuition that for Raskolnikov, the Napoleonic "idea" was indeed a sore spot rather than merely an idea. In the following conversation, all the classical elements of a signaled taboo violation obtain: the unwary violator (Zametov) and his interlocutors, who react to his violation by remaining silent, pretending to ignore it as a *faux-pas*:

> "Allow me to observe", he answered dryly, "that I do not consider myself a Muhammad or a Napoleon..." [Dostoevsky's three dots] [...]
> "But, my goodness, who in our Russia nowadays doesn't consider himself a Napoleon?" Porfiry suddenly pronounced **with horrible familiarity. There was something particularly clear this time even in the tone of his voice.**
> "Might it not have been some future Napoleon who bumped off our Alyona Ivanovna with an axe last week?" Zamyotov suddenly **blurted out** [*briaknul vdrug*] from his corner.
> Raskolnikov was silent, looking firmly and fixedly at Porfiry. Razumikhin frowned gloomily. He seemed to have begun noticing **something** even earlier [*Emu uzh i prezhde stalo **kak budto chto-to***

kazat'sia]. He looked wrathfully about him. **A moment of a gloomy silence passed** (VI:204/ P&V 265-266).[24]

The general silence marks Zametov's violation of the "local sore spot." Yet each character also has his own way of reacting to it. Razumikhin, who has his own taboo on *suspecting* Raskolnikov, reacts to the imminent possibility of *his* taboo being violated. Furthermore, Razumikhin's taboo is signalled in the way traditionally reserved for Raskolnikov's (or for the interaction between his *and* Raskolnikov's taboos, which I discussed above)—namely, the accumulation of loaded indefinite pronouns [*kak budto chto-to*].

Raskolnikov reacts to the violation of his sore spot with silence. Porfiry's silence, on the other hand, turns this sore spot into "something" [*nechto*] shared by everybody present. He reacts to Zametov's *faux-pas* the way Petrov in *The Notes from the House of the Dead* reacts to Gorianchikov's. Of course, Gorianchikov violates Petrov's personal taboo, but he also mentions something very important and truly valid that is *in the air*, and *therefore* should not be mentioned. Porfiry uses his silence to "chastize" the unwary Zametov for a similar *faux-pas*. Although Porfiry provokes Raskolnikov to talk about his sore spot here—"there was something particularly clear this time even in the tone of his voice" [***dazhe v intonatsii ego golosa bylo na etot raz nechto uzh osobenno iasnoe***] (VI: 204; the cluster of emphatic words, pronouns and adverbs, in the Russian text is particularly conspicuous)—he himself never mentions Raskolnikov's sore spot. As I will demonstrate in the chapters on *The Eternal Husband* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, taboo signalers may use "horrible familiarity" to provoke others to violate a taboo, but they do not violate it themselves. Unlike Zametov, Porfiry understands that Raskolnikov's Napoleonic "idea" is not merely an idea but a sore spot, and that consequently, it can be exorcised only as a sore spot, i. e., from within, by *internalizing* the taboo on it. He also understands that in the act of internalizing it, he cannot compete with Raskolnikov's conscience (which uses the language of italicized pronouns throughout the novel). Only Sonia can, because she loves Raskolnikov and intuitively regards his ideas as sore spots subject to exorcism.

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[24] In this passage, I retain the transliteration of names used by Pevear and Volokhonsky.

It takes Raskolnikov himself a while to realize that his Napoleonic "idea" haunts him as a sore spot. Developing his Napoleonic theory rationally, Raskolnikov tells Porfiry that if an extraordinary person "needs, for the sake of his idea, to step even over a dead body, over blood, then within himself, in his conscience, he can [*mozhet*] [...] allow himself to step over blood (VI:200 / P&V 261)." The word *mozhet* in Russian may designate either "can" or "may." Although when Raskolnikov uses it in this passage, he believes that he means "can," the italicized pronouns which I have interpreted as the signalers of his *internal*, socially unimposed taboo on the murder scene, reveal that the only *viable* meaning of his *mozhet* here is "may:" Raskolnikov himself *is not able* to violate inwardly what he allows himself to violate in practice.

Thus the Napoleonic motif, the myth of the moral distinction between great and ordinary people, being Raskolnikov's personal sore spot rather than merely his abstract idea, determines the particular nature of tabooing in *Crime and Punishment*. The chief taboo in the novel ("thou shalt not kill") was to be transformed from universal to idiosyncratic, and to be signalled by italicized demonstrative pronouns only in non-social circumstances.

Tabooing in *Crime and Punishment* vs. Other Dostoevskian Taboos

In *Crime and Punishment* the eventual destiny of the taboo is to be abolished. The moment Raskolnikov confesses, he no longer needs to load any of the pronouns with a special meaning, although in the epilogue, after he repents, he italicizes, for the last time, the word "everything" which signifies his now passed moral and ideological torments. This final use of italics marks the overcoming of the gap that existed in Raskolnikov's mind between formal confession and repentance. The taboo on mentioning murder to himself, which persisted even after the law was violated, originally *marked* this gap between the realms of Raskolnikov's absolute conscience and his very relative sense of social duty or obedience. The italicized "everything" (*vsë*) signifies and lexically symbolizes his overcoming of this gap through repentance.

The function of the taboo in *Crime and Punishment*, which is to be abolished when the two elements of the protagonist's consciousness are reconciled, is similar to the function of psychological suppression. The main difference between the two functions, however, lies in the presence of a moral and didactic aspect to Raskolnikov's tabooing. The nagging fact that he cannot mention the murder scene to himself teaches him a lesson: despite all his rationalizations to the contrary, murder is *always* forbidden.

One may ask: If the taboo on murder is a personal one for Raskolnikov, how can it signal a universal moral law? If the taboo is personal, does this mean that all is permitted for Napoleons, who do not have this personal taboo? *Crime and Punishment* suggests that others do not share Raskolnikov's personal taboo because and only as long as they are not murderers (i. e., not Napoleons). In this novel, as in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, the absolutely inviolable aspect of the taboo on murder is revealed only as the immanent *punishment* for the crime: the criminal discovers that he *is not able to talk* about the very crime he *has* committed in deed; the mention or non-mention of the crime is no longer "up to him." For a murderer, this verbal taboo is actually much more viable and inviolable as a personal one than is the social interdiction against the criminal deed itself. Unless the commandment "thou shalt not kill" *becomes* a personal taboo, i. e., part of the punishment, rather than the interdiction on the crime, it remains a purely technical legal regulation which holds only for non-Napoleons, who do not know how to get around it. Dostoevsky does not say that there are no Napoleons in this world, rather he suggests that the Napoleons are those who cannot personalize the taboo on murder, or simply put, have their conscience atrophied.

In other novels taboos are not abolished but discovered, or at least constantly observed. In *Demons* the non-mentioning of the word *besy* (demons/ devils) is indispensable for correctly functioning in, or understanding the system of values in that novel, and this taboo is not to be abolished. But the taboo on mentioning devils, although implying and designating a system of values, does not *operate* on values: devils are not a moral value. In *The Idiot* and *The Adolescent*, the protagonists learn about taboos as they learn about values, and any violation of these taboos leads to a catastrophe, rather than to a beneficially dispel-

ling effect as it does in *Crime and Punishment*. In his last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky returns to what he developed in his first, namely a taboo which implicates those who generate it by suppressing their guilt. In the last novel, however, the dispelling of the taboo *never occurs* within the story, and the taboo is not intended to be abolished. The guilt of those implicated in *The Brothers Karamazov* consists of suppression; there the chief taboo and its suppression–or possibly repression as it is unclear to what extent these implicated are conscious of the taboo–are *identical*, whereas in *Crime and Punishment*, the suppression is the cause of the taboo. If so, once the guilt is gone the taboo should be abolished as a sign of redemption. This last function of taboo is unique to *Crime and Punishment*.

CHAPTER 2

The Idiot

What shall Cordelia do? Love and be silent.

King Lear, Act 1

"'Too much talk... That's no way to go about this business, fella..." No one, of course, understood what Rogozhin meant but his words made a strange impression on everybody: everyone was, somehow, obliquely affected by a certain idea they all shared...

The Idiot, Part II

[W]ith a man like the Prince no greater proof of his being in love exists than his rejection of the whole "shameful" idea.

Diana L. Burgin[1]

"The thought articulated is a lie,"
'Silentium' is *The Idiot*'s epigraph —
Implied at least (see Miller's book on why)—
And silence looms at Myshkin's epitaph:

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[1] Diana Burgin, "Prince Myshkin, the True Lover and 'Impossible Bridgeroom:' A Problem in Dostoevskian Narrative," *SEEJ*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Summer 1983), 162-163.

To Radomsky he offers scant reply,
Preferring to remain misunderstood
Than wordily calumnify the Good.

Diana L. Burgin[2]

Conspicuous Omissions

The major theme of Dostoevsky's *Idiot* is that values and taboos are interdependent. At the beginning of the novel neither values nor taboos are operative. As values emerge, however, so immediately do the accompanying taboos. Of the approaches to *The Idiot*, two are relevant to my argument: Robin Feuer Miller's and Leslie A. Johnson's.[3] Since I will need to refer to Miller's analysis of the novel's structure several times, I will first correlate my argument with Johnson's.

In her article "The Face of the Other in *The Idiot*," Johnson juxtaposes violated and observed kinds of "decorum" or *prilichie* in *The Idiot*. The former is the conventional, social decorum, to which people like Totsky and Evgeny Pavlovich are sensitive. The latter is what Johnson calls "the higher *prilichie*"[4] or "some ultimate *prilichie*" (Johnson, 875), which Myshkin possesses and teaches to others. If Johnson wrote in my terms, she would have considered the violation of a human face the ultimate taboo in the novel, since she believes that the inviolability of "the face of the other" constitutes this "ultimate *prilichie*" to which Myshkin is sensitive and others are not. Johnson defines this *prilichie* as specific for the novel, rather than typical of any social conventions:

> A different narrative decorum is operating in this novel, *one that resists invading the consciousness of the other*, preferring instead to let the other reveal herself, dissemble himself, through his or her own face." (Johnson, 868) [...] The face breaks the totality of language. It is the one metaphysical sign, flashing from a region *beyond the*

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[2] Diana Burgin, Prince Myshkin (An Article in Verse), *ibid.*, 183.

[3] R. F. Miller (1981); Leslie A. Johnson, "The Face of the Other in Idiot," *Slavic Review*, Winter 1991 vol. 50 no. 4, 867-878.

[4] Johnson, 871, 877 (compared with Dostoevsky's *vysshee prilichie* in VIII:453)

> *reach of the assailant*. If I assail it with my mind, then my comprehending grasp captures a type, a physiognomy, not the face that alone gives sign of *this* other. If I assail it with brute force, then my appropriating grasp possesses an object, a head, not this face that reveals itself only *in the halo-space of inviolability* (emphases mine, O. M.—Johnson, 870).

What Johnson terms this "higher" or "ultimate" *prilichie* specific to *The Idiot*, I identify as a taboo unique to Dostoevsky—as opposed to any conventional taboo he may introduce or make his characters violate in his work. According to Johnson, then, what I would call the *taboo* on invading the other's face eludes violation. I have already demonstrated that in *Crime and Punishment*, such an ontologically inviolable taboo eludes Raskolnikov's violation by "relocating" its realm to his uncompromising conscience—thus making him unable to inwardly violate the taboo on the murder that he has already committed outwardly. I do not believe, however, that in *The Idiot* the face of the other—important as this motif may be—is indeed such an inviolable taboo. More important than this taboo on an action are the taboos on subjects of discourse in the novel.

Furthermore, while I agree that the opposition between the conventional and the ultimate *prilichie* in Dostoevsky is exceptionally important, unlike Johnson, I do not believe that Myshkin is the main teacher of taboos, or their main signaler in *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky extends the opposition between the two kinds of *prilichie* far beyond the figure of Myshkin. In fact, in this novel, as elsewhere, Dostoevsky uses unworthy characters as adequate signalers of taboos.[5] After all, in order to be trusted, one does not need to prove the validity or genuineness of one's private *sore spot* the way one needs to live up to one's *proclaimed* values; and in *The Idiot*, just as elsewhere in Dostoevsky's works, taboos *are* mostly signaled as someone's personal sore spots. Although according to Leslie Johnson, Rogozhin lacks not only conventional but also higher decorum as well, in this

[5] In the works already discussed, Petrov and Svidrigajlov are especially important "unworthy" taboo signalers—although Raskolnikov also is no saint. In *Demons*, it is Maria Lebiadkina, a very problematic character. Even more important are Trusotsky and Smerdiakov—the "unworthy" taboo signalers whom I will discuss in the last two chapters.

chapter I will show how at one point Rogozhin *teaches* the importance of "higher decorum" *to Myshkin*.[6]

Although she does not discuss taboos, Robin Feuer Miller analyzes the narrative techniques of *The Idiot* in terms which help to elucidate my theory. She describes *The Idiot* as the watershed novel in the course of which Dostoevsky discovers an entirely new author-narrator relation, a relation which then remains intact, with only minor modifications, in the two major novels to follow—*Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.[7] In the course of *The Idiot* the narrator splits from the author in his treatment of Myshkin, that is, Dostoevsky's narrator abandons Myshkin while Dostoevsky does not (Miller, *ibid.*, 227). Miller describes how Dostoevsky needs and uses this technique to impose his values on his readers more effectively: he deprives them of an "objective" point of view which would allow them to stand above the experience of the characters—and thereby forces them to partake of the characters' experience, evaluating it only with the criteria and emotional feedback available to the characters themselves. Most importantly, Dostoevsky thereby manages to force the reader to partake of the moral offenses which the characters commit as reader and character react to events in the plot non-objectively and partially:

> [A]t times [the reader's] participation as the narrator's reader[8] brought him to the brink of judging and condemning a suffering, good man. It involved him in the same web as the characters of the novel" (R. F. Miller (1981), 230, cf. also *ibid.*, 227, 228-9).

I will discuss the connection which grows between tabooing and this "web" in the context of the chief taboo in *The Brothers Karamazov*. For the present it suffices to say that the evolution of the author-narrator relation identified by Robin Miller in *The Idiot* is closely connected with the ever increasing importance of tabooing in the course of this novel.

Dostoevsky has many ideological purposes for invalidating the "objective" point of view.[9] Miller maintains that the evolu-

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[6] For Johnson's view of Rogozhin, cf. Johnson, 873.

[7] R. F. Miller (1981), 89.

[8] In Miller's terms, the narrator's reader is that aspect of the reader which has to accept the narrator's view at its face-value.

[9] One of them is undermining the very objectivity of this point of view by revealing its partiality. Thus in the *Adolescent* chapter I will demonstrate that in *The Adolescent* Dostoevsky goes so far as to taboo objectivity; there he treats the

tion from an "objective" commentary to a narrative style abstaining from "objectivity" was inevitable for two reasons: (a) Dostoevsky found straightforward statements of his ideas ineffective (Miller, 12-13, 89, 39[10]), and (b) He had "a positively beautiful man" to depict (Miller, 12, 81, etc.). This second task set for himself by Dostoevsky can also be translated in a way I prefer: "to depict a beautiful man positively" (*izobrazit' polozhitel'no prekrasnogo cheloveka*: the adverb here can modify either the verb "to depict" or the adjective "beautiful"). Such a "positive" program doomed all formally positive (cataphatic) statements about the beauty of "the beautiful man" to failure. According to Miller, in the course of the novel Dostoevsky developed a narrative and structural technique which would respond to the demands of his positive program, or, in Miller's words, would "overcome the potential dullness of a perfectly good man." (Miller, 81). This *via negativa* (apophatic) technique invalidates the "objective" through various kinds of conspicuous omission, including (1) the split between narrator and author—which deprives the author's opinion of direct expression, (2) the non-mentioning of important ideas by the narrator or a character (Miller, 267), and (3) the evolution of Myshkin's childlike verbal openness at the novel's beginning to his eventual tongue-tiedness as someone who is too concerned about the events to chat about them easily (Miller, 222).

Utilizing the narrative technique described by Miller, Dostoevsky creates in *The Idiot* a microcosm of moral values which he imposes on the reader by tabooing the consideration of certain key notions that concern these values. Since Dostoevsky developed several elements of this narrative technique only *in the course* of this novel,[11] the corresponding taboos in the novel are also shown as they emerge. Consequently, the taboos in *The Id-*

"objective" assessment of other people's faults as indecent and improper (*neprilichnoe*). For *The Idiot*, however, Miller's analysis of the invalidation of the "objective" suffices.

[10] *Ibid.*, 39: "The writer must be a strategist, a rhetorician who could never speak his thoughts and say 'the last word,' because of the withering effect such directness would have on his art." For the analysis of Dostoevsky's treatment of the notion of "the last word" as taboo, see my chapter on *The Eternal Husband*.

[11] Miller cites Wasiolek's statement that the novel still lacks organic fitness, and that Dostoevsky tries "many routes to the same ends" (R. F. Miller (1981), 50-51). I agree with Miller and Wasiolek only to a point, however, and I will soon specify where we part.

iot are not as structurally consistent—or verbally observed—as they will become in *Demons* or *The Brothers Karamazov*. In *The Idiot*, a word may be constantly omitted throughout a passage where it designates the key notion of this passage, though it may later appear in a relatively neutral context. The tabooed word may also appear when the tabooing passage ends, resolving and releasing the tension of the taboo which, on the verbal level, obtains only for the purposes of that passage,—the way one resolves a dissonance in music. In *Crime and Punishment* and *The Eternal Husband* taboos also are "released" or "resolved," but only toward the end of the whole work. Structurally important tabooed notions are mentioned this way, at the end of each pertaining episode, only in *The Idiot*.

Discussing tabooed key notions in *The Idiot*, I will therefore concentrate on conspicuous *omissions*, and will not always account for the *appearance* of the same word in unmarked contexts. I will, however, discuss the appearances of the tabooed when such appearances *signal* the taboo. There are two types of such signals. One is common to all of Dostoevsky's works: a character mentions the unmentionable and those listening signal to him that he has violated a taboo—by being shocked, or by pretending they did not understand him, or by changing the subject abruptly. The other way of signaling the presence of a taboo by mentioning the tabooed is uniquely "idiotic" (in the Greek sense of the word, too). It is the mention which releases the tension at the end of the passage involving the taboo which I discussed above.

Zero-Tabooing. The Two Natures of Myshkin's Idiocy and the Two Realms of Reality Set Apart by Dostoevsky's Ways of Tabooing

As the novel progresses, more and more things are mentioned less and less freely. At the beginning, there is a rather socially improbable situation of what I called "zero-tabooing" in my introduction. Just as zero-endings in grammar presuppose grammatical endings, so zero-taboos presuppose the function of tabooing rather than its neutral absence.

Everyone freely chats about Myshkin's idiocy: the author, naming his novel *The Idiot;* Gania, losing his temper; Mme. Epanchina naively; her daughters incredulously; Myshkin himself matter-of-factly; and Nastasia Filippovna hysterically, complimenting herself on marrying "a prince, a millionaire, and an idiot to boot!" (VIII:141). Although later in the novel it will become clear that Myshkin is a consistent idiot only in the original Greek sense of the word (a deviant of any kind, positive or negative, a private person who is set apart from society, possibly as a "positively beautiful man"), initially characters do not realize that Myshkin's idiocy, Greek or Russian, should be unmentionable.

This zero-tabooing, or bad manners, continues; neither Myshkin himself (VIII:227) nor others will refrain from mentioning his idiocy (VIII:89, 141, 219, 264, 273, 287). But some will become ashamed of so doing, and some mentions will come to be perceived as scandalous by other characters. Thus the tone of Keller's article shocks the listeners *despite* the fact that they have mentioned Myshkin's idiocy to his face (notably Gania and Lizaveta Prokofievna Epanchina, VIII:219, 221); and Myshkin chastizes Lizaveta Prokofievna for mentioning to his face that Aglaia used to call him "a mutant and an idiot" (*urodik i idiot,* VIII:264). Here Myshkin's reaction results not from any concern about the status of his own idiocy, Greek or Russian, but from his love for Aglaia—a motif that becomes an important taboo as the novel progresses.

Myshkin's reproach to Lizaveta Prokofievna, and the listeners' indignation at the reading of Keller's article would be appropriate under any socially normal circumstances but not in the abnormal situation which Dostoevsky artificially normalized (or "zero-tabooed") at the beginning of the novel. To use the terminology which elsewhere I apply to Andrej Platonov, Dostoevsky *familiarizes*[12] everyone's abnormal chatting about

[12] The term "familiarization" (*neostranenie*) as the opposite of Shklovsky's "defamiliarization" or "deautomatization" (ostranenie) first emerged in 1986 as a result of my collaboration with Nancy Workman. (We delivered a joint paper on the topic at the 1987 AATSEEL conference, San Francisco). Familiarization functions in Platonov for the same moral purposes taboos function in Dostoevsky: to implicate the reader in characters' and narrators' moral, mental, sentimental, and linguistic shortcomings. Cf. also Olga Meerson, "Dostoevsky and Platonov: The Importance of the Omitted," PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1991.

Myshkin's idiocy in order to defamiliarize or de-automatize the true meaning of this "idiocy." In Myshkin's case, as often elsewhere in Dostoevsky's work, this true, deeper meaning of the word "idiot" is literal, i. e., etymological rather than idiomatic or conventional. As characters eventually begin to recognize this potentially positive aspect of Myshkin's "idiocy," they mention this idiocy less and less freely.

Recently Harriet Murav has correlated this potentially positive meaning of the word "idiot" in Dostoevsky's novel with the etymology of the Russian word *iurodivyj*, a fool-for-Christ.[13] Both *iurodivyj* and *idiotes* literally signify "a social deviant." Dal' lists *iurodivyj* among the synonyms of *idiot*.[14] *Iurodivyj* has the same root as *urod*, the Russian for "ugly mutant," i. e., someone *born different (u-rod-it'sia)* from the rest.[15] Although *urod* is a very pejorative and offensive word in Russian, *iurodivyj* often has positive connotations. Also, in Polish, for example, *uroda*, the feminine equivalent of the Russian *urod*, signifies "a beauty," not an ugly woman. Thus in Slavic languages, the positive and negative connotations of the stem *urod-* may vary, but the denotation of being set apart from the rest remains constant. As I mentioned above, Aglaia calls Myshkin *urodik i idiot*, an ugly mutant *and* an idiot. The combination of the two words, which, according to Lizaveta Prokofievna, Aglaia uses more than once and/or emphatically (*nazyvala* is imperfective—VIII:264), suggests that Dostoevsky wants his readers to correlate the meanings of these two words and to regard at least some of their aspects as synonymous. The only synonymous aspects of *urod* and *idiot*, however, reside in the respective *etymologies* of these two words—both of them being traceable to the meaning of "being different from those around them." The *conventional* meanings of these two words, on the contrary, have nothing in common, since in today's idiomatic Russian *urod* means "an ugly man," thus referring to appearance, whereas *idiot* refers to someone underdeveloped mentally. Since Myshkin is not ugly, Aglaia's *urodik i idiot* compromises the idiomatic meaning of the first word (*urodik*). This compromise, in turn, implies that the idio-

[13] Cf. the section "The Problem of Sanctity: *The Idiot* and the Holy Fool," in Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness, Dostoevsky's novels & the Poetics of Cultural Critique*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992, 88 ff.

[14] Vladimir Dal', *Tolkovyj slovar'*, second edition, 1880-1882, vol. 2, 8.

[15] Cf. Vasmer, IV:168, 534.

matic meaning of the second word (*idiot*) is also not self-evident. Once the idiomatic meaning of an idiom is compromised or distorted, the reader's attention is drawn to the literal or etymological meaning of the same idiom. This de-idiomatizing of idioms reveals the fact that originally they were metaphors but were automatized in the process of turning into idioms. Thus de-idiomatization inevitably implies de-metaphorization, i. e., the Shklovskian "resurrection" of the literal meaning of idioms.[16]

In *The Idiot*, just as in *Demons*, the taboo on the conventional, idiomatic meaning of "idiot," the title word, is easily violated, or more precisely, its rather scandalous violation leads to no major catastrophic consequences. The violation of the taboo on the etymological, Greek meaning of "idiot," on the other hand, leads to a major catastrophe, thereby marking this potentially positive, Greek meaning as unmentionable, and therefore significant. Aglaia may easily call Myshkin an ugly mutant and an idiot, but when she openly declares Myshkin's "*positive* beauty" to Nastasia Filippovna, she (Aglaia) immediately realizes that she has violated an important taboo: "...'[A]nd no matter who cheats him, he will forgive them, and that's why I came to love him...' **Aglaia stopped for a moment, as if struck, as if not believing herself..." (VIII:472).**

Aglaia is shocked by what she has just said not because it is not true but because it is too true to be uttered. She violates the taboo on the mention of Myshkin's *positive* "idiocy," which amounts to his ability to forgive those who cheat him, i. e.,

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[16] On the resurrection of the original meaning of a word as the artist's function or task, cf. Viktor Shklovsky, "Voskreshenie slova," St. Petersburg, 1914, reprinted in *Gamburgskij schet. Stat'i, vospominaniia, esse. 1914-1933*, Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel', 1990, 36-42. On idioms as automatized metaphors, which one can resurrect or de-idiomatize through the study of their etymology, cf. A. A. Potebnia, "Slovo i ego svojstva. Rech' i ponimanie," in his *Mysl' i iazyk*, Khar'kov, 1892, 151-155, esp. 151. On various aspects of the birth of metaphors, cf. also Olga M. Frejdenberg, "Metaphora," as chapter 2 of her *Obraz i poniatie* (1945-1954), published as *Mif i literatura drevnosti*, Moscow, 1978, 180-205. Cf. also A. N. Veselovsky, "Iazyk poezii i iazyk prozy," in: Gyula Kiraly and Arpad Kovacs, *Poetika. Trudy russkikh i sovetskikh poeticheskikh shkol*, Budapest, 1982, 263: "At some point, every word used to be a metaphor; it expressed through a one-sided image that aspect of the [depicted] object which seemed the most typical for this object's viability. [...] By revving up [*podnovliaia*] the graphic element of the word, the language of poetry to some extent brings the word back to the work once done by the developing language — insofar as it digests through images the phenomena of the external world."

those who believe him to be an idiot in the conventional sense of the word. Nothing happens when Aglaia calls Myshkin an ugly mutant and an idiot. But when she openly declares his *positive* "idiocy" or *iurodstvo*, his ability to forgive the unforgiveable, she generates a whole sequence of events which, among other catastrophic consequences, eventually reduce Myshkin to conventional idiocy. Apparently, Dostoevsky's task of depicting "a positively beautiful man" can be fulfilled only as long as the man's "positive beauty" remains unmentionable, or at least not subject to exegesis.

As we saw in *Crime and Punishment* and in Petrov's reaction to Gorianchikov's comment about hell, the unexpected "split" or dichotomy between the violable (metaphoric) and the inviolable (literal) aspects of a taboo characterizes Dostoevsky's tabooing in general. In theological terms, this dichotomy parallels the distinction between the ontological and the phenomenological realms of sin. God punishes sin (thus opposing it ontologically) but saves the sinner (who makes sin phenomenologically possible). In order to make the distinction between these two realms especially clear, God must "make room" for a plane where the taboo on sin itself would be inviolable even when the sinner violates it on the non-ontological plane.[17] Dostoevsky delineates this plane of inviolable taboos by *contrasting* it to the social (or, linguistically conventional, sociolectal) plane, where what one *normally* considers taboo is easily violated in Dostoevsky's work. This contrast between the social and the ontological planes of language and behavior accounts for the proverbial scandalousness of Dostoevsky's poetics. As we will see later in this chapter, the greatest expert on a taboo in *The Idiot* is Rogozhin, arguably the most scandalous character in this novel.

Ippolit: The Taboo Violator

Ippolit's confession, the peak of zero-tabooing, most visibly signals that zero-tabooing, although familiarized, is still abnor-

[17] Cf., Florensky (1914), esp. 237, but also 219 ff., 230, 232-236 ff.

mal.[18] Ippolit pronounces the unpronounceable in society: he publicly discusses his own imminent death and his fear of dying. In reference to this topic, and some others associated with it, he ennunciates Myshkin's sacred convictions—which Myshkin, by that time, has stopped pronouncing. In the specific context of death and resurrection, he extensively comments on the Holbein picture at the Rogozhins'. Myshkin only tells Rogozhin that one might lose faith contemplating this picture. Ippolit, on the other hand, explains why one might lose it, talking in terms rather unacceptable in society: he describes, in great detail, how death corrupts Jesus's body too powerfully for one to believe that it is incorruptible. Ippolit also picks up Myshkin's theme interest in a man awaiting his own inevitable execution, a theme which Myshkin has since stopped mentioning. As Robin Miller states,

> It is Ippolit, Myshkin's ideological opponent, who makes the most profound 'statement' of many of Myshkin's own beliefs (Miller, 200) ... Ippolit's narrative contains the fullest verbal expression of two of Myshkin's most essential beliefs: the belief in the effectiveness of good deeds...and the belief that words, in the end, fail to express the idea behind them. (Miller, 214)

Elsewhere Miller asserts that Dostoevsky himself shared these beliefs (e. g. Miller, 12-13, 81). She says of Ippolit: "...it is to Ippolit, the sympathetic 'enemy,' that Dostoevsky gives his precious formulation of the miraculous means by which the seeds of good acts spread through the world (VIII:336,424)" (Miller, 211). Thus Ippolit's figure is designed to violate not only the taboo on pronouncing a character's sacred convictions but also the one on ennunciating the author's own beliefs. In addition to signaling to the reader the importance of the taboo on the author's values, Ippolit's violation provides a clue as to what these values are.

Ippolit thus functions here as the inevitably scandalous figure who enunciates the truth that the author and his "positively beautiful man" confess silently. Dostoevsky has such figures elsewhere. One, Stepan Verkhovensky, puts into words a truth

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[18] Cf. an earlier note on familiarization. Familiarization only pretends to cancel or defy the abnormality of the abnormal. It always leaves a glimpse of the abnormality visible—in order to cause the reader emotional discomfort and thereby to provoke him/ her to take a doubletake.

Dostoevsky himself tried to affirm by affixing the Gospel story about the possessed man as one of the two epigraphs to *Demons* (commonly known in English as *The Possessed*). Like Ippolit, all such figures have a double function: (a) by violating the taboo they signal it, both to other characters and to the reader, and (b) they signal the importance of the tabooed values. But Ippolit differs from other such figures in one respect: by the time he enunciates Myshkin's now silent beliefs, we have not yet experienced these beliefs as unmentionable, or as taboos that no one before Ippolit dared to violate. Only the blatancy of Ippolit's violation signals that there was something to violate—and therefore to care about—in the first place. In *The Idiot*, there are no rules known until someone becomes disturbed when they are violated.

According to Robin Miller, the novel's conventions develop from a situation where everything may be mentioned to one where the important things are not mentioned. She says that the character of Ippolit emerged because Dostoevsky needed Myshkin to become increasingly tongue-tied. I believe that the emergence of this figure was necessary in order to valorize the tabooing of the important. Ippolit's confession aims at the same conspicuous zero-tabooing that Dostoevsky initially established as the novel's background, when Myshkin commented on everyone's countenance and character and everyone commented, equally liberally, on his idiocy.

Zero-Tabooing Signals that Dostoevsky Had a Plan to Write a Novel about the Process of the Emergence of Taboos

Zero-tabooing is artificial and marked: the social norms of every culture demand some taboos. Otherwise there are no values. Zero-tabooing carries the possibility of a valueless world ad absurdum—and therefore defamiliarizes the need to taboo things in order to establish values. The similarity between the flagrant violation of taboos in Ippolit's speech and the equally flagrant zero-tabooing by and concerning Myshkin at the beginning of the novel and in its title suggests that the zero-tabooing was conscious and pre-planned, and not fully conditioned by the fact that Dostoevsky, at the novel's inception, had not yet

learned/mastered the narrative techniques he would develop in the process of writing it. It is possible that from the very beginning Dostoevsky wanted to write a novel which would comment on the nature of taboos, their emergence and the degree to which the existence of values depends on the existence of taboos.

Here I differ with Robin Miller. She is an "evolutionist:" she explains the novel's narrative and structural peculiarities by describing the evolution of Dostoevsky's techniques as he found the way to say effectively what he wanted to say while writing it.[19] I am, partially, a "creationist:" I explain some motifs in the novel by the initial intention of its creator—Dostoevsky. I believe that throughout the novel Dostoevsky at least tries to remain faithful to the intention of treating or investigating the nature of taboos.

But Miller is right at least partially. Many things in this novel can be explained only "evolutionistically." The relative inconsistency of taboos on the verbal level, in comparison to the consistent verbal taboos in his two subsequent great novels—*Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov*—points to one of these. In *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky sensed the importance of tabooing, especially for describing the positive, and he defamiliarized tabooing and transformed it into a motif in the novel, but he did not yet create any consistent taboos on a word that would be traceable throughout the whole novel. The episodes in which taboos emerge, however, demonstrate these taboos very powerfully and are very important structurally. So are the taboos. They concern love and death.

The Taboo which Concerns Love

As I mentioned before, Prince Myshkin is the most visible of the characters who, in the course of the novel, learn to shut up (the next most visible one is the narrator). The Prince acquires the useful inability to utter things as he begins to partake of the

[19] It is interesting to note that the evolution of the main character's narrative experience and style in *The Adolescent* is exactly what Miller describes as the evolution of Dostoevsky's own narrative technique in *The Idiot*. (Cf. the chapter on *The Adolescent*).

lives and concerns of those around him. Of these partakings, the most notable is his falling in love. The first attempt to taboo the mention of love occurs already in Part I, when Myshkin falls in love with Nastasia Filippovna. This taboo is conveyed through an apophatic discourse—the narrator's description of what is going on in Myshkin's mind at the time. As he goes to Nastasia Filippovna's for the first time, he knows *a* reason for which he is going there: he wants to warn her not to marry Gania. But the real reason is not formulated or formulatable, and it remains unclear whether this reason also causes him to warn her against Gania, or whether it is a separate one:

> ...But the question: 'What, after all, is he going to do there and why is he going?—'...to this question he decidedly couldn't (*reshitel'no ne mog*) find a consoling (*uspokoitel'nogo*) answer... There was yet one more unresolved question so important that the prince was even afraid to think of it, couldn't, and dared not, even admit it; as to how to formulate it—he did not know, kept blushing and trembling at the mere thought of it (VIII:114).

The purposely awkward syntactic inversion [*formulirovat' kak, ne znal*] conveys the emotional disorder and discomfort in Myshkin's mind—as if *the narrator* could not formulate things any better than Myshkin. *The reader*, who encounters this unformulatable text, must in turn share the narrator's verbal discomfort about Myshkin's taboo. As we have seen in the introduction, this first-hand experience of characters' taboos typifies Dostoevsky's poetics, in contrast to the poetics of taboos in such novels as *War and Peace*.

The second time Myshkin advises Nastasia Filippovna not to marry Gania: "The Prince seemed to be trying to overcome a great difficulty uttering... (*vygovorit'*+0) and could not utter it, as if a great burden were pressing on his chest. 'D-do n-not...—' he finally forced himself to whisper and sighed with an effort." (VIII:123). Given the fact that Myshkin did not seem restrained during his preceding conversations with Gania, it is not Gania who makes it hard for him to utter his tirade but rather "the other unresolved question." As the novel progresses, more and more questions become "unresolved" for Myshkin because they begin to concern him personally. Consequently, more and more things become unutterable for him. The "unresolved" question, or the taboo on mentioning his love to Nastasia Filippovna, is

resolved when Myshkin declares his love to her, with the result that, at least for plot purposes, this resolution brings the love itself to an end. Towards the beginning of Part Two Myshkin's other love is born. Unlike his love for Nastasia Filippovna, this love has fewer overtones of philanthropy in it: he needs Aglaia at least as much as she needs him. This love involves him in the life and concerns of the beloved more personally than does his love for Nastasia Filippovna who—as he himself, at least, believes—needs him more than he needs her. The level of tabooing concerning Myshkin's second love is proportionately higher and more consistent.

A major shift in Dostoevsky's concept of the novel occurred after he completed Part One. This shift partially explains the incongruity of a plot which renders unanswerable the readers' question: "whom of the two, after all, did he really love?!" Even though one may persuasively argue that Myshkin's love for Nastasia Filippovna is not genuine (the argument Myshkin himself tries to make in the course of the novel), it is a fact that the degree of its genuineness directly corresponds to the degree of its being tabooed. What exactly this degree is, I do not undertake to determine. The criterion of tabooing suggests, however, that the motif of Aglaia and Myshkin's love for her outweighs the motif of any other woman or love in the novel. Even at the novel's outset—when Myshkin chats rather liberally about people's countenances—he still flatly refuses to comment on Aglaia's.[20] This refusal probably signals the planting of the seed of Myshkin's future love for Aglaia—through the use of a "preliminary taboo" on a matter concerning her.

The character who violates the taboo on mentioning Aglaia's name to the Prince in vain, and thereby signals this taboo most often, is Lebedev (VIII:169, 199, 260). Each time Lebedev mentions Aglaia's name, the Prince either falls silent (VIII:199) or winces, as though someone had touched his sore spot (*kak budto dotronulis' do ego bol'nogo mesta*—VIII:169). At one point, however, he signals the taboo on "Aglaia" particularly strongly. After Nastasia Filippovna yells things to Radomsky with vulgar familiarity (presumably in order to compromise him and to

[20] I owe this observation to Deborah Martinsen. Myshkin's early refusal to discuss Aglaia's countenance conflicts with Miller's chronological interpretation of the novel as the process during which Dostoevsky himself learned to be silent about the important.

grant Myshkin the bliss of Aglaia's preference), the following conversation occurs between Myshkin and Lebedev:

> "This intrigue is not mine, not mine," said Lebedev, "there are others here, and it is a fantasy rather than an intrigue." "What's the matter, after all, explain it, for Christ's sake! Don't you understand that this concerns me directly? Evgeny Pavlovich is being slandered." "Oh, Prince!... you do not allow me to tell you the whole truth; I have already tried to begin telling you about the truth more than once; you forbade me to go on..." The Prince fell silent and thought for a moment. "All right, tell the truth,"—he said gravely, apparently after a strong [inner] struggle. "Aglaia Ivanovna..."—Lebedev began immediately. 'Be quiet, be quiet! (*molchite, molchite*)"—exclaimed the Prince, beside himself and all blushing from rage and, possibly, from shame as well (VIII:260).

Aside from the comic effect of two mutually exclusive sets of instructions ("tell the truth" vs. "be quiet": *govorite pravdu* vs. *molchite, molchite*), another detail is striking in this conversation: it is not merely at the mentioning of Aglaia's name that the Prince blushes. He understands immediately that which it takes the reader considerable inferential effort to understand—namely, that by slandering Evgeny Pavlovich Nastasia meant either (subconsciously) to stain Aglaia or (consciously) to make her "available" for the Prince in order to benefit him. (This understanding is the reverse of dramatic irony, which tabooing in Dostoevsky very often seems to be.) To Myshkin both of Nastasia Filippovna's possible intentions seem equally scandalous. He fully realizes the second one, and yet he does not credit Nastasia Filippovna with wishing him well in her intention to bring him and Aglaia together. In other words, the idea of anyone considering his love for Aglaia real is shameful to him.

This comic discrepancy between his impulsive love for Aglaia on the one hand and his conscious furious refusal to use the shameful word "love"—or "amorous"—(*liubovnoe*) on the other comes out even more strongly when Aglaia reprimands him for having written "a love letter" to her:

> "How dared you write me a love letter?" "A love letter? My letter is a love letter?! This letter is most respectful; it poured out of my heart at the hardest moment of my life! I then recalled you as a certain light...I..." (VIII:359).

Not only does the Prince practically confess his love to Aglaia ("you...a light") after vehemently denying her generic definition of his "love letter," but she also reacts to his tirade as if it were a love declaration:

> "All right, all right," she interrupted suddenly, but in an utterly different tone—penitently, almost scared, even bending over to him, trying to avoid looking him directly in the face, even trying to touch his shoulder, in order to ask him more persuasively not to be angry with her... (*idem*).

Aglaia uses the term "a love letter" provocatively. She wants to know if the Prince is sensitive to the taboo on "love." He is. His sensitivity to this taboo proves to her that his love is genuine; she is then greatly moved by this proof, as the passage above indicates.

In the course of this conversation Aglaia uses the adjective "love" as if it were odious, and then announces to Myshkin: "I do not love you a bit" (VIII:360). Following this, she piles up some implausible lies: that she loves Gania and that he burned his finger to prove his love to her. Then she admits that she lied, without, however, specifying whether she began lying before or after the declaration of her non-love for Myshkin. This non-love conversation then continues as a discussion of Myshkin's relationship with Nastasia Filippovna—Aglaia's violation of a common social taboo. This violation of a common social taboo, however, masks the release of the tension of the idiosyncratically "idiotic" taboo established earlier in the same conversation: Myshkin admits his love to Aglaia as an off-handed explanation of *his* motives for violating a conventional social taboo, i. e., choosing Aglaia as his confidante in matters pertaining to his being possibly in love with another woman. He says: "Why I wanted to tell that to you and you alone—I do not know; probably because I indeed loved you a lot" (VIII:361). Even though Myshkin mentions the word without the odious connotations it has received in his immediately preceding conversation with Aglaia, he puts the verb in the past—in order to avoid an explicit statement of his emotions in the present. He thus resolves the emotional tension of the taboo present in the preceding conversation without actually violating that taboo, since the taboo is on declaring his actual, present-tense love for Aglaia. This combination of the taboo being "released" on the one

hand—and not actively violated or logically contradicted on the other—allows this taboo to remain latently present throughout the rest of the novel and activated when needed.

The dynamic of taboo release without taboo-violation occurs again, when the narrator speaks for Myshkin, specifying rather apophatically whom he loved *rather* than Nastasia Filippovna, without mentioning Aglaia's name: "His heart was at peace with itself: he knew whom he loved" (VIII:467)—instead of "that he loved Aglaia." The word "loved" is used here, but the taboo on stating Myshkin's love for Aglaia is not violated.

The connection of Myshkin's and Aglaia's obstinate and rather comic refusal to talk about their love on the one hand and this love's genuineness and seriousness on the other is obvious to other characters, notably to the narrator:

> If anyone had told him at that moment that he fell in love, was passionately in love, he would have denied it with amazement and possibly even with rage. And if anyone added to that that Aglaia's note was a love-letter,... he would have been mortally ashamed for that person, and probably even have challenged him to a duel. All that would be quite sincere... He fancied (*emu mereshchilos'*) that this was only a prank on her part...but he, somehow, found it only too common (*slishkom v poriadke veshchej*); as for himself, he was preoccupied and bothered by something entirely different [*zaniat i ozabochen chem-to sovershenno drugim*]... To him, everything mostly amounted to the fact that tomorrow he would see her again,... sit next to her, listen to how one loads a pistol and look at her (VIII:301).

In this passage, as in the one where Myshkin makes Aglaia his confidante about another woman, many conventional social taboos are violated: it is not "all too common" (*ne slishkom v po-riadke veshchej*) for a young girl to summon "an idiot and a mutant" to an intimate meeting in the park; neither is it very common for her to discuss how one loads a pistol—which, in this case, means discussing the possibility of a duel—also mentioned in the same passage in another context but equally matter-of-factly. This carelessness with such important matters reminds the reader's subconscious of the novel's artificially conventionalized zero-taboo background (which Leslie Johnson would call the violation of "conventional decorum"). Against this background, however, the "ultimate decorum," or the omitted mention of what truly matters to Myshkin himself, be-

comes especially conspicuous. This background endows the apophatic "by something entirely different" with the charge of a value-determining taboo.

Lizaveta Prokofievna notices the same discrepancy between Aglaia's love for Myshkin and her stubborn refusal to admit it: "She never takes her eyes off him, hangs on his every word... But tell her she loves him—and God preserve us from what would happen" (*A skazhi ej, chto liubit, tak i sviatykh von ponesi*) (VIII:430). This Russian idiom literally means that if one tells Aglaia she is in love, something so scandalous will happen that icons—or literally, the saints depicted on them—will have to leave the room.

A very marked violation of the taboo on the mention of Myshkin's love for Aglaia occurs when Myshkin tells Aglaia, in the presence of her family: "I love you, I, I love you a lot, I love only you, and...don't joke, please, I love you a lot" (VIII:426). While repeating these words with comic monotonousness, Myshkin is seriously afraid that their utterance might invalidate their meaning. That is why, despite the obvious comic effect of his imploring Aglaia "not to laugh," Myshkin so desperately asks her not to. She, on her part, is so keenly aware of the danger of mentioning the unmentionable that she tries to joke and laugh Myshkin's words away—the way people do in society when they feel awkward about an improper comment.

Eventually, however, it is Aglaia who kills her love and Myshkin's by violating two taboos at once (Cf. VIII:472). Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the first taboo, the taboo on the open mention of Myshkin's "positive beauty" (i. e., on the positive aspect of his "idiocy"). The second taboo concerns Aglaia's own personal "sore spot," her love for Myshkin. When she admits her love for Myshkin to Nastasia Filippovna, quite inadvertently and completely unintentionally, the results are disastrous. Aglaia's declaration (quoted for the second time in this chapter but with a different emphasis) marks a turning point in the plot: "...'[A]nd no matter who cheats him, he will forgive them, **and that's why I came to love him...**' Aglaia stopped for a moment, as if struck, as if not believing herself..." (VIII:472). As a result of this indiscretion, Aglaia's and Myshkin's love is aborted.

In the meeting with her rival, Aglaia infuriates Nastasia with her passionate excitement and tactlessness, and as a result

Nastasia demands that Myshkin abandon his beloved forever. Myshkin obeys her.

These two taboos—on taking Aglaia's name in vain in Myshkin's presence and on mentioning Myshkin's and Aglaia's love—are also marked for other characters, as well as the reader. When one character voices her name in connection with Myshkin, another chastizes him and cuts the topic short. Prince Shch., for instance, mentions how once at the Epanchins people were discussing the resemblance between Prince Myshkin and Pushkin's "Poor Knight." Prince Shch. tells the story in a neutral manner perfectly fit for a social conversation, acting as though it does not concern the scandalous implication of Myshkin's likening Nastasia Filippovna to the Madonna. He pretends that he is just describing how everyone was trying to find a topic for Adelaida's future painting. When he claims that he does not remember who was the first to mention Pushkin's "Poor Knight," Kolia, youthfully excited about the personality of Myshkin and eager to reveal the "real," romantic meaning of the story, exclaims: "Aglaia Ivanovna was the one—" to which Prince Shch. responds casually yet sternly: "Maybe so, I agree, but I do not remember..." (VIII:206). Had Prince Shch. truly forgotten who it was, he would have thanked Kolia for reminding him and either confirmed or refuted Kolia's statement. But Prince Shch.'s words warn Kolia that mentioning this fact is highly inappropriate, even though everyone, probably, knows it was Aglaia anyway. Prince Shch.'s comment aims at signalling to Kolia that he violated a taboo—and signalling to the reader the importance of this taboo, and, therefore, of the motif of Aglaia in connection with Myshkin.

Kolia's eagerness to reveal the romantic aspect of the situation resembles the eagerness of the Swiss children to imagine that Myshkin was in love with Marie. There, however, Myshkin does not mind their alluding to "the situation" because the situation does not exist, and therefore cannot concern him. For the same reason he does not mind telling the whole story about Marie to the Epanchins. But he does mind when anyone mentions Aglaia as a possible motivation for his own actions, or for "an intrigue," or suggests that she is in any way concerned about him. Thus although Kolia's childish excitement at the romantic aspect of the situation is not unprecedented in the novel, Myshkin's reaction to this excitement is unprecedented, or

rather, it would be if he, rather than Prince Shch., had expressed it. Prince Shch. demonstrates his own awareness of the possibility of such a reaction. Both this possibility and Prince Shch's awareness of it reveal that Myshkin's love for Aglaia is *not* like any analogous situation described in the novel—i. e., that for Myshkin Aglaia is unique. The difference between Marie and Aglaia's is that Marie involved no verbal taboos. Thus it is the taboo on Myshkin's love for Aglaia that signals its genuineness—both to other characters and to the reader.

The Taboo Concerning Death

The other important center of tabooing in the novel is Rogozhin. While the taboo involving Aglaia concerns love, the one involving Rogozhin concerns death. Rogozhin taboos the mention of death precisely because he is an expert in various aspects of death. His interaction with Ippolit reveals his theoretical expertise in death, and his relations with Myshkin and Nastasia Filippovna reveal his practical ability to bring it about. Hence the death taboo in *The Idiot* has two aspects: murder and death *per se*. Rogozhin is the exact opposite of Aglaia. They never interact or converse, and there are no significant encounters between them until Aglaia arranges her meeting with Nastasia Filippovna—and thereby kills her own and Myshkin's love. Their second names have opposite meanings: *Rogozha* is rug, and *epancha* is a well-tailored sleeveless garment, somewhat resembling in its shape the sleeveless Swiss coat in which Myshkin arrived from Switzerland. Vladimir Dal' cites a parallelistically-structured folk saying about how one should stick to one's place in life: "The rug does not go with the mug, and the *epancha* does not go with the face": *Ne k rozhe rogozha, ne k litsu epancha.*[21]

[21] Dal', vol. I, 520. An onomastic link exists also between Myshkin and Barashkova. Their names derive from the diminutives of non-flying animals ("mousekin" and "lambkin"). The morally and aesthetically baser characters who oppose them often bear names of birds: Lebedev, Ivolgin, Ptitsyn. Ironically, the higher-flying-named characters oppose the "higher-flying" characters. In the cases of Rogozhin and Aglaia, the opposition between their second names—if it matters at all—confirms their "unmixability," the chemical incompatibility of their personalities and literary meanings.

Without naming it, Robin Miller senses the importance of tabooing as a parameter of the novel's narrative evolution and links this parameter, first and foremost, with the motif of Myshkin's relationship with Rogozhin as his projected and suspected murderer:

> As the novel progresses, the theme of nonexpression of an idea, either intentionally or through an inability to do so, ceases to be a mere narrative device and assumes a metaphysical significance. Later in the novel Myshkin condemns himself for this constant habit of not completing or admitting his thoughts: "Conviction of what?... 'Say it if you dare, conviction of what?' he kept saying to himself, in challenge, in accusation. 'Put it into words, dare express your full thought clearly, precisely, without hesitation! Oh, I am dishonorable!" Myshkin's wording is interesting in the light of Dostoevsky's own reservations about expressing ideas fully and directly (Miller, 267).

Miller here refers to the passage where Myshkin attempts to avoid Rogozhin on the day when Rogozhin tries to kill him. In this passage Rogozhin's name is avoided. He is called "this man" (VIII:194). The taboo is rather local. Only four pages earlier, the narrator still voices Myshkin's thoughts directly: "Although, if Rogozhin kills, he, at least won't do it messily." Then—just as Razumikhin with Raskolnikov—Myshkin becomes ashamed of his own suspicion: "Isn't it a crime, isn't it base for me to suppose this so cynically and overtly?' he exclaimed, and the blush of shame suffused his face at once" (VIII:190). Myshkin's personal shame transcends the limits of his psychology and gives birth to the localized *narrative* taboo on mentioning Rogozhin's intention to kill him—a taboo that remains intact for several important pages afterwards. Citing Myshkin's internal monologue in the third person (i. e., the so-called double indirect discourse), the narrator has already used three dots to replace the next reference to the possible attempted murder, and he also substitutes "this object" for the knife: "And after all that, to catch oneself constantly looking for something around oneself; and that store, and this object...what a base [idea]!" (VIII:190, 191).

After the tension of the episode—and of that whole day—is released through Myshkin's epileptic fit, the taboo on mentioning what caused this tension is also resolved. The word "knife" is mentioned: "He had a fit of epilepsy...Apparently, the im-

pression of sudden awe paralyzed Rogozhin...and thus saved the Prince from the imminent knife-stroke" (VIII:195). In the preceding paragraph the knife is still refered to as "something," but here, the murder attempt has already occurred and failed, and the narrator retreats to a seemingly objective tone, where words are not emotionally charged and need not be tabooed.

Actually, Myshkin "condemns himself" not for "this constant habit of not completing or admitting his thoughts"—as Robin Miller states—but rather for *having* them—since they are tabooed. The passage thus exemplifies not only what Miller calls "the theme of nonexpression of an idea" which "assumes a metaphysical significance," but also—and most importantly for my purposes—the metaphysical significance of the nonexpressed idea itself. It is not the narrative technique which "assumes the metaphysical significance" but the forbidden idea of imagining Rogozhin on the verge of committing the murder. The narrative technique is the means of tabooing and the attempted murder is its object. The act of tabooing endows the motif of Rogozhin-the-murderer with metaphysical significance.

Other textual examples confirm the importance of the nonexpression of the fact that Rogozhin is Myshkin's prospective murderer (cf. VIII:186-7, 193-4, 195). Nonetheless, the passage which Robin Miller cites suffices to exemplify the sporadic, and yet insistent, tabooing of this idea.

The motif of Rogozhin-the-murderer involves two more characters besides Myshkin: Ippolit and Nastasia Filippovna. As with many other motifs in the novel, Ippolit says what Myshkin dares not say: he discusses the link between Rogozhin and death. Describing how he awaited death, Ippolit says that he was afraid of Rogozhin, yet that when Rogozhin came he was not too surprised and did not even want to ascertain whether it was the real Rogozhin or a mere hallucination (VIII:320, 340-341). This fear—combined with the possibility that *that* Rogozhin was only an apparition—acquires metaphysical significance because it is not motivated by the plot as it is with Myshkin or Nastasia Filippovna: Rogozhin is not interested in killing Ippolit either out of jealousy or for any other reason (except, maybe, for the same reason Nastasia Filippovna wants to compromise Radomsky: to eliminate for Myshkin any possible rivals for Aglaia. But this motif is not developed in the novel in any other way).

Ippolit is also attracted by the death symbolism of Rogozhin's house and, specifically, by the Holbein painting in it. As I mentioned earlier, the discussion of this picture provides one of the key links between Ippolit's and Myshkin's attitudes towards death. Myshkin comments on it very tersely and Ippolit very elaborately, yet they are both concerned about the same thing: the painting's depiction of death undermines one's faith in resurrection. (Unlike Ippolit, Myshkin does not mention the words "death" or "resurrection" in his comment because the link between Rogozhin and death is not merely symbolic to him—and therefore he instinctively treats it as a taboo.)

Strengthening his association with death, Rogozhin signals the taboo on death to Ippolit just before Ippolit violates it with the recitation of his confession. Rogozhin says to Ippolit: "Too much talk... that's no way to go about this business, fella" (*Razgovoru mnogo...Ne tak etot predmet nado obdelyvat', paren', ne tak...*) (VIII:320). "This business" (*etot predmet*) substitutes for "dying." Rogozhin does not pronounce either "death" or "dying" or "suicide" because *he* is very careful with this taboo. And yet both Ippolit and all those present, who do not yet know what the confession is about, intuitively understand Rogozhin perfectly and are scared and shocked by his comment—precisely by that aspect of it which they cannot define:

> No one, of course, understood what Rogozhin meant, but his words made a strange impression on everybody: everyone was somehow obliquely affected by a certain idea shared by them all (*vsiakogo tronula kraeshkom kakaia-to odna obshchaia mysl'*). And the impression these words made on Ippolit was horrible: he trembled so much that the Prince tried to reach out with his hand to support him (VIII:320).

The repetition of various words connoting the idea of "all" and "general/commonly shared" (*nikto, na vsekh, vsiakogo, odna, obshchaia*) emphasizes the universal rhetorical validity of the unmentioned idea. The reason why "everyone" intuitively senses what Rogozhin meant without consciously understanding it remains mysterious for "everyone," and it is this mysteriousness that scares "everyone."

The "everyone" of the scene is then projected onto everyone who reads about this scene, and thus the universality of the taboo on death is established. In the scene, Rogozhin—a charac-

ter—chastizes Ippolit—another character—for being careless with words. But through this interaction between his two characters Dostoevsky imposes on his reader the value of death as a notion important enough to be tabooed. Just as in the earlier scene with Kolia, Prince Shch. and the taboo on mentioning Aglaia, the scene itself signals to the reader the importance of the unmentionable words with which one should be careful. But this time they concern death rather than love.

As we might expect in a novel where Dostoevsky is working out a system of taboos, in the novel's last scene before the epilogue—that of Myshkin's and Rogozhin's vigil over Nastasia Filippovna's corpse—the taboo on "murder" and other words connoting death is verbally the most consistent one in the whole novel. One can explain this verbal consistency in terms of both composition and function. Compositionally this scene is the last in the novel, and there is no demand for a transition to the next episode which would require its own tension-buildup. Functionally, the murder of Nastasia Filippovna is the only one of the three (hers, Myshkin's and Ippolit's) that Rogozhin actually carries out. Even more important, however, is the fact that Dostoevsky considered this scene a definite success even though he had doubts about the rest of the novel[22]: it seems to me that the relative consistency of the verbal taboo on "death" in the scene is what ensures this scene's literary efficacy. This hypothesis also explains why in his subsequent great novels, *Demons, The Brothers Karamazov,* and even in *The Adolescent,* Dostoevsky maintains those taboos which are important for these novels with greater verbal consistency than he does in *The Idiot.* In this final scene of *The Idiot,* both participants of the conversation understand that what is said intentionally presents an obviously inadequate surrogate for the unmentioned, and yet the very obliqueness of treating the unmentioned affirms its importance:

> "Where, then...is Nastasia Filippovna"—the Prince said short of breath. "She's...here," ennunciated Rogozhin slowly, as if delaying the answer... He kept whispering and speaking... slowly and—just as before—remarkably pensively...as if he was trying to express something else with his narrative—despite all its effusiveness... "I

[22] Cf., for instance Dostoevsky's own comment in his notes, XI:283: "Finale. Not bad." Cf. also R. F. Miller (1981), 157.

> just knew you'd stay in that there pub (*v jeftom traktire*)" he began **"the way one sometimes approaches an issue of importance starting from some marginal details not related directly to the matter.**[23] ...I also thought: 'I'll take him to stay here overnight,' so that we'll be together this night..." "Rogozhin! Where is Nastasia Filippovna?" the Prince suddenly whispered and stood up, all trembling. Rogozhin also got up. "There," he whispered, nodding at the curtain. "Asleep? " the Prince whispered. Rogozhin, again, stared at him fixedly as before. "Should we go in now! ... Though you... OK, let's go! " (VIII:502)...
> ...While standing at the bed, both did not utter a word the whole time...On [the bed], **someone** was sleeping being absolutely still... The sleeping someone [*spavshij*] was covered, head and all, with a white linen sheet... "Let's get out of here," Rogozhin touched his arm... "Is it you?" [the Prince] finally uttered nodding at the curtain. "It's...me...," whispered Rogozhin...(VIII:503) "They'll start interrogating me and I'll say it's me [*skazhu, chto ia*]" (VIII:504)... "With what did you do it to her [*chem ty eë*]? With a knife [*nozhom*]? With *the* knife [*tem samym*]? " "Yea, with that one" (VIII: 505).

In these excerpts words pertaining to murder are conspicuously omitted. The last instance of verb elision (*chem ty eë?*) is a common speech feature of Dostoevsky's characters, notably Kirillov in *Demons*. The identity of the "someone sleeping" and Nastasia Filippovna is intentionally blurred. The blurring is achieved both through the use of the abstract masculine participle (*spavshij*), and through the elision of the verb "to kill": "'Is it you?' the Prince uttered, nodding at the curtain." If it were not for the omission of the verbal "who killed her," the sentence would imply that Myshkin asked about Rogozhin's own identity *with* the one behind the curtain. But this meaning does not occur to Rogozhin who understands what verb is omitted, and why.

When, carried away by emotional excitement, Myshkin does mention the verb, Rogozhin does not understand him—or pretends not to, in order to signal the impropriety of its overt use. Rogozhin thus signals—both to Myshkin and to us—the presence as well as the violation of the taboo on mentioning death:

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[23] The emphases in bold are mine. O. M. The elisions are Dostoevsky's.

> "...Parfen,...you'd better tell me...did you want to kill her before my wedding... with a/the[24] knife? Did you or didn't you?" "Don't know if I did or didn't..." Rogozhin answered **dryly, as if surprised by the question and not understanding it** [my emphasis O. M.] (VIII:505).

Rogozhin's dryness and pretense at not understanding Myshkin smacks of the reaction that a squeamish interlocutor might have when an unacceptable obscenity is used in his or her company. Only, Rogozhin is not squeamish, and he is hardly shocked by any scandalous escapades of Nastasia Filippovna's, Myshkin's or Ippolit's which occur in his presence. The violation of conventional social taboos does not matter to him. What does matter to him is the violation of a taboo that concerns him personally. Just as Myshkin can comment easily on Marie but not discuss Aglaia or even mention her name, so can Rogozhin be generally boisterous and scandalous yet extremely squeamish when it comes to his sore spots—concerning death and Nastasia. The general scandalousness of Rogozhin's character creates a background of the conspicuous zero-tabooing of social conventions. But this zero-tabooing of the social isolates and thereby strengthens the idiosyncratic aspect of the taboo on death. Or, in Leslie Johnson's terms, it strengthens the sense of the "ontological *prilichie*" in *The Idiot*.

The word "murder" becomes utterable again in the last paragraph of that chapter when the narrator retreats to the objective passionless tone: "When...people came in, they found the murderer (*ubijtsu*) completely unconscious" (VIII:507). The presence of "people" releases the tension of the meaning of the word *ubit'*. This word had tension only for Myshkin and Rogozhin and not for "people." Thus the taboo on the word becomes not only non-social because of its being idiosyncratic but, in a sense, anti-social: it obtains only in the atmosphere of privacy existing between Rogozhin and Myshkin (and the corpse). The presence of any society—"people"—invalidates it—just as others' presence invalidates Raskolnikov's "personal" taboo in *Crime and Punishment*.

The paragraph concludes with the narrator's retreat to the key zero-tabooing in the novel—the mention of Myshkin's idi-

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[24] Both possibilities are implied in the Russian *nozhom*, and since the knife is important for Myshkin, both should be considered.

ocy: "And even if Schneider himself came now from Switzerland to take a look at his ex-pupil and patient, he, too...—just as he did then—would have waved his hand [in despair] and said: 'An idiot!'"(VIII:507).

The narrator's retreat to the zero-tabooing of the novel's beginning and its title[25] lays bare the device of zero-tabooing. The implicit permission to mention everything "just as then" suggests that whatever happened in the course of the novel—the emergence of values and corresponding taboos included—does not matter. This controversial suggestion could be refuted only in the following way: Dostoevsky carried the possibility of no-taboos *ad absurdum* and thereby affirmed the fact that taboos are necessary and important. If so, then the novel is about the importance of tabooing in a world where things matter. To the extent that *The Idiot* is *about* tabooing, and thus represents a case of *meta*-tabooing, it violates the taboos it presents to the reader: meta-languages need not obey the rules they describe.[26] As Bakhtin correctly noted, however, in Dostoevsky meta-languages are rarely alien to what they describe, especially if they describe people's idiosyncrasies and sore spots. The greatest difficulty with the taboo-inconsistencies in *The Idiot* is that they suggest that the message of this novel does not always agree with the rules for conveying it. Dostoevsky will correct this problem—at least as far as tabooing is concerned—in *Demons*, *The Adolescent* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. But although in *The Idiot* Dostoevsky still does not observe the rules of tabooing as strictly as the novel's message requires, the message itself is clear: if things matter, there are taboos, and if taboos are violated, things stop mattering.

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[25] The taboos in *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov* are also closely related to these novels' titles, and the taboo in *Crime and Punishment* makes the reader hesitate whether it refers to the first or the second part of the title. Is Raskolnikov's inability to mention the murder scene to himself a signal of his crime or of his punishment?

[26] Tolstoy, for instance, does not hesitate to discuss what Natasha or Princess Mary found unmentionable about their love for Prince Andrew, and the fact that this unmentionable bound them and made them understand each other. Tolstoy's taboos rarely coincide with those of his characters. Thanks to his narrative techniques, his works almost always constitute meta-tabooing.

CHAPTER 3

Demons Hidden and Overt: Taboo or Not Taboo?

Metaphoric Language Is the Opposite of Tabooing

In primitive cultures and folk beliefs, taboos on demons are very basic and universal.[1] But many of these taboos are still intact in "civilized" society. In our culture too, people who may easily use the word "devil" do not believe in devils, while those who believe in them do not mention them easily. Belief in and mention of devils can also be in complementary distribution within a single person, who at times mentions devils easily and at other times regards them as real—but not at the same time. Sporadic or consistent, primitive or sophisticated, one's belief in devils goes together with an awareness of the taboo on mentioning their name/-s. Calling someone "a devil" simply insults that person; it does not aim at exploring the topic of devils as actual beings whose behavior needs to be studied. Overtly labeling people as demons serves the purposes of a political pamphlet directed against people and not against devils. Such an attitude to the word "devil" is *metaphorical, or allegorical*—like Gorianchikov's attitude to the infernal image of the bathouse in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*. Gorianchikov uses "hell" as a metaphor, while Petrov understands this imagery literally, and *therefore* taboos it. Metaphoric language is the opposite of tabooing (especially when it refers to hell or its

[1] Cf., for example, Nikolaj Kareev, "Mifologicheskie etiudy," in *Filologicheskie zapiski*, 1873, vol. 3, 12. Cf. also such tellingly euphemistic references to the devil as *khoziain* ("the master"), *igrets* ("the player"), *ne-nash* ("not-one-of-us"), *tot* ("the one"), and *on* ("he"), in: Sergej V. Maksimov, *Nechistaia, neviedomaia i krestnaia sila*, St. Petersburg, 1903, 4, the footnote.

inhabitants—a common taboo in many societies). The referent of an *unmentionable,* tabooed sign is literal. Thus for the metaphorizing Gorianchikov the referent of "hell/furnace" is *a* hellish place, but for Petrov it is hell itself.

In the same way, *tabooing* the notion of one's possessedness presupposes a *non-metaphorical* attitude to devils and suggests that they are autonomous beings with their own will and agenda. Such tabooing befits a treatise on demonology. In *Demons* (known in English primarily as *The Possessed*), Dostoevsky taboos any references to the literal meaning of the novel's title, i. e., the mention of devils, or people's possessedness, and thereby leads us to experience this novel on an additional plane. Besides being a political pamphlet against Russian nihilists and their successors, the novel can be read as a work of art treating the phenomenology of moral demonology. As one Dostoevsky scholar has put it, "the novel itself is an amalgam of two other works: one political, the other metaphysical."[2] The Russian title of the novel is *Devils/ Demons* [*Besy*], which announces that its topic is the possessors, not the possessed. Berdiaev, among the few thinkers who considered the genre of *Demons* to be a treatise on demonism,[3] understood what the taboos in *Demons* confirm: rather than merely launching an attack against Russian nihilists by "demonizing" them, this novel also warns people against becoming slaves to devils, using the nihilists as an example. This warning occurs on the plane where taboos operate—the same plane where the literal meaning of the word "devil/s" matters.

This reading of the novel might seem far-fetched or at least much less obvious than its traditional political or philosophical readings. These traditional readings, however, treat the use of the word "devils" in the novel's title and its two epigraphs metaphorically rather than literally. Normally people consider the literal meaning of any word or notion prior to its meta-

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[2] Richard Peace, *Dostoevsky* , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971 (the Chapter "The Pamphlet Novel: *'The Devils'*," 140-178), 171-172. Peace carefully examines the motifs of sectarian mysticism in *Demons*. I am more interested in the novel's discursive assumptions, for these provide criteria for the novel's axiology, as opposed to what it describes. It is less important for my approach that the novel depicts metaphysical motifs than that its implied author narrates and structures it as a metaphysical work.

[3] Cf. Nikolaj Berdiaev, "The Spirits of Russian Revolution" (Dukhi russkoj revoliutsii), in *The Landmarks*: *Vekhi*, Moscow, 1909.

phoric use or implications. As we saw in *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky occasionally draws his reader's attention to the literal or etymological meaning of such words as *idiotes* or *urod*. The Gorianchikov-Petrov example reveals that Dostoevsky also wanted his readers to consider the literal meaning of similes pertaining to infernal imagery even when this literal meaning would seem less obvious than the metaphoric one. No intelligent reader of his works can afford to ignore the literal meaning of Dostoevsky's infernal metaphors without risking the misunderstanding of a novel entitled *Devils* or *Demons* (*Besy*). The literal, or "taboo-sensitive" interpretation of the word *"devils"* (*b(i)esy*) in the novel has therefore been long overdue.

Dostoevsky himself provides a good example of the complementary distribution within a single person of mentioned metaphorical demons and tabooed literal ones. In his January 1876 *Diary of a Writer*, he writes a playful article on "devils" [*cherti*], mentioning them easily in the title—and four months later, in his April *Diary*, he writes another article where he denies that spiritualism is mere charlatanism and suggests that the practice of invoking spirits should be avoided not because this pastime is futile but because the invoked spirits are demons. In this April article, he discusses the role and efficacy of demons in spiritualism much more seriously than he had in January. In the title of the ironic January entry Dostoevsky mentions the word "devils" [*cherti*] easily and generously, at the same time expressing a doubt that they exist or play a role in what he describes: "Spiritualism. A Thing about Devils. Devils' Extreme Cunningness—If Only These are Devils."[4] In the title of the "serious" April entry, on the other hand, he pretends to play down the equation between spiritualism and tinkering with demons, and avoids any reference to them: "One More Tiny Word on Spiritualism."[5] In this "serious" April article, rather

[4] "Spiritizm. Nechto o chertiakh. Chrezvychajnaia khitrost' chertej, esli tol'ko eto cherti" XXII:32-37.

[5] "Opiat' tol'ko odno slovtso o spiritizme" XXII:126-127.

Florensky, arguably the best educated Russian religious thinker of his time, actually refers to this article while insisting on the demonic nature of political meetings of the kind described in *Demons*. In the following passage, Florensky is clearly interested in the nature of demons, not of radicals, since he does not discriminate between various political factions or between political meetings and spiritualist sessions: "A political meeting is quite similar to a witch's kitchen, and understandably, demons enter its participants. In a simplified and half-conscious way, [...] magic devices are [also] common among spiritualists,

than dismissing the issue of devils, Dostoevsky signals discussing it as taboo. He elaborates on his reluctance to discuss the topic; he mentions a certain "friend"—apparently an imaginary tabooing interlocutor—who tried to dissuade him from writing on this topic, he discusses his original idea of *concealing* his impressions (italicized in the original[6]) and the seriousness of the topic;[7] finally, he calls summoning devils a dangerous *something* (*nechto* italicized in the original[8])—rather than mere "crass" charlatanism—etc. These are all traditional devices for establishing an important unmentionable, a taboo. Since in the April article Dostoevsky insists that those who believe in spiritualism are in serious danger because they tinker with demons, in this article the word "devils" [cherti] ceases to be a metaphor for people's stupid pastime and begins to refer to real devils; as a result, Dostoevsky-the-narrator seems or at least pretends to be reluctant to openly discuss the topic.

In *Demons* too, the meaning of words pertaining to demons, including *chort*, is rarely merely metaphorical. To be sure, two mutually exclusive attitudes to devils (the literal and the metaphoric) cannot be assumed simultaneously in our culture, or even in Dostoevsky's non-fiction. Since, however, *Demons* is a Dostoevsky novel rather than a journalistic piece, it is polyphonic, and polyphony allows for two mutually incompatible visions (such as the tabooing and the metaphoric vision) to coexist at the same moment on different planes, without ever fusing, like water and oil. In Dostoevsky's polyphonic fiction two mutually exclusive views may be present in the same utterance, provided that the utterance is "double-voiced," in Bakhtin's sense of the word[9]—as happens with Gorianchikov's comment about hell. In *Demons* too, the metaphoric (political) and the literal (tabooing) attitudes to the notion of devils coincide in time but still never fuse, pertaining to two different and possi-

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[...] and all kinds of pseudo-mystics. Spiritualism was considered a spiritual poison by many. Cf., for example, Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, [...]" Florenskij (1914), 699. Since Dostoevsky also seemed not to discriminate between the demonic aspect of political meetings as he described them in *Demons*, and the same demonic aspect in spiritualist sessions as he described them in his *Diary*, it is possible that he also was interested primarily in demons, and only secondarily—in radicals.

[6] XXII: 126.

[7] XXII: 128.

[8] XXII: 130.

[9] Cf. Bakhtin (1979), 214 ff.

bly incompatible points of view, and certainly to two entirely separate planes of being. Valid and important as a political interpretation of *Demons* may be, it addresses only one of these two planes, the metaphoric one, and cannot therefore elucidate what Dostoevsky thought of demons, a matter of great concern to those of his readers who shaped Russian religious philosophy, such as Nicholas Berdiaev[10] or Pavel Florensky.[11]

In her *Holy Foolishness,* Harriet Murav states that Dostoevsky's understanding of devils in *Demons* is not metaphoric. Murav considers what she calls the "literal" interpretation of Dostoevsky's devils too simplistic, but she uses of the term "literal" culturologically, and I use it theologically. Having argued that Dostoevsky wanted his readers to see the events in *Demons* "through the prism of the seventeenth century, a period known as the Time of Troubles,"[12] Murav states:

> For the seventeenth century, the demonic was to be understood in a literal sense. Devils (*besy*) have a fixed representation in iconography: they are black, have forked tails, horns, and sometimes carry hooks. For Dostoevsky, the demonic does not necessarily retain its literal significance. [...] But the demonic is not simply a metaphor either.[13]

Like Fedor Pavlovich Karamazov who doubts that devils really have hooks (XIV:23-24), Murav identifies as literal the canonical representation of devils on seventeenth century Russian icons—thereby interpreting the literal in culturological terms,[14] an interpretation that greatly differs from the interpretation of the literal in *theological* terms.[15] Theologically, the literal understanding of devils does not presuppose that they have hooks, tails or horns. Quite the contrary. Devils can appear in any

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[10] Cf. especially Berdiaev (1909).

[11] Cf. Florensky (1914), 699 n. 268b.

[12] Murav, 15, 102 ff.

[13] *Ibid.*, 122.

[14] In general, our understanding of the literal is culturally conditioned. In the Biblical Hebrew, for instance, spirits are winds, and to respect and glorify someone means to treat the person as physically heavy (C-b-d).

[15] Elsewhere Murav demonstrates her awareness of the importance of theological values in Dostoevsky: "I will seek to give theology and formal experimentation equal weight. The theological concepts of creation according to the image and likeness, the incarnation and the resurrection, and the imitation of Christ should not be seen as metaphors at the service of formal needs. Rather, Dostoevsky's rhetoric and narrative strategies serve his theology. We can call these tropes theologemes" (Murav, 13).

shape or remain invisible. A devil (*bes*) is a fallen angel, a bodiless spirit who can tempt and possess a human being by imposing its will or willfulness on him or her. This theological definition of devils constitutes what I call the literal, tabooed meaning of the word *b(i)es* in Dostoevsky's *Demons*.

Pseudo-Metaphoric Use of Words With Tabooed Literal Meaning

Russian has at least two non-euphemistic words for demons, *b(i)esy* and *cherti*. Both words are often unmentionable, but in *Demons* and in real life, the taboo on *chort* is violated more often than the one on *bes*: in Russian (unlike, for example, Ukrainian), *bes* pertains to theological vocabulary, while *chort* can pass relatively easily for a colloquial or metaphoric curse, which enables this word to function as a *pseudo*-euphemism. As I have defined it in the introduction, a pseudo-euphemism is a word that *seems* to replace the tabooed word in order to avoid its harmful magic effect, whereas in fact this substitute word evokes the magic as powerfully as the word it has replaced. As we will see in this chapter, the apparent innocence of mentioning *chort* is deceptive precisely because pseudo-euphemisms are conspicuous signalers of a taboo's existence. Both in his novel and in his April *Diary* entry, Dostoevsky's treatment of the word *chort* reveals a great deal about the nature of the taboo on *besy*. In *Demons*, when people (including the narrator) use the word "devil" metaphorically, they act as taboo violators because they exhibit insensitivity to the important and tabooed literal referent of "devil"—just as Gorianchikov exhibits insensitivity to Petrov's "sore spot" which concerns the tabooed literal referent of "hell." Since such taboo-violators signal the presence of a taboo, investigating the chief taboo in *Demons* will involve examining instances of *pseudo*-metaphorical language—be it what Viktor Shklovsky called the subliminal "resurrection" of the literal meaning of an accepted idiom[16] or metaphor, or a dialogue where one interlocutor (e. g., Gorianchikov) unwarily violates a taboo, and the other (e. g., Petrov) refuses to register the meta-

[16] Cf. Shklovsky, 36-42.

phorical meaning of the expression. I will demonstrate that these instances are conspicuous signals of tabooing.

Characters as Signalers of Taboo

The chief taboo in the novel best known in English as *The Possessed* centers on mentioning one's possessedness. It finds its concrete verbal expression in the taboo on mentioning the word of the title: devil/-s, or, in Russian, *bes/-y*. Aside from the Gospel epigraph and Stepan Verkhovensky's comment on it, and one mention made by the narrator at one point—instances both of which I will discuss later—only one character (Stavrogin) mentions *bes-/y*. Otherwise, characters signal the taboo on *bes/-y* by conspicuously avoiding this word and/or replacing it with pronouns (or such euphemisms as *demon*—which in Russian has Romantic rather than demonic connotations).

Maria Timofeevna Lebiadkina signals the taboo on *bes* particularly conspicuously when she sees a devil—or believes that she sees one. Stavrogin visits Maria Timofeevna and scares her in a mystical way; she takes him for his own double, which is associated with the presence of a demon—both in Dostoevsky's poetics and in various cultural traditions, including Russian folklore and patristic literature. Though she takes him for a devil of sorts, she avoids using the word and replaces it with a pronominal construction: "Of course, bad dreams have risen up against me[17]—that's for sure—but why is it that you, of all people (*vy-to*), appeared in this very way?" (*v etom samom vide prisnilis'*—X:216).[18] This expression does not specify in what way (*v kakom vide?*) Stavrogin, or perhaps the devil, in Stavrogin's likeness, appeared to her in her dream. Her fear of Stavrogin,

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[17] In Russian odoleli, a verb that personifies its subject (dreams, in this case). I chose the Biblical "have risen up against me" because it connotes the adverse powers of demons. Cf. Ps. 3:1 (Lord, many are they that rise up against me).

[18] Richard Peace's explanation of Maria Timofeevna's behavior is personal and psychological rather than metaphysical: "her meaning is clear enough: she refuses to accept the man she sees before her as Stavrogin; for this is the man who was ashamed of her at the Sunday gathering, and is ashamed of her now" (Peace, 195). This interpretation explains why Maria is angry but it fails to explain why she fears this alleged double of her husband.

mentioned both before and after these words, and her addressing him as his own double (she refers to Stavrogin in the third person when she addresses him directly)—both eliminate all ambiguity about the meaning of her words: these are traditional ways of referring to a demon without naming him.[19] And yet, she does not *pronounce* the word "devil"—neither *bes* nor *chort*, for that matter, although the latter is a common swearword in the novel. The conspicuous circumlocution "in this very way" testifies to her responsiveness to the chief taboo in the novel and endows her unuttered reference to Stavrogin's devil with great power.

At the beginning of this century, Viacheslav Ivanov, Serge Bulgakov and Leo Zander asserted Maria Timofeevna Lebiadkina's symbolic significance and "sophianess."[20] Her observance of the verbal taboo on Stavrogin's demonism demonstrates her awareness of the key issues in *Demons* and thus confirms her symbolic and prophetic function in the novel against more modern refutations of the importance of this function—such as Liudmila Saraskina's.[21] As I will show in the chapters on *The Eternal Husband* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, however, and as the example of Petrov suggests, a character in Dostoevsky may be sensitive to key taboos and yet be quite "negative." I share Saraskina's skeptical attitude to Maria Timofeevna's "sophianess" and sainthood, but I disagree with her implicit suggestion (shared, by the way, by Zander, Bulgakov and Ivanov) that these two or any other virtues are prerequisites for fulfilling a prophetic function in Dostoevsky's works. Maria Timofeevna may be insane or even possessed, but she understands what possessedness means, and therefore she taboos any direct reference to devils.

The other woman who demonstrates her awareness of the taboo in a crucial encounter with Stavrogin is Dasha, of whom the insightful Maria Timofeevna says that she "alone is an angel" (X:216). In her conversation with Stavrogin, when he tells her of his "baby-demon" [*besenok*] Fed'ka, who was offering to

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[19] Cf. Maksimov, *idem*.

[20] Cf., for instance: Viacheslav Ivanov, "*Ekskurs*." Osnovnoj mif v romane *Besy*, in "Borozdy i mezhi", Moscow: Musaget, 1916; Ivanov (1985), 41-42; Sergej Bulgakov, "Russkaia tragediia. O "Besakh" F. M. Dostoevskogo v sviazi s instsenirovkoj romana...," Russkaia mysl', April, 1914.

[21] Cf. Liudmila Saraskina, *Biesy: roman-preduprezhdenie*, Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel', 1990, 130-157; also in *Voprosy literatury*, 1984, no. 11, 151-176.

murder the Lebiadkins for a relatively moderate fee, Dasha asks God to preserve Stavrogin from this "baby-demon," but although she needs to use the word *bes* to refer to Fed'ka as the embodiment of this particular temptation of Stavrogin, she stumbles over the word. Instead of *bes*, she substitutes its romanticized foreign equivalent (*demon*). But even this substitution she finds uneasy. She says: "May God preserve you from your demon and... call me..." (*Da sokhranit vas Bog ot vashego demona i... pozovite, pozovite menia skorej!* X:231). Apart from the three dots, these words in themselves do not suggest that Dasha has any difficulty discussing the subject, yet Stavrogin immediately notices her reticence, discomfort, and, most importantly, fear about something that he fails to perceive: "But look, Dasha, there's something again you don't dare say?" (*A ved' vy, Dasha, opiat' ne smeete govorit' chego-to?—idem*). Although Dasha has said everything she wanted, Stavrogin senses the internal, psychological stumbling, or, rather, her awareness of an important taboo, of the fact that the untold reality behind her words is bigger than they are and, in principle, ineffable. All of her fears—of the possibility of Stavrogin's madness or suicidal or homicidal plans—amount to her awareness of his "demon's" existence and nagging presence. Furthermore, unlike Stavrogin, she knows that this demon is *not* metaphorical—neither the Romantic Lermontovian *Demon* nor merely a Fed'ka—but a real *bes*. It is precisely her awareness of this literal demon that makes her stumble over the word.

Stavrogin: No Values Means No Taboos

Stavrogin himself possesses a curious immunity to taboos.[22] This possession (i. e., possessedness) enables him to bite people's

[22] Michael Holquist's understanding of Stavrogin's character provides an interesting explanation for this character's immunity to taboos on subjects of discourse. According to Holquist, Stavrogin is "suspicious of the ineffable" and believes that "only what is available to words [...] is real" In: Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1986. Originally: Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1977, 140. This conviction precludes him from attaining individual freedom, the ultimate goal of his quest for identity, according to Holquist. Unlike the ineffable, words always come from a preexisting system. As a result, "Stavrogin spends his life seeking

ears, pull them around rooms by their noses, rape a little girl, marry a cripple outside of his social class, commit suicide—and, most important for my purposes—to use the word *bes* metaphorically, and even allude to Dasha's inability to do so. In the passage I just quoted, for instance, he does not hesitate to use the word *bes*, or even to mention the issue of devils. He calls Fed'ka-the-convict his baby-devil (*besenok*) and, when referring to Fed'ka's demand for a two-thousand ruble fee—"the accountant-devil" (*bes-bukhgalter*: X:230-231).

Such immunity to taboos stems from Stavrogin's lack of values; his sense of them is atrophied. In fact, unlike Shatov, Kirillov, or Peter Verkhovensky, Stavrogin is immune to the very ideas he himself pronounces. He cannot fall in love or distinguish between good and evil. The passage on lukewarmness from the Apocalypse—which Dostoevsky found so important that he reintroduced it in Sofia Matveevna's readings after it was excluded together with the chapter "At Tikhon's"—refers directly to Stavrogin: in the chapter "At Tikhon's," Stavrogin actually asks Tikhon to recite it to him. This strange inhuman passionlessness of Stavrogin goes together with his insensitivity to taboos.

Tikhon: Taboos Mean Values

In the version that Dostoevsky originally planned to publish in *The Russian Messenger*, which included the chapter "At Tikhon's," Tikhon, rather than Dasha, signals the taboo on *bes*. Apparently, when the chapter was excluded, Dostoevsky rein-

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a self, only to discover at the end of his various ego probes that he has once again merely articulated a pattern that was determined by the preexisting systems he had sought to transcend" (*idem*). Richard Peace believes that Stavrogin is the central figure in *Demons* because Stavrogin best exemplifies the amalgamation of the novel's spiritual and political concerns. (Peace, 174, 179-217, *passim*), but also because he combines the apparently incompatible features of a saint and the devil (*ibid.*, esp. 180 ff.). More important for my purposes is Peace's discussion of the fact that many characters in *Demons* regard Stavrogin as their idol (*ibid.*, 181)—an idea that Stavrogin himself is in no rush to refute. Both false deification and self-deification are forms of possessedness. In principle, therefore, there is no difference between Stavrogin and the rest of the characters as far as demon-possessedness is concerned. I believe that Stavrogin's immunity to taboos both causes his demonic self-deification and results from it.

serted its critical ideas into the novel in different places. Thus, he made the angelic Dasha fulfill Tikhon's function of signaling the taboo on *bes* and thereby also signaling the significance of the notion *bes* itself. In the original *Russian Messenger* version, Dasha refers to Stavrogin's devil much more openly than in their dialogue's final version, although she herself refrains from mentioning the word *"bes"* (cf. XII:141). Unlike the calm and reserved Dasha of the final version, the Dasha of the original is desperate and somewhat hysterical. As a mystic she appears inconsistent; she believes in God and yet tries to ignore the possible existence of Stavrogin's personal demon. She prays to God to preserve Stavrogin from believing in his demon: "You are talking about him as if he really existed. May God preserve you from that!—she exclaimed desperately." Yet she is aware of this demon's reality, or at least of the fact that believing in him actualizes his existence: "The moment you believe in him, you will have perished [*vy pogibli*]." This theologically legitimate type of mysticism presupposes that the demonic non-being—and a non-being demon—can be destructive rather than neutral and insignificant.[23] In the original version, although Dasha does not actively violate the taboo on mentioning *bes*, neither does she signal it by conspicuously avoiding the topic.

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[23] Philosophers and theologians have long been aware of the association between demonicity and non-being. For a very condensed tracing of theological thought on this issue—as well as an example of this thought in modern Orthodoxy—cf. Sergej Bulgakov, *Svet nevechernij*, Moscow: Put', 1917. Bulgakov distinguishes between the Divine "nothing"—the subject of apophatic theology—and the created ("creaturely") "nothing" (*tvarnoe nichto—ibid.*, 181 ff). He renders this latter as the non-being which "is only a satellite to being" and as "the nothing" which "does not exist but as a shadow of the what" (p. 100). Bulgakov refers to this "created non-being" as "the banal (*poshlost'*) <which> is only the concealed seamy side of the demonic" (here, like Merezhkovsky, using Gogol's Chichikov and Khlestakov as examples—182) and—most importantly for my purpose—with a Dostoevskian term—although he does not mention Dostoevsky: he equates the demonic created nothing with underground (*podpol'e—idem*). Bulgakov also writes: "The kingdom of nihilism, the cult of nothingness (*nichto*), hell—exist only at the expense (*za schet*) of the positive forces of existence, as a form of ontological theft (*ontologicheskim khishcheniem—ibid.*, p. 186)." This argument theologically justifies Dasha's fear of Stavrogin's demon, although, or rather because, he "does not exist." Besides Bulgakov and those he cites and discusses, it is rather interesting that Dostoevsky's own character, Ivan Karamazov calls the devil *"strashnyj i umnyj dukh samounichtozheniia i nebytiia"* ("the awful and smart spirit of self-annihilation and non-being"). In his rendering of demonism in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Robert Belknap lists non-being among typical and doubtlessly demonic qualities. Cf. Belknap (1967), 38, 39, 41.

"At Tikhon's," a scene which broke such important taboos that the publisher did not allow its inclusion, contains a prolonged discussion of Stavrogin's demon (*bes*). The chapter's presence or absence is relevant to my argument because it contains the only discussion of the nature of belief in demons. If the chapter "belongs" in the novel, then laying bare the otherwise tabooed topics (such as Stavrogin's seducing the little girl Matresha and driving her to suicide *and* mentioning the importance of devils [*besy*]) turns this chapter into the center of the novel. From a rhetorical point of view, the novel becomes a very different piece. While the chapter's prolonged discussion of Stavrogin's demon (*bes*) apparently challenges my claim that the word *bes* itself is tabooed, it actually serves to strengthen the sense of the taboo on mentioning *bes/-y*. The chapter reinforces the taboo on mentioning *bes/-y* on its own terms, however, and those differ somewhat from the literary conventions of the rest of the novel. Mentioning a tabooed word or bringing up a tabooed topic implies the violation of the taboo, rather than its absence, *as long as the signals of such violation are unambiguous.* Stavrogin's verbal carelessness with Dasha, for instance, indicates his insensitivity to the taboo, rather than its absence.

Similarly, when Stavrogin mentions the topic of demons to Tikhon, he clearly violates a taboo. Otherwise, it is inexplicable why Tikhon—who believes in demons because he believes in the importance of fighting them—would obstinately refuse to acknowledge this belief to Stavrogin or pursue the topic with him, especially since Stavrogin is pushing it. First mentioning a demon's visit to him, Stavrogin says he will see a doctor about it. To his surprise, Tikhon approves: "definitely do see a doctor" [-- *Ia skhozhu k doktoru.—Nesomnenno skhodite,—podtverdil Tikhon*] (XI:9).

Tikhon behaves like a typical taboo observer, yet, culturally speaking, his reaction seems shockingly secular; one would rather expect such a squeamish reaction from Miusov in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Murav comments on this passage as follows: "We cannot readily identify mouthpieces for secular or sacred culture, not should we attempt to do so. For example, in *The Devils*, it is none other than the monk Tikhon who recommends that Stavrogin go to a doctor" (Murav, 15). Although Tikhon is not a very good *mouthpiece* for the sacred culture which he represents as a monk, we can readily identify him as

an expert on *taboos* in this culture. Such expressions as "Tikhon was silent," "Tikhon did not finish [his sentence]," "Tikhon stopped talking," "Tikhon whispered as if trying to overcome a barrier," "Tikhon smiled vaguely," or "Tikhon lowered his eyes," occur ten times within this chapter. Usually when Stavrogin makes a guess about Tikhon's motives, Tikhon neither refutes nor confirms the guess, e. g.:

> "Maybe, you've heard so much about me that... you confusedly believed you have seen me."
> Tikhon made an effort to remain silent [*smolchal*]" (XI:7).
> "Can't you suppose it's a demon indeed [that I see]?... After all, this would be more appropriate for your profession?"
> "More likely, it is an illness, although... Demons [*biesi*] doubtless, exist, but the ideas about [what] they are might differ greatly" (XI:9).

Tikhon uses the Church Slavonic *biesi*, a "scientific," professional term for "demons," as opposed to the Russian *b(i)esy*, dilettante, everyday, and therefore sceptical—the way a doctor may use a Latin term for an unmentionable illness or body part.

After the written confession, Stavrogin provokingly suggests that Tikhon has even started respecting him. Tikhon refuses either to refute or to confirm this supposition. He says: "I will not answer this question directly" (XI:25).

Stavrogin guesses that Tikhon thought he was ridiculous [*smeshën*] kissing "the dirty lass' foot." Tikhon neither confirms nor refutes this guess: "Tikhon kept silent" [*molchal*] (XI:27). When Tikhon does make a statement, it costs him considerable effort. Foretelling to Stavrogin how unbearable people's laughter [*smekh*] would become for him, Tikhon speaks "as if overcoming himself and in a whisper" [*kak by cherez silu i shëpotom*] (XI:26).

Tikhon himself is tabooed. People avoid talking about him [*umalchivaiut*]: those who dislike him do not talk of him "apparently, out of negligence," and his adherents "from a certain modesty, as if wishing to conceal [*utait'*] something about him, a weakness of his, possibly his holy foolishness [*iurodstvo*]" (XI:6).[24]

Thus, even though the chapter "At Tikhon's" reveals many other taboos crucial for the novel, it does not annul the taboo on

[24] Cf. Murav, 115.

bes/-y because Tikhon, like Dasha, is aware of this taboo and demonstrates his awareness by his reluctance to respond to Stavrogin's mention of the topic. Tikhon's reluctance to discuss demonology and his awareness of its taboo status places him in the same diagnostic camp as Dasha and Maria Timofeevna. Furthermore, it shows that he takes the topic much more seriously than Stavrogin does.

The chapter "At Tikhon's" also introduces some taboos on other issues which might compete in importance with that on demonology. These issues, tabooed only in "At Tikhon's," are totally unrelated to the problem of demonology. They address such questions as whether Stavrogin deserves respect (Tikhon refuses to answer this question): and how important is Stavrogin's shameful secret concerning the rape of Matresha. The importance of the social taboo violated in this episode inevitably shifts the central taboo of the whole novel to the rape issue. Consequently, the variant of the novel that includes "At Tikhon's," taboos the notion of *bes* less consistently because of this additional unmentionable. In Anna Grigorievna Dostoevskaia's copy (the *Spisok*) of a section of this chapter (dating from January-February of 1872—cf. XII:157), the narrator, formally commenting on Stavrogin's confession, speculates on a possible motivation for writing it. At the very beginning of this comment, the narrator describes "the document" as "the deed of a demon (*bes*) who possessed this gentleman" (XII:108). Dostoevsky eliminated this remark in the final version. Apparently he did not want his narrator to make any explicit statements about Stavrogin's possessedness, or to mention the word *bes* in the relatively lightminded and offhandedly ironic context of the word "gentleman" (*gospodin*). Like the English "Mister," "Master," or "Lord," *gospodin* refers to a free man who controls others rather than being controlled himself—whether by a mortal or by a demon. Hence the irony of a *gospodin* being possessed. Although this irony connotes the illusory nature of the "free master's" conviction of his freedom—and therefore is theologically correct—the ironic tone itself is nonetheless too frivolous for the use of the word *bes* in the general context of *Demons*.

Thanks to the elimination of this passage, the narrator does not break the taboo in the final version. While this might imply that the idea of this taboo emerged late in the creative process, it

also may mean either that Dostoevsky just kept "purging" the novel of the violations of the key taboo, or that Dostoevsky made *bes* the key taboo in the novel only *after* Stavrogin's confession was excluded from the text. The motif of Stavrogin's possessedness is, of course, extremely prominent in the chapter "At Tikhon's," and especially in A. G. Dostoevskaia's version which I have just cited, but this motif is *mentionable and mentioned;* it is not yet taboo. Only after excluding the chapter did Dostoevsky make this motif consistently unmentionable. In the final version Dasha became less hysterical and more reserved about discussing devils with Stavrogin not only because she took over Tikhon's function as a tabooer of the word *bes*, but also because it became crucial that *no person* except Stavrogin himself should violate this taboo.

The Narrator as Character. Pseudo-Figurativeness as a Way of Signaling the Taboos on *Bes* in Two Ways: With and Without Violating It

Unlike the chapter "At Tikhon's," the rest of the novel avoids the root *bes-* in its primary meaning, with one very significant exception that reveals the function of the inconsistent narrator. As we saw in *The Notes from the House of the Dead,* characters observe taboos less consistently than the narrator because they repress rather than suppress the tabooed. But even the narrator Gorianchikov violates the chief taboo in that work when, in his capacity as a character, he verbally interacts with another character (Petrov). This passage, where the narrator violates the taboo on mentioning hell, actually signals this taboo in *The Notes* more strongly than any other passage. The same happens in *Demons.* Here, as with Gorianchikov and later in *The Brothers Karamazov,* Dostoevsky uses a narrator who at times is a rhetorically clumsy character and at times is omniscient and rhetorically careful and skillful.[25] At one of the rhetorically clumsy moments the narrator of *Demons,* acting as a character ("the

[25] On the inconsistency of the narrator's awareness of different planes in *Demons,* cf. Tunimanov, 87-162. On *The Brothers Karamazov* cf., for example, Thompson, 26-51.

chronicler"), unwarily violates the taboo on mentioning *bes*, using the word metaphorically, rather than literally. As with Gorianchikov and Petrov, this violation signals the taboo.

The chronicler-narrator uses the word "*bes*" when most of the novel's major characters, from the Lebiadkins to Peter Verkhovensky, are gathered in Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina's drawing room. When Lisa Tushina's mother, Praskovia Ivanovna Drozdova, enters the room, the narrator comments on Varvara Petrovna's behavior by observing that "it is precisely when she could in any way suspect that, for some reason, she might be considered humiliated—that the **demon** of the haughtiest pride would come to dwell in her." (*vselialsia* ***bes*** *samoj zanoschivoj gordosti*: X:130).

Here, imparting to us some intimate knowledge about a (female) character's whims and behavioral peculiarities, the narrator assumes his town-gossip hypostasis.[26] In this capacity, he uses the tabooed word *bes* casually, as an idiomatic *metaphor* for whimsical pride. Translated into Gossipese, this sentence could be paraphrased as follows without any semantic changes: "She used to have fits of pride, *as if* a demon came into her suddenly." By using the word *bes* metaphorically, the narrator, in his capacity as a character, violates the chief taboo of the novel just as Gorianchikov-the character does by addressing Petrov. Each, perceives Chthonic imagery *figuratively*. The author himself, however, is as different from the narrator in *Demons* as he was from the narrator Gorianchikov. The author uses this narrator's careless mention of *bes* in order to introduce a paradoxical situation: the idiomatic expression *bes zanoschivoj gordosti*, which appears to be metaphoric, conceals the importance of its literal meaning. The figurative or metaphorical meaning becomes automatized, requiring the idiom's literal meaning to be resurrected[27] in order to be realized by the reader.

Precedents and parallels in Dostoevsky's other works can be invoked to argue for the literal approach to idioms. In *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, certain motifs depend on the realization of the literal meaning of the idiomatic use of the root *-rez-* (pertaining to butchering). Whenever the literal meaning in this idiom is realized, it signals a violation of Raskolnikov's *private*

[26] More on this cf. in Tunimanov.
[27] Cf. Shklovsky.

sore spot. In *Demons* the same de-idiomatization of the tabooed root *-bes-* signals the violation of a taboo common to most of its characters and the narrator. As I have said, metaphorical uses of taboo words always diminish or dismiss the serious implications of their tabooed meanings. In Dostoevsky, however—as the example with Gorianchikov and Petrov demonstrates—those who metaphorize a taboo are usually unaware of its tabooed aspect, while those who are aware of taboos take metaphors literally. Yet the metaphorizer's *faux pas* usually reveals the interlocutor's sore spot. In this light, metaphorical swearwords referring to demons (e. g., the colloquially acceptable *chort*) and idioms containing the root *-bes-* but seemingly unrelated to demons (e. g., ***beshenstvo*** or ***besit'sia***) should be considered suspicious and analyzed as signalers of the taboo on *bes*.

The use of such metaphorical swearwords as *chort* differs from the use of the idioms with the supposedly dormant etymology (*besit'sia*, etc.). The metaphors signal taboos through the voices of conspicuous taboo violators, such as Peter Verkhovensky or Stavrogin. The idioms detached from their etymology also point to taboos, but without violating them: they manipulate the reader into thinking "in terms" of the *bes* root about those things which supposedly have nothing to do with demons. Those who use demonic swearwords mechanically, as metaphors, may be unaware of violating a major taboo—just like the unwary Gorianchikov. The narrator and those characters in *Besy* who use *besit'sia* idioms with supposedly dead or dormant etymology, on the other hand, are probably aware of the taboo on *besy* and try to avoid its violation. They tease and provoke the reader in ways which—as I will show—are very common for those characters who are most sensitive to taboos in *The Eternal Husband* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Since the semantic function of the metaphors greatly differs from that of the idioms, I will consider these two taboo signalers separately. First, however, it is necessary to briefly restate what they have in common. In a novel entitled *Demons*, both the interjection "chort!" (devil!) and the expression for "rage" (*beshenstvo*—literally—"endemonedness") entail the subliminal realization of their literal meanings. This reactivation of the literal meaning affirms the importance of the tabooed motifs of possessedness and *bes/-y*.

Many characters in *Demons* (including the allegedly positive Shatov) use the word *chort* as a swearword/ interjection. In most instances this swearword interjection can be explained as automatic and innocuous. Its literal meaning, however, is present on a separate plane, the plane which involves taboos. Furthermore, on this taboo-plane, this literal meaning creates a whole consistent motif. Since unlike the professional theological term *bes*, the word *chort* is a common swearword in colloquial Russian, the taboo on it seems to be as easily dismissable and dismissed in today's culture as it is in the novel. The relatively consistent taboo on *bes* in *Besy*, other than its use for the title, however, recharges the easy mention of *chort* with its original meaning of a conspicuous and important taboo violation. The contexts in which the interjections are used often allow for, or even actively call attention to the literal meaning of the word *chort*. In short, the utterer converses with a very non-metaphorical devil or makes a statement about one. Lebiadkin, for example, says about Peter Verkhovensky's clique: "Devil knows what these devils are cooking up." (*Chort znaet chto zatevaiut eti cherti*.—X:214). In the larger ideological perspective of the novel, Lebiadkin utters a prophesy[28]: on that plane of the novel where taboos apply, devils, rather than the human beings whom they possess, are in action; furthermore, the literal devil is certainly the most competent in what these metaphoric, human devils are "cooking up." Discussing a similar idiom, Harriet Murav suggests that its literal meaning explains what its idiomatic (or metaphorical) meaning leaves unexplained:

> Stavrogin, in response to Gaganov's favorite expression that he cannot be led by the nose, literally takes Gaganov by the nose and leads him a few steps across the room. Later, on the pretext of revealing a secret, he bites the governor's ear. The narrator says that these schoolboy tricks were "unlike anything else" and were performed "the devil knows what for" (*chert znaet dlia chego*) (PSS 10:38, D 1.2). Precisely. The devil knows why Stavrogin played his pranks because they belong to his realm.[29]

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[28] This is another proof of the fact that, contrary to Saraskina's belief, in Dostoevsky, as in the Bible, not only holy people but asses and Caiaphas (cf. Num. 22:20-35; Jn. 20:50-51) may prophesy great truths.

[29] Murav, 105.

In the episode with Gaganov, Stavrogin realizes the literal meaning of the idiom "led by the nose" with a gesture. By setting a precedent for literalizing idioms, Stavrogin's gesture prompts Murav and most readers to interpret literally rather than metaphorically *the narrator's* idiomatic expression "the devil knows what for."

One of the most effective ways to compromise the predominance of the metaphoric reading of an idiom, and to impose the implications of its literal meaning on the reader, is to deautomatize the idiom by *distorting* it.[30] After the murder of the Lebiadkins and the night with Lisa, Stavrogin kicks Peter out, exclaiming: "Now, march from me to the devil, and by tomorrow I will come up with something. Come tomorrow" (*Stupajte ot menia teper' k chortu, a k zavtramu ia chto-nibud' vydavliu iz sebia. Prikhodite zavtra.* X:408). The trajectory is precise, indicating not only the direction but also the starting point ("from me": *ot menia*). Instead of using the idiomatic "*go* to the devil" (*idite k chortu*), Stavrogin says "march to the devil" (*stupajte [...] k chortu*). These two modifications—*stupajte* and *ot menia*—de-idiomatize the expression "go to the devil," thereby undermining its metaphoric function and subliminally activating its literal, tabooed meaning. Also, Stavrogin is actually informing Verkhovensky about his own plans for the following night, specifically asking him to return on the morrow: "By tomorrow I will come up with something. Come tomorrow." The idiomatic expression "go to the devil" is tantamount to "get lost," but the de-idiomatized phrase "now march to the devil and come back tomorrow" suggests too concrete a task and time frame for "the devil" to remain metaphorical. As a result, Stavrogin's "now march from me to the devil" sounds like an instruction about how precisely Verkhovensky should spend his night, before he comes back to Stavrogin. Rather than actually kicking Verkhovensky out, Stavrogin dispatches him to the devil on an errand. To make his order more specific, Stavrogin also repeats the words: "to the devil, to the devil!" All these details suggest the idea of a meticulous address and errand specification, undermining the possiblity that Stavrogin merely swears automati-

[30] In my work on Andrej Platonov, I claim that this is the device which allows one to discern his system of values.

cally. In this case, the metaphoric meaning of *chort* fades away and the literal becomes especially prominent and unignorable.

In other cases the idiomatic use of chort as a swearword remains intact, and the metaphoric plane is not compromised, but once one idiom is de-idiomatized, the reader is sensitized to the literal meaning of the others. When Kirillov is about to sign his suicide note, Peter Verkhovensky exclaims impatiently: "Hey, devil [*chort*], he hasn't signed it yet!" (X:472)—as if he were sharing his impressions with a devil present right there, in the same room. This literal reading of Peter's interjection is further strengthened by association with the traditional myth of signing a contract with the devil—known from *Faust* and elsewhere.

Peter Verkhovensky uses the interjection "*chort*" very often. In each case, as in the example above, one can and may ascribe it to Peter's idiosyncratic speech mannerisms. But these examples support each other's function as signalers of a taboo violation. Peter's interjections sound as if he were appealing to his advisor. Thus, when he forgets the words of the folk song with which he tempts Liza and aims to tempt Stavrogin, he uses a curse to solicit the archetemptor's advice: "How, the devil / oh you, devil, [*kak tam, chort,*] X:299), does it go there in their song?"—as if he were addressing the devil and asking him for the reference which would enable him to tempt his interlocutors.

When Shigalev and Erkel demand something from Shatov, he tells them that he "owes nothing to any devil" (X:110, also 393). Most likely, he is simply expelling his uninvited guests. But the only person mentioned in the conversation, who claims that Shatov owes him something, is Peter Verkhovensky. On the literal, non-metaphoric and non-idiomatic plane, Shatov then refers specifically to Peter Verkhovensky, who, Shatov believes, stands behind these two. Furthermore, Shatov's expression implies that someone—the devil—is standing behind Peter Verkhovensky himself, manipulating him as much as he manipulates Shigalev and Erkel.

Karmazinov, who so cares about the beauty of his style, says of Peter: "Is it possible that, actually, he is their genius of sorts,—although, the devil [*chort*] take him, anyway." (X:286). In Karmazinov's mouth, any curse would sound cutely unassuming. This curse also sounds that way. Only in the context of other cursers (e. g., Lebiadkin, Shatov and, most importantly,

Stavrogin) does the literal potential meaning of the curse gain the opportunity for release. But once a precedent for unleashing the literal potential of a curse exists, all otherwise innocent cases are open to interpretation.

The fact that intellectually, morally, ideologically and socially Stavrogin, Lebiadkin, Karmazinov, and Shatov differ so widely helps Dostoevsky a great deal: on the conscious level, the reader does not link their interjections and curses with each other. Thus only when one realizes the connection between these instances, and therefore sees the consistency of the subliminal message of the curses, can one infer the prophetically literal meaning of these characters' words.

Of course, Dostoevsky was neither the first nor the last to subliminally activate the literal meaning of metaphoric and automatized swearwords pertaining to demons. Gogol, for instance, did the same in Act Five of "The Inspector General," which starts with the mayor's innocently excited "you, Anna Andreevna, hah! [...] became kin to such a devil!" [*Chto, Anna Andreevna? a? [...] s kakim d'iavolom porodnilas'!*][31]—and escalates into the horrible scene of hatred where Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky are scapegoated.[32] Ibsen activates demonic swearwords in "Public Enemy," and Mikhail Bulgakov does the same in *Master and Margarita*. Dostoevsky himself does it in *Crime and Punishment*—where, incidentally, he uses *bes* more often than *chort* because the former does *not* constitute the central taboo of that novel. Only in *Besy* does the characters' carelessness with the seemingly harmless colloquial *chort* have to be perceived against the contrastingly serious, non-colloquial background of the *strictly* marked and observed taboo on the root *bes*.

I have already noted that when the chronicler mentions the word *bes* with reference to Varvara Petrovna, its metaphorical meaning (designating her haughty temperament) masks the literal one—rather than cancelling it. This instance demonstrates Dostoevsky's authorial ingenuity precisely because his chronicler, unlike the author, does not ascribe any significance to this literal meaning. When characters and the chronicler use the words from the *beshen-/besit'sia* cluster (the latter verb meaning

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[31] Nikolaj V. Gogol', *Sobranie sochinenij v shesti tomakh*, Moscow: Khudlit, 1952, vol. 4, 82.

[32] Cf. also Dmitry Merezhkovsky, *Gogol' i chert. Issledovanie*, Moscow: Skorpion, 1906.

to be mad, maddened, enraged, hysterical, or unreasonably capricious), they quite justifiably seem completely unaware of the etymological implications of this nest, since these words are not even metaphorical idioms containing the word *bes* (as in the case of the chronicler's use) but have different meaning altogether (even though they are derived from the same nest). Yet, as I have mentioned earlier, this appearance of innocence on the narrator's part may be deceiving. The characters and the narrator use the words *beshen-/besit'sia* only in reference to possessed characters—thereby subliminally reactivating the etymological relation.

These meanings of the *beshen-/besit'sia* cluster all pertain to behavioral symptoms, but none of these meanings specify the cause of the symptoms. In fact, these words imply a conspicuous absence of motivation for the behavior they describe. This motivation would be supplied if Dostoevsky explicitly declared the importance of the *bes* etymology in the *beshen-/besit'sia* nest. Instead he, or rather his narrator, describes the behavior as enigmatically unreasonable. Even syntactically, the words from the nest are not used in the explanatory part of the sentence but rather as matter-of-fact modifiers of the characters' emotional or clinical state at the moment of the described action. Here are some examples.

During Stavrogin's visit to Maria Timofeevna, she conspicuously avoids the word "devil." Yet, the narrator employs the word *beshenstvo*. After her face gets paralyzed with fear for the second time, Stavrogin, "almost enraged" (*pochti v beshenstve*—X:217),[33] exclaims "what's the matter with you, after all?" The expression "almost enraged" signals the genre of a cheap melodrama, if one considers only the idiomatic meaning of *beshenstvo*: rage. The reader's percetion changes, however, if the literal meaning of *beshenstvo* ("endemonedness") is taken into account. Such re-evaluation of the narrator's allegedly cheaply melodramatic tone enables us to perceive the power of a half-broken taboo as a taboo-signaler.

After Stavrogin is arrested for biting Ivan Osipovich's ear, he is called *vzbesivshijsia*—madly enraged (X:43). But the word oc-

[33] It is significant that Maria's expression mirrors that of the "enraged" or "endemoned" Stavrogin. Murav suggests that one of the functions of holy fools is to mirror the behavior or actions of the truly possessed (cf., for instance, Murav, 27-29). On Maria Lebiadkina as a holy fool cf. Murav, 113-114.

curs in the subordinate clause of a sentence which actually states that Stavrogin was suffering from delirium tremens at that time: "When the guard officer came running with his crew and his keys—and made the order to open the jail in order to attack the madman (*na vzbesivshegosia*) and tie him up,—it turned out that he (the madman: *tot*) had a very strong fit of delirium tremens" (*idem*).

Although the narrator cites the diagnosis, he constantly undermines the idea that Stavrogin's illness can really explain his behavior. The narrator does this by supplying contradictory evidence. In the ear-biting passage, the narrator says that at first no one in the whole town ascribed Stavrogin's strange behavior to madness. Then, after providing a physical explanation (delirium tremens), he notes that everyone would be "appeased," or, at least, that everyone "would seem to be" (*povidimomu*) and would "accept the explanation"—everyone but the narrator himself (X:40). Even as he says that "all was explained [by the delirium tremens]" (X:43), the narrator also mentions that Ivan Osipovich "considered Nikolaj Vsevolodovich capable of any mad action in his right mind" (X:43). The narrator continues this treatment of Stavrogin's behavior up to the novel's last sentence where he states that the doctors refuted any suggestion of madness (*pomeshatel'stvo*).

The characters' hesitations and inconsistencies about Stavrogin's madness have a reason: although the explanation of madness is obviously inadequate, the only alternative explanation—possessedness—is taboo. Sometimes this taboo is signalled by characters' repression of their own suspicions—just as, in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, it was with Razumikhin who suspected Raskolnikov and with Myshkin who suspected Rogozhin. In *Demons* also, when Stavrogin suggests to Liputin that Liputin believes him to be able to attack people in his right mind, Liputin "somehow, shrinks, turns pale and fails to answer" (X:44)—because Stavrogin has put Liputin in an awkward position by articulating Liputin's belief in Stavrogin's possessedness, and thereby violating the taboo on the mention of this belief. Liputin does believe that what makes Stavrogin act madly is not clinical madness, but he shrinks from fear lest Stavrogin name what the cause *is*, rather than what it is not; for only as long as possessedness is defined apophatically, as *something other than* clinical madness, is the taboo on mentioning it

not violated. Like Maria Lebiadkina and Dasha, Liputin "shrinks" not because he fears Stavrogin, sane or insane, but because he fears Stavrogin's totally uncontrollable demon who may make him violate the taboo on mentioning itself—a taboo which, among other taboos, Stavrogin himself violates so easily in his conversations with Dasha or Tikhon.

In his capacity as a character, the narrator also attempts to repress Stavrogin's possessedness. With regard to Stavrogin's diagnosis, this repressive mechanism may, in fact, be more important for the narrator's inconsistencies than any *intention* on the narrator's part to confuse the reader with contradictory evidence. At times the narrator sincerely tries to explain things by Stavrogin's madness, and yet he fails conspicuously. As a result, the idea that a demon possesses Stavrogin and makes him do what he does remains unmentioned, unless one chooses to infer it from the etymology of the epithet *vzbesivshijsia* (the madman).

The same happens with other characters who, like the narrator, have both the subconscious mind and narrative functions. Repressing Stavrogin's and each other's demons psychologically, they nonetheless occasionally invoke and signal the tabooed *bes* reality etymologically. Praskovia Ivanovna, Liza's mother, says about her daughter that when she became jealous of Dasha, she began acting as if she were mad (*besit'sia*—X:55). Praskovia Ivanovna refers only to Liza's vigorous temperament and uncontrollable peevishness. But once she utters the word, it acquires all the semantic layers that do not depend on her intention.

Later, describing Liza's "acting like mad," [*besitsia*], the chronicler speaks of her "sickly nervous unceasing restlessness." He says: "Alas, the poor thing was suffering badly, and eventually, later, everything was explained" (X:88). The description fits a psychopathological case. But the last sentence does not confirm this idea: Liza is never diagnosed as mad. In fact, nothing "was explained later." The promise of explaining "everything eventually" is never fulfilled. The narrator "shrinks" from the explanation as conspicuously as Liputin does in the passage I just cited (X:44). The narrator's unfulfilled promise of explaining Liza's mad behavior confirms and strengthens the taboo on the etymological connotations of *besit'sia*. Both devices—the pseudo-explanation and the verb's subliminally activated etymology—treat Liza's possessedness

as an important taboo: they signal the prominence of the issue by creating an aura of suspense and inexplicability around it, and by conspicuously abstaining from direct mention of it. Furthermore, the two devices confirm each other's function as taboo signalers.

Thus in *Besy*, both *chort* and *beshenstvo* or *besit'sia* only seem to be euphemistic substitutes, or mentionable equivalents for the unmentionable *bes*. Actually the mention of either of these substitutes is perilous, and they are subliminal yet important taboo signalers. They both manage to make a great "fuss" about their unmentionable signified (*bes*), i. e., they attract the reader's attention to the tabooed issue. The natures and the implications of these two substitutes, however, differ greatly. *Beshenstvo* (rage) acts more subliminally than *chort*. *Chort* and *bes* share a referent, whereas *beshenstvo* and *bes* do not. But these two share something more important: their etymology—and etymology often harbors and preserves those tabooed totems of a given culture, which have been long extinct in all other realms of that culture.[34] The idiomatic, i. e., metaphorical meaning of *beshenstvo* is more obvious than its etymological meaning, and therefore more viable than the non-literal, metaphorical meaning of *bes*; but in a world of taboos—where many treat literal meanings as indecent and pretend to ignore them, thereby inevitably marking their importance—this metaphorical meaning of *beshenstvo* also has the strong potential to be overpowered by the literal. This unexpected activation of the literal meaning enables *beshenstvo* (now meaning "endemonedness," rather than "rage") and related words to signal the taboo on mentioning *bes* **without** violating it. If *chort*, merely a pseudo-euphemism for *bes*, marks the taboo on *bes* by violating it conspicuously, *beshenstvo*, a viable euphemism for the unmentionable "endemonedness," marks the same taboo as its euphemistic substitute. Although different in nature, both conspicuous violation (pseudo-euphemistic) and viable euphemisms are legitimate taboo signalers.

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[34] Cf., for example, A. A. Potebnia, "Mif i slovo," in Kiraly and Kovacs, 509-519, especially 517. Cf. also: Aleksandr N. Veselovsky, "Psikhologicheskij parallelizm i ego formy v otrazhenii poeticheskogo stilia," in Aleksandr N. Veselovsky, *Istoricheskaia poetika*, Leningrad, 1940, 606-607 (also containing a short bibliography on totemism). Cf. also Vasmer, vol. 2, 589, on the euphemistically descriptive etymology of the Russian word for "bear"—*medvied'* (= a honey eater / connoisseur), a totem for many Slavic and several non-Slavic tribes. Also: Frazer, *Totemism*.

Unmentioned Frames of Reference as Taboo-Signalers in the Narrator's Discourse

Unfulfilled promises of explanations (as with Stavrogin or Liza above) belong to the category of unmentioned frames of reference. Besides undelivered explanations, this category embraces such taboo signalers as ominous yet vague allusions which point to a phenomenon without naming it. When Stavrogin is about to bite Ivan Osipovich's ear, the narrator says that what happened was "totally impossible, yet, on the other hand, all too clear in one particular respect [*nechto sovershenno nevozmozhnoe, a s drugoj storony, i slishkom iasnoe v odnom otnoshenii*]" (X:42). Without specifying "in what respect," the narrator, somehow, still presumes that it is "clear." This unclarified "respect" (*otnoshenie*) constitutes the unmentioned frame of reference in which whatever the speaker says makes sense. This is typical of taboo-treatment: in human speech cultures, "touchy issues" are common frames of reference which determine value-systems but should remain invisible.[35]

The narrator often signals the taboo on the mention of devils through the vague yet emphasized *it*, a pronominal substitute for the unmentionable, *it* which signifies a conspicuously unspecified referent.[36] The ominous expression "*nachalos'!*" vividly exemplifies this tabooing device. It signals a tabooed issue of which individual human possessedness is only one aspect. This is the issue of demonology as defined above—namely, that on a certain plane, in certain episodes devils, rather than people, act and determine the course of events. "*Nachalos'/nachnetsia*" means "it has begun/will begin" (X:364, 387). In Russian, the

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[35] Discussing omissions rather than taboos, Murav nonetheless asserts the importance of these invisible frames of reference in *Demons*: "Dostoevsky's narrative implies a model of transcendent causality (Murav, 116). [...] The lack of connectedness between the events, the gaps in the narrator's chronicle, suggests that we must seek connectedness elsewhere, outside the chain of cause and effect that we might otherwise expect from it. We have to look to the novel's [...] literary margins, most importantly its epigraph from Luke, in order to discover the other chronicle in the novel, one that provides an interpretation 'from above,' to use Auerbach's term" (*ibid.*, 120). I shall come back to the discussion of the epigraph from Luke in the context of taboos.

[36] For personal pronouns as euphemistic references to the devil, cf. Maksimov, *op cit.* As we have seen, loaded pronouns in general constitute a type of tabooing which is very prominent in *Crime and Punishment*, in *The Adolescent*, and, in *Besy*, in Maria Timofeevna Lebiadkina's rhetoric as described earlier in this chapter [*vy-to v etom samom vide*] X:216.

sentence is impersonal, which means that it has no pronominal subject. Thus, even the mystifying power of the "it" stems from its absence. The expression is not just mystifyingly allusive as it is in English, but strictly tabooing. Not only the referent of "it," but even the word "it" itself [*eto*] is absent. And yet the sensational aura of this absent *it* is present. "*Nachnetsia/nachalos'*" occurs mainly in reference to "the party" (*prazdnik*) and its scandals. The chronicler and the guests are in constant apprehension as to "when [it] will begin" (*kogda nachnëtsia*).[37] Of course, people would use a similar impersonal expression when apprehending any scandal, whether demonic or secular, but on the plane where one takes demons seriously rather than metaphorically, any scandal is demonic precisely because, unlike any moral action or an act of faith, a scandal depersonalizes its participants. In scandals, events get out of hand and people are depersonalized because they are no longer in charge of the events. On the plane where demons are tabooed rather than metaphorized, those who do take charge when humans lose it, *are* demons.[38] The impersonal construction of *nachalos'/ nachnetsia* thus strongly suggests that humans are not in charge here. In-

[37] Cf., for example, X:364, 387. A related expression referring to the party events is "just as before" (*opiat' kak davecha*)—without specifying what was before or when exactly that "before" was (X:392). The expression occurs twice within two sentences. The first time it refers to the end of the party and Lembke's going mad, and the second time—to the news about the fire across the river. The expression links these two events to each other and suggests that they have the same cause.

[38] Concerning the incompatibility of demonism and personhood for a religious mind, cf., for instance, Florensky (1914), 183-184—a very significant source considering that, as I showed in my introduction, among Russian Orthodox theologians Florensky was arguably the most sensitive to the plane of reality where notions are not metaphorical and taboos are intact. Also, in *Stolp* Florensky analyzes the etymology of many idioms in order to trace their semantic overtones to their etymology. On pp. 183-184 of Florensky (1914), Florensky analyzes the passage in Mark's Gospel which describes the exorcism in the land of Gadarenes (Mark 5:1-13)—the same event that Luke describes in the passage cited by Dostoevsky as the Gospel epigraph to *Besy* (Luke 8:32-36). In both Mark and Luke, as the conversation between the demon and Christ proceeds, the demon's personality falls apart; it multiplies, at first being one and in the end a legion. Florensky stresses this fact in order to argue that demons lack the integrity of personality. Florensky also emphasizes the fact that Jesus talks to the demon, not to the man whom the demon possesses (*idem*, 184)—thereby suggesting that the impersonal characterizes demons, rather than the humans possessed by them. Consequently, on the plane where the meaning of "devil" is not metaphorical, when scandals are described impersonally, those who cause them are not the possessed people but the demons within these people.

terestingly, at this point nobody says "it is all because of Peter Verkhovensky and his clique," a sentence that would imply a hostile "demonization" (i. e., a form of justified scapegoating) of a possessed human being. Instead, those who say *"nachnetsia/ nachalos'"* intuitively dread the *impersonal* force governing this scandal and other intrigues in the novel. Peter is merely a particularly befitting tool for this impersonal force, a demagogue at his best and a puppet at his worst, when he loses his temper.

The expression "it has begun" first occurs toward the beginning of the novel. Varvara Petrovna says *"nachalos'"* about Stavrogin's pulling Gaganov's nose (X:40). Since Varvara Petrovna does not yet dread a public scandal—as there has not been a precedent for one at that point, it is totally unclear what specifically she dreads. Her use of the expression *"nachalos'"* sounds particularly ominous because it refers to the first horrors in the otherwise seemingly peaceful town. It is foretelling rather than estimating the horrors. This foretelling creates apprehension—one of the strongest signalers of taboos[39] (along with shame and awkwardness). By saying *"nachalos',"* Varvara unconsciously and spontaneously confesses that she is not surprised by her son's eccentric behavior. Like Liputin, she expects anything from her son, whether he is ill or not. Yet neither Liputin nor she dare name what reason they have to expect these things from Stavrogin. The unmentionable reason is that Stavrogin is possessed by a demon that no one, including himself, can control. In a novel where both of its epigraphs—from the Gospels and Pushkin—stress possessed people's helplessness and inability to control their fate or actions, the use of impersonal constructions suggests that the grammatical subject or the "doer" of the sentence is not only unmentioned but unmentionable, *because* it is a demon. In *Demons,* tabooing by impersonal constructions suggests especially strongly that besides "demonizing" and polemically fighting the radical movement of the 1860s, Dostoevsky also allowed for the possibility that the representatives of this movement were depersonalized because they had become mere puppets in devils' hands.

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[39] Frazer called the second volume of his work *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul,* and Mary Douglas titled her book on taboos *Purity and Danger.*

The Taboo on the Parallel between the Novel's Events and the Gospel Epigraph

Dostoevsky provides no comment on his novel's title *Demons* (*Besy*); nor do any of the characters ever refer to Pushkin's poem "Demons" ("*Besy*"), although he selects for his first epigraph the section in Pushkin which includes the desperate cry: "We are lost; what are we to do? Apparently, a demon is leading us round about the field." The novel contains only one reference to its Gospel epigraph, the passage from Luke describing how Jesus cast out demons from a possessed man, sending them into a herd of swine:

> And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and [the devils] besought Him that He would suffer them to enter into them. And He suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also that saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. (Luke, 8:32-36, the King James version.)

This epigraph further proves what I said earlier, namely that in this novel entitled *Demons*, Dostoevsky not only mocks or satirizes the radical movement of the 1860s, but also, most importantly for the reader interested in taboos, describes how demons possess people in general, and Russia of the 1860s in particular.

Important as this non-political aspect of the novel may be, however, the only character in *Demons* who comments on the parallel between Russia and the possessed man in Luke's Gospel is Stepan Trofimovich, whose unreliability jeopardizes, or at least somewhat compromises, the seriousness and adequacy of his statement (X:498-9). Stepan Trofimovich has devoted his entire life to such relative trifles as "the civil and Hanseatic significance of the town of Hanau between 1413 and 1428" (X:8). His friend Varvara Petrovna does not expect "anything serious or decisive to originate from him" (X:504). In his comment on the Gospel passage he uses such grotesquely *precieux* mannerisms as professing his love for Russia in French ("Oui,

cette Russie, que j'aimais toujours."—X:499) or, while comparing Russia to the possessed man in the Gospel—calling her "our great and nice patient" (*nash velikij i milyj bol'noj—ibid.*). And yet this character alone draws the parallel that Dostoevsky finds so significant as to determine the novel's epigraph. Discussing Stepan Trofimovich as a holy fool, Murav ascribes key importance to this Gospel passage: "this passage, and indeed the whole novel, suggests that all forms of civic life are riddled with the demonic" (Murav, 121). Nowhere else do Dostoevsky or his narrators (the omniscient one or the chronicler) explain the events in the novel or the behavior of characters in it by declaring that they are possessed. *Compromising* the declaration (rather than just omitting it) enhances the importance of the absence of such a declaration elsewhere.

Stavrogin violates the taboo on mentioning *bes/-y* because his sense of values is atrophied. In such a case, a Tikhon or a Dasha is necessary in order both to show the violator his place and to signal the presence of the taboo to the reader. Stepan Trofimovich, however, is an entirely different type of taboo-violator. He does not bite people's ears or rape little girls. He merely confesses his love for Russia in French. Dostoevsky conceived Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky as an articulate person. Since, however, even Varvara Petrovna does not take him seriously, in his person Dostoevsky suggests the discreditation of articulateness as the adequate treatment of certain topics. For some mysterious reason, the readers, without any help from a Dasha or a Tikhon, are urged to dissociate themselves from Stepan's comment on the Gospel epigraph. Thus, his violation of the taboo like Stavrogin's, but for a different reason, serves as a signal of its presence.

"Lesser" Taboos in *Besy* Compared to the Major Taboo On *Bes/-y*

Stepan Trofimovich's kind of taboo-violation has precedents and parallels both in *Besy* and in other works of Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky often takes the risk of compromising ideas or statements of fact—which he believes to be valid and true—by

putting them in the mouths of inappropriate characters.[40] In *Crime and Punishment*, Luzhin tells Raskolnikov, his family, Razumikhin, and us about Svidrigailov's sodomizing a girl. Judging from Svidrigailov's pre-suicidal vision of, most likely, the same girl in a coffin—supposing conscience torments Svidrigailov at the time—Luzhin tells the truth. But the same Luzhin slanders Sonia and Raskolnikov—which compromises any story he would tell. It is, again, Luzhin who mocks, and thereby exposes, Lebeziatnikov's disrespect for tradition and for Katerina Ivanovna's hospitality. Even though at that moment Luzhin himself is preparing to humiliate her by slandering her stepdaughter, what he says about Lebeziatnikov's social thoughts coincides with Dostoevsky's journalistic opinions.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the defense lawyer Fetiukovich tells how Mitia came to kill his father but abruptly changed his mind and, succumbing to his conscience, ran away. Even though, according to Dostoevsky's own plot, this version is correct, Fetiukovich describes the events merely as one version among other more plausible versions, without believing in it himself. This treatment compromises the idea of Mitia's innocence, and, therefore, his disproportionate suffering—an idea crucial to Dostoevsky's plot and philosophy.

My taboo theory suggests that these and other similar instances of careless, improper and untimely pronouncements of truths by characters or by the narrator do not actually compromise the truths they proclaim. Rather, they make it evident that some truths suffer from being pronounced.

In *Demons*, as in Dostoevsky's other novels, truths seemingly compromised by their proclaimers are important. Stepan Trofimovich's compromised yet correct rendering of the Gospel does not stand in isolation. Some other truths that Dostoevsky holds dear also come out of unbefitting mouths. It is Stavrogin—who lacks values—to whom Shatov attributes Dostoevsky's own words: "If Christ and truth differed, I would rather stay with Christ" (X:198). Judging from Dostoevsky's own letter

[40] In this argument I challenge the opinion of Valentina Vetlovskaia, who, in her *Poetika romana "Brat'ia Karamazovy"*, argued that Dostoevsky used *argumentum ad hominem* in order to prove the validity of his own opinions—and used this idea as a clue to what his own opinions were.

written to Fonvizina in February 1854,[41] and from the fact that Shatov, rather than anyone else, cites these words, one can infer that this idea was very dear to Dostoevsky.

Among the ideas which Dostoevsky cherished but compromised by letting his characters mention them was the idea of conveying his ideological messages in *Demons* through "a special tone" [*osobyj ton*]. As I mentioned in the introduction, in his notebooks for the novel, he repeats the expression "tone" (XI:261,262). Interestingly enough, both times he specifies that this tone should consist of the lack of "explanation," i. e., of the tabooing of the key issues:

> *Most important [is] a special tone of the narration—and all [will be] saved* [Dostoevsky's emphasis]. The tone [consists of] not explaining Nechaev or the Prince" [i. e., Peter Verkhovensky and Stavrogin] (XI:261). [Let] the narration [be] terser—a special tone and a special manner. A special terse story-telling tone without any explanations" (XI:262).
> Glavnoe—osobyj ton rasskaza, i vse spaseno. *Ton v tom, chto Nechaeva i Kniazia ne raz"iasniat' (XI:261). Koroche rasskaz—osobyj ton i osobaia manera. Korotkij rasskaznyj osobyj ton bez ob"iasnenij* (XI:262).

The three-fold repetition of the expression "a special tone" [*osobyj ton*] suggests that the idea of tabooing a message concerning two chief characters in the plot and conveying this message only through a "special" kind of narrative "tone" was very important to Dostoevsky, at least at the time he was working on *Demons*. The expression "*Osobyj ton*" is practically a declaration of Dostoevsky's method of tabooing certain key issues. But in *Demons*, a piece of fiction, he compromises the motif of "tone" *precisely because* this motif, in a certain sense, amounts to the overt declaration of his own method of tabooing. When Peter Verkhovensky urges Kirillov to write his suicide note, Kirillov wishes to insert an ideological (no matter how absurd!) message in his letter. He wants to verbally insult "the administration" (*nachal'stvo*); he even tries to draw a mug with its tongue stuck out. Then Peter Verkhovensky—the tempter and the basest rhetorician in the novel—suggests that Kirillov might express

[41] For an interesting and enlightening philosophical rendering of this statement, cf. Grigorij Pomerants, *Otkrytost' bezdne, Etiudy o Dostoevskom*, New York: Liberty Publishing House, 1989, 14, 79-81, and 110.

whatever he wishes "with the appropriate tone alone" (X:472). This suggestion enraptures Kirillov. He repeats the expression four times in great excitement: "With tone? That's good. Yea, with tone, with tone! Dictate it with the tone!" (X:472).

In this crucially important scene, Kirillov, who earlier has been tempted by Peter to follow the dictates of his awful suicidal ideology, rather than his own basically good instincts, emotionally identifies with this ideology. Kirillov thus suppresses his own good impulses and lets the idea of suicide possess him as if it were an uncontrollable passion. Up to this point, Kirillov has been undergoing a psychological change conditioned by this possessedness. Now he is ready to commit the moral crime of betraying his own loyalty to Shatov by declaring responsibility for his murder.

At this crucial point, the issue of "tone" becomes more than just Peter Verkhovensky's rhetorical device. Peter is actually satisfied with a very "toneless" message, but Kirillov keeps asking him to dictate more, "to curse [*izrugat'*] with tone, with tone!" (X:473). A *deus ex machina* of sorts, the power of the notion of "tone" possesses Kirillov in a way which Peter Verkhovensky cannot control. In the novel, therefore, the notion of "tone" appears in the context of the disintegration of Kirillov's personality, of his ultimate break with any opportunity for redemption. In the notebooks, on the other hand, Dostoevsky writes of the "special tone of narration" as "all-saving" (XII:161).

It is possible, and even likely, that Dostoevsky created such an opposition between the positive and negative concepts of "tone" unconsciously or unintentionally, but if it is unconscious, the opposition is all the more significant. Its unintendedness only testifies to the fact that Dostoevsky tabooed the expression of his ideological and programmatic innermost concern unconsciously—and therefore naturally—which means that tabooing the significant was not merely a literary device but the prism of his worldview. The statements in Dostoevsky's notebooks, however, are hardly unconscious. When he mentions "tone" in his notebooks he actually says that this "tone" should conceal, rather than reveal, the definitions of the two main characters of the novel. His statements suggest that Dostoevsky had a definite intention to taboo the important. Thus the notion of "tone," the term for the rhetorical principle of the novel, *seems* sublimi-

nally compromised. Actually, however, its declaration is signaled as tabooed, rather than as false.

Although in *Demons* Dostoevsky introduces the "special terse tone of narration" in order to establish a taboo on excessive verbosity as a mode of narration, he wants his narrator to violate this taboo by giving a detailed and verbose description of one particular character. This violation is conspicuous and marks the importance of the taboo it violates—just as with other taboo violations in Dostoevsky. The one character who, according to Dostoevsky, should be described in detail and with speculations as to his motivations is Stepan Trofimovich—as if everything were clear about him: "Nechaev and the Prince [should be described] without explanations, through [their] action[s]; and Stepan Trofimovich—*always with explanation* [Dostoevsky's emphasis]." (*Nechaev i Kniaz' bez ob'iasnenij, a v dejstvii, a pro Stepana Trofimovicha*—vsegda ob"iasneniem—XI:261). Not everything *is* clear about Stepan Trofimovich, however. He himself says in French that he has lied his whole life (X:506). This "complication" of Stepan's character testifies to the fact that the detailed descriptions do not actually simplify his character. They aim at tabooing—rather than refuting—the idea that somewhere even Stepan Trofimovich's personality might have psychological and spiritual depth and value. The narrator's apparent departure from the "terse tone," i. e., the reductionist simplification of Stepan Trofimovich's figure (or in Bakhtin's terms, his "finalization") corresponds to Stepan's own function as a character who violates the chief taboo intact for the narrator of the novel: spelling out its likeness to the epigraph. Paradoxically, because of his very articulateness, Stepan violates the chief taboo concerning the "tone" of narration in the novel and displays scandalous verbal carelessness. As a typical Dostoevskian taboo violator Stepan confirms the significance of the taboo that he violates. Dostoevsky treats Stepan with a description befitting a taboo violator, himself violating the taboo on excessive verbosity in narration when he refers to Stepan ("always with explanation"). Dostoevsky's violation of this taboo, however, only confirms the presence of the very taboo it violates. Where the "special terse tone" "fails," i. e., violates the taboo on too much detail, the person described also turns out to be a taboo violator. Both the narrator's violation of the taboo on excessive verbosity and Stepan Trofimovich's violation of the

taboo on making a direct link between the epigraph and the events in the novel, signal the importance of their respective taboos.

Those Who Justly Reproach Violate a Taboo

Apart from the significance of "tone," a rhetorical value to Dostoevsky, an important ideological message of the novel also *seems* to be compromised by its carrier, but is actually tabooed. The message is that the Russian liberals of the 1840s are ideologically directly responsible for the actions of the nihilists of the 1860s, even though the liberals, appalled by the radicals, deny this responsibility.[42] The novel's plot clearly indicates the importance of this ideological continuity, which seems to be so much "in the air" that it is actually possible to miss the fact that the narrator abstains from mentioning it.[43] Stepan Verkhovensky exaggerates and parodies many features of Timofej Granovsky and his contemporaries—the whole liberal generation of the 1840s with their pro-Western ideals. Dostoevsky made Stepan the father of Peter, a literary incarnation of Nechaev, the most prominent 1860s demagogue and terrorist. Stepan Trofimovich actually raised, educated and shaped many of the characters who belong to his son's generation—the generation of the 1860s. Stepan Trofimovich's position as a teacher, his relation of fatherhood to Peter, and his wish to find common terms with his son's generation, as well as his shock at its cynicism, all point to this logical and ideological continuity between the 1840s and the 1860s, as well as to the 1840s-generation's irresponsible denial of this continuity.

Stepan's ideological responsibility for the actions of Peter's generation, so important to Dostoevsky in the novel and present in it as obviously as the Gospel and the Pushkin epigraphs about devils, is nonetheless never discussed or even mentioned by the narrator or anyone in the novel, except Lembke. Lembke, insane at the moment, and not very eloquent in general, would

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[42] For the discussion of this continuity, cf., for instance, XII:176.

[43] My anonymous reader expressed serious doubts that the topic was not mentioned.

compromise any idea that he enunciates, and Dostoevsky lets him compromise *this* idea. Lembke reproaches Stepan Trofimovich: "It's you, you who for twenty years have been the hotbed of everything which now has accumulated!" (X:344).

Besides representing the irresponsible men of the 1840s who gave rise to the 1860s generation, Stepan Trofimovich also symbolizes their irresponsibility in serf-ownership and their inability to correlate their practice with their own liberal theories. He lost his serf Fed'ka (the one whom Stavrogin pretends to mistake for his demon) on a bet in a card game. Yet the character who reproaches Stepan Trofimovich for this situation and for Fed'ka's current criminal status hardly deserves to reproach him: this character is a boisterously "merry," base, bad-mannered, and "typical" seminarian at the "party" (X:373).

The Significance of Stavrogin's Personal Taboos in the General Context of the Main Taboo in the Novel

Stavrogin is at least as responsible as Stepan for causing everyone's possessedness. After all, Stavrogin has abused most of the female characters in the novel sexually or emotionally (even in the version where Matresha remains unmentioned) and corrupted most of the male characters with ideas to which he himself remained indifferent. Once "At Tikhon's" was removed from the novel, the taboo on *bes*, which in the banned chapter concerned one of *Stavrogin's* personal problems, in the final version became applicable to everyone's possessedness. Other taboos that concerned Stavrogin's personal possessedness, on the other hand, became less central precisely because Dostoevsky did not redistribute them among other characters. If we regard Stavrogin as a source for others' possessedness, however, then Stavrogin's personal sore spots and taboos deserve special attention. They are especially important because Stavrogin does not share any taboos accepted either in society or among other characters in the novel. In this respect, his idiosyncratic taboos resemble those of other Dostoevskian murderers.

Some vestiges of these idiosyncratically "Stavrogian" taboos remain in the final version of the novel because Liza, like Dasha, also compensates for Tikhon after he disappears. For ex-

ample, Liza mentions Stavrogin's spider—which in "At Tikhon's" was a detail in Stavrogin's confession—as the image of her future with him. (In Liza's interpretation, the originally tiny spider becomes "huge" X:402.) Unlike Dasha and like Tikhon, Liza touches upon some idiosyncratically "Stavrogian" taboos—as opposed to those involving everyone's possessedness. Thus she asks Stavrogin if he paid for his hope of being with her with his own life [*zhizn'iu*] or with someone else's (X:399-400). (Russian does not require a possessive pronoun here. Dostoevsky will further exploit the tabooing potential of this grammatical feature of Russian in *The Brothers Karamazov*.) Liza refers to her life (*svoeiu ili moeiu zhizn'iu zaplatili* X:399), but Stavrogin, who feels complicity in the Lebiadkin murder, reacts to her question as a reference to his own sore spot, i. e., paying for his hope with the lives of the Lebiadkins. Liza notices his strange reaction:

> "Why have you suddenly jumped up? Why are you looking at me thus? You scare me. What are you afraid of all the time? I noticed a while ago that you have been afraid, are afraid right now, this very moment... Oh Lord, how pale you're turning! "
> "If thou, Liza, knowest anything, I still swear to thee that *I* know nothing... And right now I did not talk about *that* thing when I said that I paid with life" [*zhizn'iu*].
> "I don't get it at all," she said scared and stumbling over words (X:400).

Stavrogin's reaction is typical of a Dostoevskian murderer being shocked at the mention of the murder as his own tabooed sore spot. Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* turns pale and insane when his interlocutors utter words which they consider innocent and which he associates with the murder. Like Stavrogin here, Raskolnikov also italicizes those pronouns which refer to this sore spot. Both call the murder "*that* thing," using the euphemism with which Gorianchikov refers to the convicts' crimes in *The Notes from the House of the Dead* (IV:12). Unlike such murderers as Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, Rogozhin in *The Idiot*, or the criminals in *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, however, in the final version of *Demons*, Stavrogin is not one of the central tabooers. He is merely the central taboo violator. In the same episode with Liza, he finally decides to reveal his horrible secret to her, but Liza taboos this revelation.

She does not even want to know—and thus prevents us from knowing—if this secret is Matresha's rape or the two Lebiadkins' deaths:

> "Hads't thou known the price of my current impossible sincerity with thee, oh Liza; if only I could reveal to thee... "
> "Reveal? You want to reveal something to me? May God preserve me from your revelations!," she interrupted almost scared. (X:401)

Akhmakova and many other tabooers will repeat these words almost verbatim in *The Adolescent*. Liza's *local* taboo in *Demons* will become central to *The Adolescent*, a novel where everyone will try to block and "unlearn" each other's shameful secrets.

Liza does not want to know Stavrogin's "horrible, dirty and bloody" (*idem*) shameful secret for the same reason that Tikhon originally tries to dissuade him from publishing his confession about Matresha: it will sound ridiculous. Liza warns Stavrogin against her own laughter: "I will do you in by laughing" (*ia vas zasmeiu*) (*idem*). At first this idea seems strange. Why would people laugh at a horrible deed? The link between Stavrogin and the other taboo violators in *Demons* explains this idea. The other taboo violators are Stepan and Lembke, and they look ridiculous when they violate the taboos I described above—precisely because their behavior at the moment of the violation is in such a sharp contrast to their usually decorous behavior and presence. Lembke and Stepan illustrate the causal link between violating a taboo and becoming ridiculous. The carnivalesque also forms this link, but in Bakhtin the taboo violation which makes the violator look ridiculous would be legitimized, and I do not believe that in Dostoevsky's fiction it is.[44] If Stavrogin, the romantic "Prince Harry," violates his own *personal* taboo, he might become as ridiculous as these caricatured taboo violators. Dostoevsky never explains to the reader why both Tikhon and Liza believe in the causal link between talking about one's horrible deed and looking ridiculous. The writer leaves it for us to

[44] Murav also finds Bakhtin's reading of carnival in Dostoevsky too optimistic. She believes that "particularly in *The Devils*, carnival leads to a frightening chaos" (Murav, 8-9). "For Bakhtin, the destructive chaos of carnival time, with its suspension of rules, distinctions and hierarchy, carries the seeds of its own rebirth. In *The Devils*, we see carnival in its demonic realization. The aftermath of the fete is not rebirth and renewal but death and destruction" (*ibid.*, 111).

infer. Only the analysis of taboos in the novel explains this logical link.

As I said, however, Stavrogin's personal taboos, important as they are, concern only his responsibility for his limited human ability to corrupt men mentally and women emotionally and physically. He is only a weak prey for the actual demons who, on the plane of taboos, should be regarded as the main actors in the drama presented in *Demons*. On this plane of taboos, both Stavrogin's personal responsibility and Stepan's ideological responsibility for everyone's badness remain subjugated to the central tabooed motif of demons' responsibility for everyone's possessedness.

As a political pamphlet, the novel asks who is responsible for the ideological and moral makeup of the 1860s generation. As a spiritual novel, it taboos Stepan Trofimovich's overt association of recent events with the Gospel epigraph. *Demons* transformed a political pamphlet into a much more complex statement. This evolution has been noted by critics and historians of literature.[45] The nature of this final complexity has been considered by critics (including Bakhtin) as Dostoevsky's refusal to accept only one aspect of reality as truth, and also as his awareness of truth's irreducibility to any ideological, let alone political, message. On its own terms, this interpretation is correct but rather apophatic. It implies that Dostoevsky considered it impossible to define what he believed and considered true. It does not, however, specify what precisely this indefinable meant for him.

But this rather apophatic interpretation does not suffice for understanding Dostoevsky's rhetorical power. He was no ideological weakling as a journalist and even less impotent in his fiction. I have demonstrated that on the plane where taboos operate and demons are not metaphorical, there exists a *cataphatic* equivalent of the apophatic definition "not-just-a-political-pamphlet:" using the genre of the novel, Dostoevsky wrote *a treatise on spiritual forces*, comparable to the writings of Church Fathers, such as a piece from the *Philokalia*. The abundance and complexity of signals of the taboo on mentioning *bes-/y*, combined with the functional significance of the violations of this taboo—compared to the relative simplicity of the taboo on

[45] Cf., for instance, XII:165.

stating the 1840-1860s continuity, as well as the merely local significance of Stavrogin's idiosyncratic taboos—these factors suggest that what Dostoevsky had to say about demons was as important as, if not more important than, what he tried to say about the 1860s radicals.

CHAPTER 4

The Adolescent

> And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon the shoulders of both of them, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.
>
> Genesis, 9:23

> "All you want is to be silent!— My friend, [...] to be silent is safe. "
>
> *The Adolescent* (XIII:173)

Other People's Sore spots

The plot of *The Adolescent* can be organized in two ways: either as the story of the adolescent's love for Akhmakova narrated by him as a memoir, or as the story of his education, sentimental, intellectual and last but not least, his education in developing sensitivity to taboos. The special importance of the latter follows from the fact that *The Adolescent* is a modified Bildungsroman.[1] As Liudmila Saraskina points out, "the spiritual evolution of Arkady Dolgoruky occurred not during the four months when he was acting but rather during the 'post-plot' time when he contemplated the events in his 'notes'."[2] During this "post-plot time," Arkady, the narrator and also the main protagonist,

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[1] Cf., for example, E. I. Semenov, *Roman Dostoevskogo "Podrostok"*, Leningrad: Nauka, 1979 (Chapter 1, section 2), 35 ff.

[2] Saraskina (1990), 90.

evolves from a zero-tabooer (to borrow a term which I apply to *The Idiot*), to an expert on taboos.

At first, the adolescent narrator—the illegitimate son of a landowner by his serf-woman—does not hesitate to mention many scandalous facts and concerns in his life. These range from his unceremonious and reductionist analysis of the love affair between his parents to the meticulous theorizing of his scandalously selfish "Rothschild idea," as he calls it—a theory which, among other things, justifies blackmail. The narrator, initially insensitive to the notion of taboo, illustrates this "idea" with his shameless account of a practical "experiment"—a scandalous episode where he made money from someone's family album, an object of sentimental value. Like *The Idiot*, *The Adolescent* therefore begins with zero-tabooing, which Dostoevsky's detractors usually regard as a kind of emotional exhibitionism typical of Dostoevsky's poetics.[3] For the actual adolescent—both as character and narrator in Dostoevsky's novel—this emotional exhibitionism is, however, only the point of departure. As he writes his notes and matures stylistically, the adolescent also matures as a person.[4] The gradual development of his sensitivity to taboos and to their particular hierarchy is crucial to both his stylistic *and* personal maturing. Furthermore, in the process of reading this novel, the reader will learn what the adolescent has learned in the process of writing it. Accordingly, this gradual development of the narrator's expertise in tabooing is probably the most defining and definable element in the structure of this rather disorderly novel.

The novel begins with the expression *ne uterpev* (unable to restrain [my]self), which Dostoevsky's reader may recognize from a marked violation of a taboo described much earlier in my book. In *The Notes from the House of the Dead*, Gorianchikov

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[3] Cf., for example, Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/ Bruccoli Clark, 1981, 106-135.

[4] In Dostoevsky's notebooks, a related idea of educating oneself by reading or rereading the written work appears very early: "AN IMPORTANT SOLUTION. Writing in the first person. Beginning with "I" [...]. For myself, afterwards, many years later [...] I will understand these facts better, but even then this manuscript will serve me in learning [about] myself/coming to know myself, etc." *Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 77*, Moscow: Nauka, 1965 ff., 95. This note suggests a close correlation between the educational experience of writing and reading, and possibly even the sharing of this educational experience by two specific parties: Dostoevsky's novel's reader and its main character and narrator.

as a character, while speaking to a fellow inmate, compares the prison bathhouse to hell, thus violating a prison taboo. Before doing so, however, Gorianchikov-the-narrator, addresses the reader directly and uses the expression *ne uterpel* ("**I could not restrain myself** from sharing this observation with Petrov" (***ne uterpel**, chtoby ne soobshchit'*; emphasis mine). Failure of restraint connotes impropriety; the words *ne uterpel*, therefore, conjure up a sense of taboo violation even before the *faux pas* comment or action itself occurs, as a sort of ominous prediction. It is important that in *The Adolescent* this subliminal prediction of an imminent taboo violation appears—in the form of the verbal adverb—as the very first two words of the whole novel *and* of the adolescent's self-instructing memoir: "Unable to restrain myself [*ne uterpev*], I sat down to write this story of my first steps on the path of life." The opening expression suggests that as early as the first two words of the novel, deep down in his soul the adolescent considers his writing a taboo violation, although like Gorianchikov who "could not restrain himself" (*ne uterpel*), at that initial point of writing his notes the adolescent is not yet *consciously* aware of the importance of the taboo on anyone's idiosyncratic sore spots.

Although initially the adolescent is extremely insensitive to others' sore spots, the motif of his own love for Akhmakova is a relatively consistent unmentionable in his narrative, perhaps, at first, the only unmentionable in it. The scene where he falls at her feet surprises the reader, although the surprise is carefully prepared because it is evident that from the very beginning he cannot control or restrain his reaction to her appearance. Yet his non-mention of his own uncontrollable passion stands in sharp contrast to his unceremonious talkativeness concerning other people's sore spots, including his illegitimate birth and the affair which gave rise to it. The adolescent's taboo on mentioning his beloved eventually becomes signalled in ways very similar to those in *Crime and Punishment*: on over twenty occasions the narrator replaces Akhmakova's name with the italicized personal pronoun "*she/her*," sometimes several times on one page.[5]

As the narrator and the character matures, he begins to observe that other people besides himself also have sore spots.

[5] Cf. XIII:324, 338, 339, 342, 365, 371, 373, 384, 386, 387, 388, 389, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 433.

Thus towards the end of the novel he even notices that Tatiana Pavlovna is in love with his father and genuinely regrets that he has mentioned this fact to her:

> "Let me tell you, I bet you yourself always were in love with Andrej Petrovich, and maybe still are..." [...] but I did not have the time to finish what I was saying: she suddenly seized my hair with unnatural swiftness and pulled it down with all her strength... then suddenly let it go, went to the corner and covered her face with a kerchief.
> "You stepson-of-a-dog (*pashchenok*)! Don't you dare say this to me ever again!"—She said sobbing. All of this was so unexpected that I, naturally, was stunned. [...]
> "You, fool, kiss me, the fool, she said crying and laughing—and don't, don't you ever dare tell me this again" [...] I kissed her. Let me note in parentheses: it's since then that Tatiana Pavlovna and I have become friends. (XIII:434)

This ability of the matured narrator to care about another person's sore spot has been growing and ripening in the course of the whole novel. Other people's cares and concerns have gradually "contaminated" the uniqueness of the adolescent's own sore spot (his love for Akhmakova). This evolution is marked in the narration by a shift in the taboo signal. Initially the narrator uses a narrative device (euphemistic non-mention) to signal his private taboo. Eventually the newly emerged taboos are signalled through a particular way in which characters *communicate* through conspicuous silence or other forms of reaction to a *faux pas*; the reader perceives the taboo *after* the characters, who understand each other long before the reader understands them.

At one point a very peculiar narrative treatment of the *universal* incest taboo complicates the narrative treatment of the adolescent's *idiosyncratic* taboo on mentioning Akhmakova. Versilov, the adolescent's natural father, is also in love with Akhmakova. As long as the adolescent does not understand this, he tactlessly mentions Versilov's supposed non-love or hatred for Akhmakova while addressing Versilov, Akhmakova herself, and Tatiana Pavlovna. All three find a way to show him that he has committed a *faux pas*, or violated an important taboo. Versilov switches the topic of conversation from his own "non-love" for Akhmakova, which seems so obvious to his son, to the adolescent's love for her (thereby protecting his own sore

spot by violating his *son's* taboo—XIII:219). Akhmakova, responding to the adolescent's pseudo-sensitive guess that Versilov does not know her because he never loved her, urges him to stop discussing "that man" with her (208), while her features become "painfully convulsed" (*chto-to peredernulos' v ee litse* XIII:219). Finally, Tatiana Pavlovna simply teases the adolescent by repeating his own careless word:

> "But what hatred! What hatred! ... and why, why? For a woman! What did she do to him? ..."
> "Hat-red!"—Tatiana Pavlovna repeated with fierce mockery. Blood rushed to my face; it was suddenly as if I understood something entirely new...
> "Get lost"—she shrieked... (XIII:259).

At these early stages the adolescent is still insensitive enough to other people's sore spots to inadvertently touch upon them. Thus on the eve of Kraft's suicide he mentions the revolver to Kraft, and Kraft asks him "not to talk about this" (XIII:61). He also talks to his sister Liza, pregnant by Prince Serezha, about the Prince's supposed marriage proposal to their step-sister Anna; Liza interrupts him very abruptly: "Bye. Have no time to talk" (XIII:199). In all these cases the adolescent is the careless violator of others' taboos, and the reaction of his interlocutors testifies to the relevance of the taboo by marking the sore spot.

As early as fifteen pages later, however, the adolescent begins to register his interlocutors' reactions as very clear signals of the impropriety of taboo violation. Thus, unaware of Liza's love affair with Prince Serezha, he mockingly suggests to Liza that she set his monetary affairs with the Prince in order. His mother, a very meek woman, chastises him for his carelessness, and he realizes that something terrible indeed has happened:

> "You, ma'am," I suddenly addressed Liza—"you often visit the apartment of Daria Onisimovna, or so it seems? So would you care to personally give her these three hundred rubles for which you kept nagging me today?"
> I took out the money and gave it to her. Will people believe me that these base words were said without any purpose, that is, any hint whatsoever. Besides, there couldn't have been any such hint because at that moment I knew absolutely nothing. Maybe I just felt like hurting her in a relatively terribly innocent [*sic: sravnitel'no uzhasno nevinnym*] way, something like the idea that, say, here, a young lady is poking her nose into other people's business

> [...] But imagine my astonishment when Mama, of all people, suddenly got up and shouted, raising her index finger and threatening me:
> "Don't dare! Don't you dare!"
> I could never imagine anything of the sort [coming] from her and also jumped up, not scared but rather with a sort of suffering, *suddenly realizing that something terrible had happened.* (XIII:214. Emphasis mine. O. M.)

Here the adolescent is beginning to sense intuitively "that something terrible has happened" long before he realizes his responsibility for a taboo violation, or learns any facts that would allow him to assess his role or others' sore spots consciously and intellectually. In his education, as in the world of *The Idiot*, taboos and their marked violations are the first visible features of emerging values. He first experiences values in terms of someone's semi-rational or irrational sore spots.

As the adolescent gradually develops his sensitivity to others' sore spots, he also begins to share his own taboo with others and share in the taboos of others. When he realizes that Versilov may be passionately in love with Akhmakova, Versilov begins to share with him the unmentionability of either her name or of anything pertaining to it. Thus the word "she" is italicized in their conversation about Akhmakova on pages 371 and 387, presumably because for both the word denotes *and* connotes the same. Both also realize that from now on they will share the taboo: "'My God! You received something from her... at five o'clock today?' He stared at me, apparently struck by my exclamation, and possibly also by my expression 'from her'" (XIII:373).

Not only do some characters chastise the adolescent for touching upon others' sore spots inadvertently, but Versilov, the adolescent's natural father, *formally initiates* him into the importance of the tabooed, and this initiation also takes time. At first, as early as page 11, Versilov impresses the adolescent as possessing what he considers "high society squeamishness" (*svetskaia brezglivost'* XIII:11). This "sqeamishness" is quite natural, since Versilov experiences discomfort at discussing with the adolescent his love affair with the adolescent's own mother.[6] At

[6] Interestingly, it took Dostoevsky a while to develop this taboo sensitivity in Versilov. In relatively early *notes* (*Literaturnoe nasledstvo, ibid.*, 90), he says that Versilov's initial prototype shares Rousseau's love of emotional

that stage, however, the adolescent does not yet understand the taboo aspect of this "squeamishness." Next Versilov teaches the adolescent the importance of silence in serious communication, and even then the adolescent still believes he does not need the lesson:

> "The Geneva ideals, my friend, are virtue without Christ [...] in a word, [...] it will be much better if we talk about something else, or even better, will be silent for a while (*pomolchim*) about something else."
> "All you want is to be silent!"
> "My friend, recall that to be silent is good, safe and beautiful."
> "Beautiful?"
> "Of course. Silence is always beautiful, and a silent person is always more beautiful than a speaker."
> "Indeed, to talk the way we two do is the same as to be silent" (XIII:173).

The adolescent initially dismisses his father's lesson. By the time he refuses to respond to Versilov's warning against blackmailing Akhmakova, however, he has learned the importance of being silent, understanding it in terms of other people's sore spots, not just his own:

> [Versilov:] "There are also...some young people here... and your ex-comrade Lambert among them... It seems to me, all of them are great scoundrels... This is just to warn you... Although, of course, this is up to you, and I understand that I have no right..."
> [The Adolescent:] "Andrei Petrovich [...] I've been silent, you did see that, I've been keeping silent 'til now, and you know why? In order to avoid your secrets (*tainy*). I really decided never to find them out. I am a coward, I am afraid that they [may] uproot you entirely from my heart, and I don't want that to happen. And if so, why should you, on your part, know my secrets (*sekrety*)? Let you also not care where I go! Am I right?"
> [Versilov:] "You are, but I implore you, don't add a word!" (XIII:332).

Aside from distinctly signalling that the adolescent has learned something about the importance of taboo, this passage marks a

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exhibitionism: "Just as Rousseau found pleasure in exhibitionism, so He too passionately enjoyed [emotionally] undressing before the youth, even corrupting him with his absolute frankness." Versilov, with his distrust of "the Geneva ideas" and his "high society squeamishness," has come a long way from this prototype.

function of tabooing very specific to the adolescent's emerging maturity and to the novel's value system. The eventual lesson the adolescent has to learn personally, and the reader has to learn from the novel's subsequent development, is *the taboo on knowing or discussing other people's shameful secrets.* Although we know all of those shameful secrets through the apparent scandalous frankness of the narrating adolescent himself, the passages I will discuss in the remainder of this chapter all indicate that Dostoevsky believes it is morally important to *un*learn and intentionally *disregard* this knowledge in order to form one's opinion about one's neighbor with love, an attitude which is markedly opposed to the scandalous assessment of the "objective" facts. By learning the importance of taboos the adolescent unlearns the scandalous facts he has told us as narrator, and we unlearn them as the recipients of this information. The eventual development of this motif in *The Adolescent* suggests that unlearning these facts can even destroy their objective existence.

Honor, Shame, and Absolute Values

Once Versilov and the adolescent begin to share both a shameful fact and the taboo on it, this taboo on discussing or even noticing one's shameful secrets gains extreme prominence. People stop the adolescent or any other such taboo violator when he wants to disclose his own, or anyone's shameful secrets of which, "objectively," his interlocutors are aware. In the first half of the novel, Petr Ippolitovich, the adolescent's landlord, tells shameless lies to Versilov, but to the adolescent's great indignation, Versilov neither contradicts nor stops the liar (XIII:165-168). Versilov pretends he believes the lies and, basically, tells the adolescent to take it easy: "'My friend, always let people lie (*sovrat'*) a little [...] First it will reveal your tact (*delikatnost'*) and second you too will be allowed to tell a lie in compensation'" (XIII:168). The main difference between this refusal to notice the lie and Prince Myshkin's with, say, Ivolgin, is

that Myshkin is ashamed[7] to contradict Ivolgin, whereas Versilov feels he cannot condemn his lying interlocutor because he himself, or anyone else, is "not without sin," i. e., is guilty of precisely *the* sin of lying. (In the course of this conversation the adolescent admits that he too has told some shameful lies about Chernyshev [XIII:168].) The condemner's complicity in the shame of the condemned and the tabooing behavior engendered by this complicity underlie the conversation between Versilov and the adolescent cited before: their shames are too similar to be discussed, condemned or even noticed by each in the other. Although the motif and the episode with the unchastised liar is similar to the one in *The Idiot*, its function in the global structure of the novel's taboo development is different. In *The Idiot* there is no taboo on exposing another's lies, because there it cannot be rationalized by the fact that the exposer would be implicated in the other's lying: Lebedev who exposes Ivolgin does not hesitate to lie, and Myshkin who does not expose him, does not lie. In *The Adolescent*, where no one is immune to lying, the universal inability to stop a liar propagates the taboo on condemning one's neighbor precisely because the condemner is no better than the condemned.[8]

The episode with Vasin in the first half of the novel also foreshadows the eventual importance of tabooing the open discussion of one's shameful secret, in this case the adolescent's:

> [The adolescent:] "Vasin, I am a lousy boy not worthy of you. I am admitting to it precisely because sometimes I am entirely different, much more sublime and profound. Two days ago I was praising you [...] and for that I have hated you for two whole days! That very night I made a vow never to come to you, and yesterday morning came to you only out of spite, you get it, *out of spite*. I was sitting here on the chair, criticizing your room, you, everyone of

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[7] The connection between lying (vran'ë) and shame is being currently explored in the book Deborah Martinsen is writing on the subject. Compare also the semantic fields of "honor" and "shame" in *The Adolescent* (Horst-Jürgen Gerigk, *Versuch über Dostoevskijs "Jüngling". Ein Beitrag zur Theorie des Romans*, Munich: Fink, 1965 (=*Forum Slavicum*, ed. D. Tschižewskij, vol. 4), 177-178). With regard to "honor" and "shame," Horst-Jürgen Gerigk has also revealed interesting parallels between Dostoevsky's *Adolescent* and another fictional adolescent, a 20th century American—Salinger's Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, 1951 (Gerigk (1995), 405-419).

[8] It is interesting, nonetheless, that even in *The Idiot* Lebedev, Ivolgin's exposer and tormentor, strikingly resembles him and shares his liar's traits.

your books, your landlady, trying to humiliate you and mock you..."
[Vasin:] "It would be better not to say this... (*etogo ne nado by govorit'*..." XIII:152)

The specific taboo on discussing shameful secrets, or merely paying attention to them, eventually gains in prominence in the novel thanks to the development of a particular plot line, namely the peregrinations of Akhmakova's letter. This letter, in which she carelessly mentions her father's madness, introduces a series of shameful secrets, and even suggests a causal connection between them. First, Akhmakova considers this letter her own shameful secret. Second, the reason she considers it shameful is that in this letter she discloses her father's shameful secret, i. e., his madness. Third, the adolescent succumbs to the temptation of blackmailing her with this letter, thereby acquiring his own shameful secret of trying to manipulate and slander the woman whom he loves and wants to love him *freely*.

Common to all these secrets is the fact that *objectively* they are true. The old prince *is* slightly out of his mind; Akhmakova *has* written the letter of which she repents; and the adolescent *has* betrayed her by not destroying the letter and subjecting her to Lambert's and Versilov's blackmail; he also betrays her by joining forces with Lambert who slanders her.

All of these "objective" facts are supposed to play a decisive role in shaping the relationships between the people involved, which endows the blackmail plot line with importance. Yet in the end the shameful secrets fail to play this decisive role because the characters involved choose to taboo them. Akhmakova actively protests against learning the adolescent's shameful secret, and eventually her father equally actively protests against learning Akhmakova's own secret of having betrayed him, i. e., of having revealed the shameful secret of *his* madness. Two episodes of shutting out the obvious information clearly indicate the impropriety of mentioning it. In the first case, Akhmakova, ashamed of the exposure of her interlocutor's shameful secret, tries to dismiss the information by regarding it as something predictable, and therefore petty and controllable:

"No, I exclaimed, no, I did not kill the one who spoke badly of you, quite the contrary, I supported him!"

> "Oh, for God's sake, it is not necessary, quite unnecessary, do not tell [me] anything," she suddenly extended her hand in order to stop me, and even with some expression of suffering on her face [...] "Not necessary, none of this is necessary, no detail whatsoever! I know all of your transgressions myself [...]" (XIII:366-367).

In the second case the old prince vehemently implores the adolescent not to produce any *objective*, documentary evidence against his daughter, repeating his desperate request four times:

> *"Mon ami! Mon enfant!"* he suddenly exclaimed folding his hands before himself and in no way concealing his fear any longer—"if indeed you do have something... [some] documents... in a word, if you have anything to tell me, then do not tell it, for God's sake, don't tell anything, better not tell at all... don't tell for as long as possible..." (XIII:425-426).

The prince's discourse unexpectedly suggests that there is a method in his madness: the words "something" or "anything" (*chto-to*), "documents" (the vaguely plural *dokumenty*), and "nothing" (*nichego*) are all careful substitutes for the tabooed definition "my daughter's letter of which she should be ashamed because it mentions the shameful secret of my madness." The old prince carefully observes the key taboo on others' shameful secrets which in turn consist of violating the taboo on his own shameful secret (i. e., carelessly mentioning his madness, or, on the other hand, threatening with exposure the one who has mentioned this madness). Ironically, this careful handling of taboo, as well as the clearly demonstrated awareness of the intrigue, implies that the prince is not mad, after all, certainly not in the sense that Anna Versilova or his daughter Akhmakova expected him to be mad. Rather than not knowing of the intrigues, he defies them willingly. The prince's behavior invalidates his own shameful secret, and thereby it also makes irrelevant both Akhmakova's letter and her own or anybody's concern about it. Thus one act of forgiveness embodied in observing a taboo on exposing an objective fact immediately destroys the very objectivity of this fact with all of its effects.

In the course of writing his memoir, which coincides with the novel, the adolescent learns the truths that Makar Ivanovich propagates but that would seem ready-made without the hero's learning of the importance of taboo first-hand through his own experience in tabooing. Makar Ivanovich, the pious wanderer

and the adolescent's legal father, talks about everybody's personal "mystery," never quite explaining what he means by it. This lack of "the mystery's" explicit definition suggests the taboo on judging any person—including Versilov, Makar's personal offender—or "finalizing" that person (in the Bakhtinian sense). This taboo becomes the final outcome of the whole novel, since eventually those who chastise the adolescent for violating a taboo do it not because he offends others but because he wants to disclose something shameful about himself. After all, the old prince's and Akhmakova's shameful secrets, or rather any attention paid to the supposed "objectivity" of these secrets, brings about the *adolescent's* shameful secret—his alliance with a blackmailer and the contamination of his own love. By seeing how others defy the objectivity of shameful secrets—be it Makar, Versilov, Akhmakova, Tatiana or his own mother—the adolescent unlearns this objectivity as a narrator and causes the reader to unlearn it as well. Thus in *The Adolescent*, as in *The Idiot*, the taboo on scandalizing others and oneself is not a given but rather a hard-earned truth.

The importance of the tabooing of one's neighbor's "objectively" true shameful secrets in *The Adolescent* can be confirmed with a piece of intertextual evidence provided by A. S. Dolinin. Dolinin compares Heine's poem "Frieden" (from *Das Buch der Lieder*, the cycle "Die Nordsee") with the way Versilov cites, or rather re-composes it, in *The Adolescent* (under the title *"Videnie Khrista na Baltijskom more"* XIII:379).[9] At the end of his poem

[9] A. S. Dolinin, *Poslednie romany Dostoevskogo*, Moscow-Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel', 1963, 184-186. Actually, Dolinin simplifies the matter. In the edition of *Das Buch der Lieder*, "Frieden," the twelfth poem of the cycle "Die Nordsee" was published as Versilov cites it, with the pious ending. This edition, however, was already the bowdlerized version of the poem as it appeared in 1826 in *Reisebilder*, the original context for the poem. Heine would omit the cynical ending of the poem in subsequent editions of *Das Buch der Lieder* but not in subsequent editions of *Reisebilder*. (Cf. 206-207 [the main text of the poem] with pp. 481-482 [the cynical ending and the commentary on the history of the publication of "Frieden"] of volume 1 of Heinrich Heine, *Heines saemtliche Werke* (9 vols.), Leipzig, 1911). Both cycles, *Das Buch der Lieder* and *Reisebilder*, were equally famous. Dolinin also assumes that both were available to Dostoevsky. Although this assumption needs proof, the context of Heine's other poems, both in the same cycle ("Die Nordsee") of *Das Buch der Lieder* and in *Reisebilder*, suggests that the omission of the ending to "Frieden" is much more artificial than its presence. I, therefore, accept as my working hypothesis Dolinin's assumption that both cycles were available to Dostoevsky (and to Versilov). Although Dolinin's presumption of Dostoevsky's good memory and knowledge of both versions is somewhat speculative, it is worth examining.

Heine undermines the notion of grace with irony, by describing Christ's mercies as the formal list of the visionary's fiscal, career and marital benefits.[10] Dolinin's assertion that Dostoevsky knew and remembered Heine's cynical conclusion may be disputed, but if Dolinin is right, then it is important that Dostoevsky "makes *us* forget" Heine's cynical conclusion, because Versilov entirely ignores it.[11] He focuses on Christ's final appearance to the secular and unbelieving humanity which tries to build utopia without believing in God, in Christ or in immortality. Telling the adolescent about his youthful attempt to rewrite Heine's poem, Versilov replaces Heine's original irony with a tone of melodramatic seriousness:

> I could not do without Him, could not help imagining Him, in the end, amidst people [who had turned themselves into] orphans. He would come to them, would raise His hands towards them and say: "How could ye have forgotten Him? [*Ego* in the original. O. M.]" And then it would be as if the scales fell from everyone's eyes, and a great, enraptured hymn would resound, the hymn of the new and last resurrection... (XIII:378-379).

While the conclusion of Heine's poem undermines the motif of faith, Versilov recalls Heine's poem in order to *reconstruct* this motif. He achieves this reconstruction by defying the objective data given in the intertext which is not actually cited.

But Versilov's transformation of the Heine source actually suggests more than the fact that Dostoevsky disagreed with the poet as to whether the motif of faith should be deconstructed or reconstructed in that poet's work. Why would Dostoevsky make Versilov, rather than any other character, bowdlerize Heine? After all, Versilov does not resemble the representatives of German censorship who bowdlerized the poem after its first publication in 1826.[12] He is neither a government official who believes that faith should not be questioned for reasons of state security, nor a person who sincerely practices unquestioning faith. Versilov, who forcefully breaks an Orthodox icon and oscillates between the ideals of Madonna and Sodom—as Mitia Karamazov will call them in Dostoevsky's next novel—cannot

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[10] Cf. Heine, 206-207, 481-482.

[11] Cf. footnote no. 9.

[12] Chapter 12 of *Reisebilder*, "Das Buch Le Grand," consists of the following text: "Die deutschen Zensoren - - - - - [five lines of dashes] - - - - - Dummkoepfe - - - [three and a half more lines of dashes]". (Cf. Heine, vol. 4, 182-183).

possibly overlook Heine's mild blasphemy out of his own excessive piety. Sincere as Versilov's thirst for faith may be, he is no Makar Dolgoruky. Versilov ignores the conclusion of Heine's poem for the same reason that he and other characters in *The Adolescent*, imperfect as they are, ignore each other's shameful secrets: he regards Heine's easygoing irony concerning Christ's grace as *the poet's own* shameful secret—and he therefore wants to defy this secret by ignoring it. After all, in both his life and his poetry, Heine was a well-meaning secular humanist who sincerely tried to retain his dignity and joy of life without Christ—and thus himself resembled the humanity described by Versilov as those characters to whom Heine's Christ comes. In Versilov's description of this humanity in the paragraph immediately preceding the one I have just quoted, many details correspond to the features of Heine's poetics and ideology:

> [P]eople remained alone, as they wished. [...] People suddenly understood that they remained completely on their own, and suddenly they felt that they were greatly orphaned [*razom pochuvstvovali velikoe sirotstvo*]. [...] They would seize each other's hands, understanding that now they and they alone constituted everything for each other. The great idea of immortality would have disappeared, and one would have to substitute [something] for it; and all the previous great abundance of love for the One who indeed was immortality, would be turned in them toward nature, toward the word, toward people, toward any tiny blade of grass. They would love the earth and life irrepressibly, to the same degree that they would realize their perishability and finiteness—and their love would be different from the previous one. They would [...] look at nature with the eyes of a lover fixed on the beloved. They would wake up and hurry to kiss each other. [...] "Let it be my last day tomorrow," each of them would think [...] and the thought that [their children and other people] will remain, still loving each other and caring for each other, would replace the thought about meeting beyond the grave. Oh, they would hurry to love in order to extinguish the great sadness in their hearts (XIII:378-379).

Pretending to evoke his utopian characters, unbelieving yet ultimately in need of Christ, Versilov actually refers to Heine. Thus in "Die Nordsee," the very cycle from which Versilov cites the poem in question, Heine reveals both mildly blasphemous irony and superficial affection for his sources when he uses

Biblical imagery, intertexts and geographical symbols for creating his own imagery of romantic love and secular friendship (especially male bonding through drinking together).[13] Versilov taboos his reference to Heine's own poetics and ideology, however, and for a very particular reason. He himself partakes of Heine's "shameful secret," for he cannot choose Christ unequivocally:

> I am not talking about my faith; my faith is not great; I am a deist, a philosophical deist, as all our kind [*kak vsia nasha tysiacha*] [...] but...[14] but it is remarkable that I would always complete my picture with a vision similar to the one in Heine of "Christ on the Northern [Baltic] Sea" (*idem*).

In *The Adolescent* people taboo each other's shameful secrets because none of them feel that they are sinless. Heine's "shameful secret" is no exception. Rather than bowdlerizing Heine, Versilov tactfully ignores Heine's conclusion of the poem as taboo,[15] precisely because Versilov is a man of little faith, complicit in Heine's "shame." Versilov ignores the lies of the adolescent's landlord because then the landlord and "others will let him lie in compensation" without noticing it; he overlooks the adolescent's faults so that the adolescent might overlook his, and so that they might continue to love each other despite their sins. Versilov omits Heine's blasphemy for the same reason: so that his own blasphemies and sins might be forgiven. As Christ says in Matthew, "For if ye forgive men their tresspasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their tresspasses, neither will your Father forgive your tresspasses" (Matthew 6:14-15. Cf. also Matthew 18:23-35 and Mark 11:25).

Although Versilov's reason for treating Heine's blasphemous conclusion as tabooed comes from the Gospels, he never cites them in the context of ignoring other people's shameful secrets. He regards the mention of this Biblical source as tabooed, but for reasons opposite to those for his omission of Heine's

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[13] Cf. the drinking scene in "Im Hafen," Song Seven of "Die Nordsee," section 2: "Erschlossen sich mir die Pforten des Heils, // Wo die zwoelf Apostel, die heilgen Stueckfaesser, //Schweigend predgen, und doch so verstaendlich //Fuer alle Voelker" (Heine, vol. 1, 224).

[14] Dostoevsky's elision.

[15] Even if Dolinin's assumption is wrong, and Versilov does not know this conclusion, he cites it in such a way that suggests that he taboos its blasphemous context consisting of other Heine's poems and maxims—be it in the same cycle or in *Reisebilder*.

blasphemy: he considers the Gospels *too sacred* to be cited directly by him, a sinner. Similarly, none of the characters who taboo *each other's* shame ever cite the Gospel passages that subliminally motivate their intuitively tabooing behavior. The authority of the Gospel passages cited or mentioned here is so important for *The Adolescent* that appealing to this authority directly *must* be tabooed. The way Versilov taboos Heine's "shame" is therefore consistent with the way he and other characters in *The Adolescent* treat each other. Only by forbidding themselves to think about each other's shame, objectively valid as it may be, can they invalidate it.

Throughout most of his works Dostoevsky defeats human "objective" judgment. In *Crime and Punishment*, when Dunia says "Brother, I know *all, all*" (Dostoevsky's emphasis), she does not mean the same thing as Raskolnikov would mean by the same word. Paradoxically, when characters assess each other's behavior and reaction based on the objective facts that Dostoevsky himself provides, they usually miss Dostoevsky's "objective" point, i. e., the point of the plot as a whole. The speeches of both the defense lawyer and the prosecutor in *The Brothers Karamazov* are based on facts. Myshkin has been diagnosed as an idiot, and he humbly refers to this diagnosis, and yet anyone within the novel or among its readers who tries to reduce him to this label without realizing the "positive beauty" of his "idiocy" will inevitably miss the main point of *The Idiot*. Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov and Stavrogin, objectively speaking, are obsessed manic monsters, and yet only a personal crisis reveals this fact to each of them, and only then is it revealed to the reader.

The Adolescent, like *Crime and Punishment*, reveals that what counters the scandalous in Dostoevsky, is *not* "objectivity" or common sense, but rather the realm of almost platonically absolute values, which are signalled by taboos on speaking of them. Since Raskolnikov violates the social realm of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" in the beginning of the novel, in the course of the novel he discovers only the *in*violable, absolute, meta-social truth of this prohibition. He may cheat others by pretending he does not care about their opinion, or indeed not care about it as in the case of Zametov (not Dunia, Razumikhin, Sonia, or even Porfiry, though). He may even at some point pationally *believe* that in order to stop caring about

his crime, a truly "great" criminal only needs the Napoleonic virtue of not caring about others' opinions (or in Deborah Martinsen's terms, that the criminal only needs to overcome his shame, rather than exorcising his guilt as well). But then the absolute, inviolable aspect of the Old Testament taboo hits Raskolnikov from within, as, precisely when he is alone, he cannot speak to himself of the murder scene. Similarly, the adolescent in discussing the scandalous love-affair between his mother and father, *initially* abolishes the taboo which in the beginning, or rather before the beginning of the novel, concerns him most. In Martinsen's terms, one may describe this initial taboo violation as overcoming one's shame, in this case, the shame of one's birth. Eventually, however, the maturing adolescent understands his parents' sore spot as something that concerns not only himself but them as well. This understanding of others' guilt where he previously saw only his own shame causes the adolescent to discover the absoluteness of the taboo on the scandalous: namely, that *he has no choice* but to keep silent about the scandalousness of this fallen world and of himself in it. The taboo on paying attention to this scandalousness is absolute because nobody imposes it on the character-narrator; he simply begins to perceive it as the only means for survival—moral, spiritual, psychological, or narrational. After all, the reader—be it Saraskina or Nikolaj Semënovich, the narrator's educator and first literary critic—can say only one concrete thing about the change that has occurred in Arkady as a result of his experience of life and narration: he has come a long way from defying taboos to defying what they demand him to defy. As one can see from the episode with the old Prince Sokol'sky, as well as from the steadfast all-forgiving power of Makar Ivanovich, these tabooing "means of survival" acquired by the matured narrator, rather than serving as an escape from this fallen world, actually defeat the objectivity of its fallenness.

People's idiosyncratic sore spots and faults, which the adolescent eventually learns to recognize and observe as taboo, seem trivial compared to Petrov's cosmological taboo on mentioning hell. In many societies—just as in *The House of the Dead*—taboos indeed are linked with ultimate questions; but they also make otherwise trivial things important. Unlike social taboos, textual taboos in Dostoevsky are always cosmological; in his poetic world which teems with scandals, no manifestation

of common decorum may be taken for granted. This is especially true for *The Adolescent*.

The adolescent has learned a lesson, and readers learn that lesson together with him. As I will demonstrate in the next two chapters dealing with *The Eternal Husband* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, the experts on taboos teach others by their expertise even when they do not learn anything positive themselves. Both Trusotsky and Smerdiakov are hardly "positively beautiful men"; they resemble Rogozhin rather than Myshkin. But their "negativeness," in conjunction with their sensitivity to taboos, has an even more important lesson to teach the reader than the one taught by Dostoevsky's positive characters.

CHAPTER 5

The Eternal Husband: The *Non-It* of *"It"*

Però a la dimanda che mi faci
Quinc'entro satisfatto sarai tosto,
Ed al disìo ancor che tu mi taci.

And as for the request that you just made,
You soon will have your wish fulfilled—and too
That other wish you have kept hidden from me.

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 10, lines 16-18.

Trusotsky and Smerdiakov

The Eternal Husband is a novella about a forty-year old womanizer haunted by the widower of his ex-mistress. At the beginning of the novella, the womanizer (Velchaninov) does not know that he had fathered Liza, his mistress's daughter, whom the widower (Trusotsky) loved dearly, having considered her his own daughter for a very long time. Eventually the widower, nicknamed "the eternal husband" by the lover, informs the lover about the fact that Liza is his daughter (the lover's), grows desperate over this fact, drinks, drives Liza to death by running wild and abusing her emotionally, alternately attempts to befriend and murder the lover, makes a failed attempt to remarry, and departs. At the end of the story, Velchaninov (the lover) meets Trusotsky (the "eternal husband") and his new wife, a frivolous tyrant, at a train station, and Trusotsky refuses to shake hands with him "because of Liza." None of the informa-

tion which the lover and the reader learn from the husband is communicated in straightforward verbal utterances. Grimaces, winks, gestures (such as two fingers put above the head as a sign of cuckolding), allusions, moments of silence, displays of objects (such as a letter, a bottle of wine, a knife, a little girl's dress), or of people (e. g., of Liza) are the prevailing modes of communication in this novella. *The Eternal Husband* is a perfect example of the efficacy of non-verbal communication.[1] The prevalence of this non-verbal communication is motivated by Trusotsky's reluctance and inability to speak directly about important concerns. He points to the existence of a concern solely by signaling the presence of the taboo on this concern.

The analysis of taboos in *The Eternal Husband* is crucial for my reading of tabooing in *The Brothers Karamazov*, since taboo rhetoric in the novella prefigures that of the novel in several ways. Smerdiakov, whom I consider both the focus of tabooing and the main tabooer in *The Brothers Karamazov*, is prefigured in the novella by Liza as a character and by Trusotsky as a tabooing speaker. Like Liza (and Arkady in *The Adolescent*) Smerdiakov is an illegitimate child paying for the sin of his father with his own destruction. On the other hand, Smerdiakov, like Trusotsky, exemplifies a particular technique of tabooing his own sore spot, the technique of magnetic repulsion, when the field around the tabooed concept points to it as its center but does not allow one to "touch" it. This technique consists of the following: the tabooer provokes his interlocutor into a discussion that comes to the very brink of openly mentioning the taboo subject, then cuts the interlocutor short before he can do so. If Stavrogin or Gorianchikov are merely unwary taboo violators, Smerdiakov's interlocutors and Velchaninov (the lover from *The Eternal Husband*) are forced to become concerned about the sore spot of the one who provokes them, and yet, although they are forced, they (and the reader with them) cannot quite pinpoint the focus of their new concern because it is unmentionable. *The Eternal Husband* presents a more convenient case for discussing the rhetoric of magnetic repulsion in its pure form because in *The Brothers Karamazov* Smerdiakov's creating a field of magnetic repulsion is only one of many ways in which

[1] Concerning modes of non-verbal communication in Dostoevsky's works (although not in *The Eternal Husband*) cf. Danow, 15-53.

Dostoevsky signals the chief taboo of the novel. Examining the ways in which Trusotsky uses this rhetoric will in turn explain many features of the rhetoric of Smerdiakov whom I consider the tabooer, and therefore, the key figure in the moral hierarchy of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Another important point of similarity between Trusotsky and Smerdiakov is the fact that, like Svidrigajlov in *Crime and Punishment* whom Raskolnikov at first mistakes for an apparition, both Trusotsky and Smerdiakov have two parallel aspects of existence: the objective existence in the plot and the subjective existence as emanations of the subconscious realms of Velchaninov and Ivan respectively. In his essay on *The Eternal Husband*, A. L. Bem argues that Trusotsky is important insofar as he is an emanation of Velchaninov's subconscious, or of his tormented conscience.[2] Bem admits that the appearance of Trusotsky, Liza, and many other characters and episodes is motivated realistically. He maintains, however, that the fantastic realm in which Velchaninov's tormented conscience emanates Trusotsky exists as parallel to the realistic and rationalizable plot-line. Bem considers this non-realistic, subjective realm of Trusotsky's existence more "profound" [*glubinnyj*] than the realistic one. Moreover, he insists that in general, "without taking into consideration this [fantastic] realm," it is "impossible to truly understand [Dostoevsky's] creative work."[3] Trusotsky, Svidrigajlov, and Smerdiakov may exist physically, but what matters to Velchaninov, Raskolnikov, and Ivan Karamazov is the existence of a Trusotsky, a Svidrigajlov, and a Smerdiakov within their tormented consciences. Bem is interested in the fantastic aspect of the plot of *The Eternal Husband* for psychological, or even psychoanalytical, reasons. The subject of his study is Velchaninov's subjective perception of the events in the novella.[4] I am interested in the fantastic aspect of the novella because it is exclusively in this fantastic, subjective realm that the tabooing techniques of Trusotsky operate. Like Raskolnikov, Velchaninov is tormented only inwardly. Consequently, his taboos are internalized and subjectivized.

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[2] A. L. Bem, "The Unfolding of a Dream (Dostoevsky's 'Eternal Husband')" [Razvertyvanie sna. ("Vechnyj muzh" Dostoevskogo)], in A. L. Bem, *Dostoevskij. Psikhoanaliticheskie etiudy*, Prague: Petropolis, 1938.

[3] Bem, 71.

[4] Cf. Bem, 54-59.

Unlike Bem, I will make Trusotsky, rather than Velchaninov, the subject of my investigation here. Dostoevsky's anthropology implies that anybody having a sore spot and capable of tabooing it, is more than a phantom. Since nothing except their ability to taboo their own sore spots distinguishes between Trusotsky and Smerdiakov on the one hand and shadows on the other, in order to clarify the "humanizing" property of tabooing faculties in Dostoevsky, I find it necessary to concentrate in the remaining two chapters of my book on Trusotsky and Smerdiakov, rather than on Velchaninov and Ivan Karamazov, who do have some traits of plausible human beings, besides the ability to taboo what ails them.

Whether existing "objectively" or only in Velchaninov's tormented conscience, Trusotsky uses what I have described as the rhetoric of magnetic repulsion in order to signal the taboo on his own personal sore spot, which is the fact that Velchaninov is Liza's father, rather than merely the ex-lover of Trusotsky's wife. Trusotsky mentions his wife's other lovers but cannot mention Velchaninov. This may be explained by the fact that he is talking to Velchaninov, but that is only a partial explanation. To Trusotsky Velchaninov is different from the other lovers in that he fathered Liza, and Trusotsky holds Liza very dear. The core of Trusotsky's concern, therefore, is Liza—specifically, Velchaninov's responsibility for Liza's life, and also for her death. Velchaninov loathes Trusotsky as the one who drove Liza to death by abuse—sincerely forgetting that he, Velchaninov, is responsible for Trusotsky's irresponsibility (just as Ivan Karamazov loathes Smerdiakov and thereby becomes distracted from his own responsibility for Smerdiakov's sin).

Although mentioning other lovers of Trusotsky's wife as lovers to Velchaninov's face is a transparent and insistent allusion to Velchaninov's own role, it still should be considered a substitution for the tabooed accusation "you were her lover, too"—an accusation, obvious as it may seem, that Trusotsky never actually utters. However, he constantly provokes Velchaninov to think in terms of this suppressed accusation, teasing him quite audaciously. His technique of tabooing by magnetic repulsion requires detailed examination and exemplification.

The Rhetoric of Magnetic Repulsion

One way in which Trusotsky creates a field of magnetic repulsion around his concerns is therefore a combination of omission and substitution. He leaves a sentence unfinished, and then replaces it with another which actually distracts his listener's attention from the omitted part by subtly changing the syntactic context. Thus when Trusotsky tells Velchaninov of his wife's death, Velchaninov is shocked in a way befitting an ex-lover of the deceased woman, and Trusotsky definitely perceives the nature of this shock. Yet he truncates the sentence which if finished would reveal the fact that he perceives it:

> [T]he news of the death of this lady (with whom he had been acquainted so long ago, and whom he managed to forget so long ago) shocked him unexpectedly.
> "Is it possible—he muttered [...] and why haven't you come by and told [me] this directly?"
> "I thank you for your commiseration, I perceive and appreciate it despite..." [Dostoevsky's ellipsis. O. M.]
> "Despite?"
> "Despite so many years of separation, you now related to my sorrow, and even to me with so much concern that I, of course, feel gratitude. It is only this that I wanted to state, sir" (IX:20).

In Trusotsky's first utterance the word "despite" (*nesmotria*) appears in a different syntactic function than it does in the second. In the first utterance the context demands that it come after the main clause with the subject ("[I] (subject) appreciate your concern, despite the fact that:" *nesmotria na to, chto*)—whereas in the second utterance "despite" actually comes in a subordinate clause preceding the main clause with its subject: "Despite so many years" (*nesmotria na stol'ko let razluki*), you (subject) now related to my sorrow." The subjects of these two sentences also differ. In the first, unfinished utterance Trusotsky talks about himself (I appreciate), and in the second about Velchaninov (you related). The second utterance, therefore, falls conspicuously short of reiterating the unfinished message of the first. Trusotsky often substitutes a lover figure (usually, but not exclusively, Bagautov) for the unmentionable Velchaninov, and gestures for the unmentionable words. Thus, instead of saying that Bagautov (not Velchaninov) cuckolded him, Trusotsky shows two fingers above his head, saying: "I am saying this,

also being sorry for [his death]. After all, he, a precious friend as he was—he meant this [much] (*vot chto*) to me, sir" (IX:43). Likewise, when Trusotsky finally reveals to Velchaninov that he was aware of Velchaninov's affair with his wife, he uses gesture rather than words: he sends Velchaninov his wife's unmailed letter without adding to it a single comment of his own.

Trusotsky also creates a field of magnetic repulsion around his sore spot either by veiling facts with too many epithets, or by concealing emotion under a falsely dispassionate account, depending on what constitutes the sore spot for him at each given moment. In the following passage, rather than stating that the "friendship" between Velchaninov, Trusotsky and Trusotsky's wife was actually a *ménage à trois*, Trusotsky substitutes salon chit-chat and the coy tone of the friendship cult that Russian readers associate with Gogol's Manilov from *Dead Souls*:

> "Oh, my dearest, oh most precious Alexei Ivanovich. [...] What do we care now? After all, we are not in society now, not in brilliant high society! We are two ex-friends (*dva byvshie druga*), most sincere and ancient, and, so to say, we have met now in most perfect sincerity, and we are mutually recalling [*sic*: *vspominaem oboiudno*] that precious liaison/connection, in which the deceased lady constituted such an extremely precious link in our friendship!"(IX:22)

The combination of "precious" and "friend" in the passage about Bagautov on page 43 was translated by Trusotsky's gesture of the horns. Here, refering to Velchaninov as "the precious friend," Trusotsky omits the translation in order to preserve Velchaninov's personal immunity. Several elements of discourse, however, present an immediate threat to this personal immunity without openly violating it. The dubious meaning of "liaison" (*sviaz'*: is it between the two friends, or between the husband, the lover and the woman, or between the two lovers?), the coy tone, the abuse of the word "sincere"—all these testify to the fact that Trusotsky does not mind if Velchaninov sees through his explanation to the actual motivation—whatever that may be—that he, Trusotsky, may have for meeting his wife's ex-lover. But Trusotsky never mentions this actual motivation. The actual motivation of Trusotsky's initial appearance and provocative behavior is, after all, ineffable: apparently, he is trying to find out how Velchaninov could have the nerve to look the widower of his ex-mistress, and the once-doting

"father" of his natural child, in the eye. By "nerve" I mean the ability to preserve external decorum by suppressing the voice of one's conscience, i. e., in Freud's terms applied to Dostoevsky's poetics by Deborah Martinsen, attending to the concerns of shame at the expense of those of guilt. I have already demonstrated how Dostoevsky uses taboos in *The Idiot* and, to some extent, in *Crime and Punishment*, to exemplify the possible conflict and incompatibility between conscience and decorum. Like Nastas'ia Filippovna when she tries to provoke Totsky to name his worst sin, Trusotsky finds the combination of unclean conscience and immaculate decorum quite inconceivable, unbearable and, in general, problematic—in fact, problematic enough for him to find it ineffable. He cannot name or mention this concern, which may be what motivates his provocative behavior throughout the whole novella: only by destroying Velchaninov's decorum can he possibly restore the equilibrium between Velchaninov's outward aspect and his guilty conscience. In other words, what Trusotsky taboos is probably his own profound concern with the deceptiveness and blatant insufficiency of external decorum. If so, then Trusotsky's own Manilovan chit-chat is a stylistically perfect substitute for the tabooed in this passage: it shows how decorum falls short of dealing with actual sore spots.

In the passage cited above Trusotsky substitutes foggy epithets for the precise definition of "the liaison." In other cases he does the opposite, replacing his own assessment of the information with bare facts. In such cases it is the assessment of the information, rather than the mere statement, that comes too close to discussing the relationship of Velchaninov to Trusotsky's wife or his daughter. This discussion is taboo to Trusotsky and therefore should be avoided. Thus instead of announcing to Velchaninov that he had fathered Liza, whom Trusotsky used to cherish as his own beloved daughter, Trusotsky merely counts the months between Velchaninov's departure from their house and the birth of Liza—leaving it to Velchaninov to draw the conclusions. He even further obscures the matter by pretending to hesitate between the term of more or less than nine months, thereby creating a field of magnetic repulsion around the whole issue:

"It was, it seems, exactly a year after you! Or, no, not a year, quite something else, wait, sir: I gather, you left us then, if I am not mistaken in my memory, in October, or even in November?"
"I left T. in the beginning of September, September 12, I remember well..."
"Was it September, really? Hah!... What's with me?" Pavel Pavlovich was very surprised. "Well, if so, let [me count]: you left September 12, and Liza was born May 8, so this is—September—October—November—December—January—February—March—April—a bit over eight months, sir, that's it sir!" (IX:32-33)

Thus in tabooing references to his wife and to his daughter Trusotsky uses opposite techniques: referring to his wife, he substitutes excessive and false emotion for true facts, and referring to his daughter, he substitutes excessive and false precision (September 12 to May 8 is a little less than eight months, not a little more, as he states) for true emotion. In both cases the true concern is signalled as unmentionable.

Other substitutions create a field of magnetic repulsion around Velchaninov personally. When Trusotsky discusses Bagautov as his wife's lover, he wants Velchaninov to draw obvious parallels between himself and Bagautov, but Trusotsky does not draw them himself. In the following passage he uses double parallelism, comparing Velchaninov to the lover in Turgenev's play "A Provincial Lady" (which Trusotsky's family actually staged with Bagautov, not Velchaninov, cast as the lover, and with Trusotsky denied by his wife the husband's role in the play)—and then comparing Bagautov's "friendship" with Velchaninov's. This double comparison both implies and avoids an overt accusation of Velchaninov, since the analogies between the three lovers—Bagautov, the lover from Turgenev, and Velchaninov—are only partial. In the coy voice of a Manilov worshipping friendship, Trusotsky says:

"[Y]ou even began to yell, and suddenly Natal'ia Vasil'evna appeared, and in ten minutes you became a most sincere friend of our house for a whole year, sir, just as [it is] in "The Provincial Lady," a play by Mr. Turgenev (IX:22)[...] but this already belongs to another category of our dear and beautiful memories, already after you left, when Stepan Mikhajlovich Bagautov graced us with his friendship, just as you had done, sir (*sovershenno kak vy-s*), and this time (*uzhe*) for five years."
"Bagautov? What's that? What Bagautov?" [...]

> "Bagautov, Stepan Mikhailovich, who graced us with his friendship a year after you and... [Dostoevsky's elision] as you did/ the way you did, sir (*...podobno vam-s*)" (IX:23).

Here Trusotsky abstains from seemingly inevitable logical links. In the first sentence he uses "and" instead of "but," thereby refusing to notice the obvious connection between the appearance of his wife and the change in Velchaninov's behavior. He also does not specify what "just like you" (*sovershenno kak vy* on *...podobno vam-s*) implies—is it merely the likeness of the two "precious friendships" or should Velchaninov also apply to himself the gesture of horns as the translation of this "friendship"? These are more than his way of teasing Velchaninov. By using these intentionally ambiguous expressions Trusotsky provokes Velchaninov to approach his own, Trusotsky's, sore spot and yet he prevents him from violating the taboo on it. In a similar way, when Trusotsky truncates idioms, he thereby provokes Velchaninov to complete them mentally: "At times, it seems, I would almost go ahead and embrace, and not just anyone but precisely one of these so-called eye-witnesses and co-participants (*ochevidtsev i souchastnikov*)" (IX:22). Trusotsky does not specify what the eyewitnesses witness and in what the co-participants participate (*ochevidtsev i souchastnikov* requires a noun in the genitive to follow it; the expression sounds intentionally incomplete without this complement). By leaving the expression incomplete he urges Velchaninov (and the reader) to complete it, and therefore makes him a "co-participant and eyewitness" of his own taboo and sore spot. This treatment of Velchaninov is aimed at forcing him to share Trusotsky's unbearable pain, which Velchaninov refuses to do on the conscious level, where he preserves impeccable decorum. Trusotsky tries in various ways to compel Velchaninov to share his taboos, including forcing him to omit words in the same sense that he, Trusotsky omits them:

> [Velch.:] "Bagautov? [...] Yes-yes-yes. What's with me! After all, he too, as well... " [Dostoevsky's three dots] (*i on tozhe...*).
> [Trusotsky:] "He too, as well, he too, as well [...]" repeated Pavel Pavlovich, picking up on Velchaninov's careless expression—"he too, as well!" (IX:23)

Trusotsky's threefold repetition of Velchaninov's "careless" *i on tozhe* amounts to saying, "You say this, not I." Paradoxically, in

this novella the fact that Velchaninov obeys Trusotsky's taboo by not completing the sentence ("he too, as well, was your wife's lover") makes the import of the "careless expression" all the more clear. It celebrates a victory over Velchaninov's indifference to Trusotsky's pain. At that moment, of course, Velchaninov, indeed, finds himself in Trusotsky's situation: compared to Bagautov, he is as much a cheated man as Trusotsky. At other times Trusotsky provokes Velchaninov to volunteer the comparison between himself and the other lover by suggesting a more subtle contrast, the one between himself on one hand and the two lovers on the other:

> "Why the devil were you in such a rush to behold Bagautov alive?"
> "Maybe just to take a look at a pal (*pogliadet' na druzhka*). Here, see, we could have drunk a bottle together."
> "He wouldn't even drink with you."
> "Why? *Noblesse oblige*? After all, you here are drinking with me, sir, and what makes you think he's better than you?"
> "I haven't been drinking with you."
> "Why such pride, all of a sudden, sir?" (IX:47)

Trusotsky says that if Bagautov had refused to drink with him, he would have done so because of his superiority to Velchaninov, not equality or inferiority—thereby emotionally provoking Velchaninov to object to any difference that may exist between himself and Bagautov. Velchaninov gets so carried away with the idea that both he and Bagautov are superior to Trusotsky that he easily volunteers a comparison between himself and Bagautov—one which, when Trusotsky suggested it, caused Velchaninov great discomfort.

At times Trusotsky comes so close to exposing Velchaninov that it almost seems artificial for him to stop just short of making Velchaninov's guilt evident. This restraint, however, suggests that no matter how refinedly Trusotsky torments Velchaninov, he can never intrude into the realm of Velchaninov's conscience—just as Porfiry cannot intrude into Raskolnikov's conscience by telling him bluntly, "You are the murderer." Trusotsky himself may believe that he has no access to Velchaninov's conscience because Velchaninov protects it with his impeccable decorum. Even in his most scandalous drunken dis-

course, Trusotsky substitutes a double for Velchaninov in his capacity as Liza's father—a certain anonymous artillery ensign:

> [V.:] "You (*ty*) drunken monster, don't you understand that without you [Liza] cannot even be buried! [...]"
> [T.:] "Do you remember [*vy* is implied: *pomnite*] the artillery... ensign...? [...]"
> "Wha-a-at?!" Velchaninov yelled with a painful convulsion.
> "Here's the father for you (*tebe*). Go look for him to...bury [her]... "
> "Liar! [...]"
> "[...] Go to..." (IX:61).

Trusotsky's scandalousness proves that even when he violates all social taboos he still cannot violate the one on calling Velchaninov Liza's father—because this fact is his own, Trusotsky's, sore spot, and not because he is afraid to violate any social decorum, which Velchaninov respectably observes. Trusotsky also may believe that violating someone else's conscience simply never succeeds in arousing it—and therefore he may taboo this violation. At any rate, he abstains from violating the realm of Velchaninov's conscience even when he has the advantage of scaring Velchaninov with possible exposure. This happens when he tells Velchaninov that he found out about his wife's love affair with Bagautov when after her death he discovered her correspondence with him. He begins this explanation by using the highly charged word "everything," building tension in Velchaninov: "I will presently explain to you, sir, how I found out "everything" ("*vse*"), and thereby will satisfy your ardent desires... [Dostoevsky's ellipsis] for you are an ardent person (*potomu chto plamennyi vy chelovek*, IX: 46; cf. also the epigraph from Dante). By the time Trusotsky finishes the story about Bagautov's letters and epistolary graphomania, Velchaninov sighs with relief: he never wrote a letter to Trusotsky's wife. But before Trusotsky reveals to Velchaninov that by "everything" he only has meant discovering his deceased wife's love correspondence, Velchaninov has to go through the torment of interpreting the meaning of "everything" on his own. Further development of the plot confirms that the torment was justified and the relief false. By the word "everything" Trusotsky indeed means everything: as the reader and Velchaninov learn at the end of chapter 16, Trusotsky makes the gesture of sending to Velchaninov his wife's unmailed letter addressed to

Velchaninov, where she tells him that she is pregnant and that he is the father. This means that Trusotsky did discover this letter in the same letter box, i. e., that in this letter box he discovered not just Bagautov's letters but indeed everything. By not telling Velchaninov everything about his discovery of "everything" Trusotsky does not cancel or alter the referent of this word, he merely signals that the referent of "everything" is unmentionable, or tabooed, but for that reason, all the more important.

The expression "the last word" (*poslednee slovo*) serves the same purpose. (This highly charged expression is put alternately in italics and in quotation marks.) In the conversations where the expression occurs "the last word" is, actually, never uttered but rather replaced with inadequate or merely semi-adequate substitutes. The reason for these substitutions, again, is that the referent of this expression is unmentionable, and not that it does not exist. At first the expression appears in Velchaninov's inner thoughts: "Velchaninov suddenly fancied that at any moment now he [T.] may suddenly utter the very last word (*vot-vot da i vygovorit seichas samoe poslednee slovo*) (IX:48). Later Trusotsky cites this expression as if Velchaninov had said it out loud, although he never did. Neither Velchaninov nor Trusotsky object to this discrepancy of reacting to each other's thoughts, rather than to words. By the end of chapter 12 and the beginning of chapter 13 they use the expression "the last word" as a term upon the meaning of which they agree. In the course of the conversation, however, it begins to seem that they mean different things by the expression. However, it only seems so. Velchaninov is afraid that Trusotsky's "last word" will be "Liza," or something pertaining to her (eventually it will be so), but in the conversation where the expression "the last word" appears Trusotsky does not mention Liza:

> "Do you," Pavel Pavlovich went on, whispering desperately "do you remember how then you demanded that I tell you everything, everything, sir (*vse, vse-s*), sincerely, sir, 'the very last word...,' do you remember, sir? Well, it's time to say this word, sir... Let's go!" (IX:83)[...]
>
> Velchaninov frowned, standing before [Trusotsky].
>
> [V.:] "I also promised to tell you my 'last' word [...] here it is, this word: I sincerely think (*schitaiu po sovesti*) that all the affairs between us are mutually concluded, so that we even actually have

nothing to talk about, do you hear?—nothing" [...] "Let's settle accounts (*pokvitaemtes'*), Aleksei Ivanovich!" Pavel Pavlovich said, but somehow looking him in the eye especially meekly.
"Settle accounts?"—Velchaninov was extremely surprised. "This is a strange word that you uttered! In what respect [shall we] 'settle accounts?' Hah! Is this, then, after all, your 'last word' that you promised to... [Dostoevsky's ellipsis] reveal to me before?"
"This is it, sir."
"We have nothing to settle accounts about anymore, we have been quits for a while (*my davno skvitalis'*)," Velchaninov enunciated with pride.
"Can it be that you really think so, sir?" uttered Trusotsky in a heartfelt voice, folding his hands in front of his chest with fingers touching in a somewhat strange manner. Velchaninov did not answer him and started pacing the room. "Liza? Liza?"—[a voice] moaned in his heart (IX:84).
"So, then what did you want to settle accounts about?" he [V.] addressed him [T.] after a rather prolonged silence. The other one [T.] kept following Velchaninov with his eyes, his hands still folded, while [Velchaninov] was pacing.
"Do not go there anymore, sir [...]"
"What? Did you mean just that?" (IX:85).

Trusotsky's "last word" seems anticlimactic not only to Velchaninov but to the reader as well. "Not going there" only means avoiding the house where Trusotsky hopes to find his next bride. Here, again, Velchaninov sighs with relief—this time because Trusotsky has not mentioned Liza. But actually, as we learn from the last ten lines of the story, Liza was what Trusotsky never forgave Velchaninov. Eventually he refuses to shake hands with Velchaninov explaining this denial of a handshake by just saying "and what about Liza, sir? (*A Liza-to-s?*)" (IX:112). "Liza," then is the very last word (at least the very last noun) that Trusotsky utters to Velchaninov in the novella or in their conversations, and therefore, it definitely is what he means by "the last word" in the passage I just cited. Here again, the referent of "the last word" only seems anticlimactic but actually is strong yet unmentionable and tabooed.

Eventually, at least on the subconscious level, Velchaninov learns a lesson by being forced to share Trusotsky's sore spots: he, Velchaninov, bears responsibility for Trusotsky's most horribly irresponsible actions. (Using the same rhetoric, Smerdiakov will desperately try to teach the same lesson to Ivan and

his other brothers.) When Velchaninov shakes from rage, accusing Trusotsky of all the horrible traits that he indeed has, Trusotsky only mildly alludes to the argument "look who's talking!"—but Velchaninov immediately registers this mild signal and accepts its validity:

> "Go to the devil!" Velchaninov suddenly bellowed quite beside himself [...], "get lost with this mousehole rubbish of yours, you, yourself a piece of mousehole rubbish—it occured to him to scare me!—the tormentor of a child!—a base man—a jerk, jerk, jerk!" he kept yelling beside himself and out of his breath at every word.
> Pavel Pavlovich was convulsed with shock, he even became momentarily sober; his lips trembled.
> "So you call me, of all people (*menia-to*), a jerk, you, sir—and me, sir? (*vy-s i menia-s?*)"
> But Velchaninov already came back to his senses.
> "I am ready to apologize," he answered after a moment of silence and in gloomy contemplation, "but only if you yourself [...] act straightforwardly."
> "And if I were you, Aleksei Ivanovich, I would have apologized in any case." (IX:56).

Trusotsky utters the last sentence not just to reproach Velchaninov. In it he also tells Velchaninov that rather than tormenting Velchaninov with "mousehole rubbish," he simply cannot talk directly ("act straightforwardly"), since what he is trying to talk about pains him so much: Velchaninov cheated him as his wife's ex-lover and deprived him of his fatherhood. Although Trusotsky does not and cannot mention either of these facts directly, Velchaninov understands him, as perfectly as Rogozhin understands Myshkin as long as the prince does not mention the murder of Nastasia Filippovna directly (cf. my chapter on *The Idiot*). This understanding of the taboo signal prompts Velchaninov to agree to apologize. Thus, although he ascribes and will ascribe great importance to decorum, in terms of absolute conscience, Velchaninov acknowledges his own moral responsibility for Trusotsky's insane behaviour.

Trusotsky is not a better character than Smerdiakov. He drives Liza to madness and death and attempts to murder Velchaninov. He also makes Velchaninov responsible for his irresponsible behavior. His expertise in tabooing his own sore spots does not clear him morally. This expertise, however, implicates Velchaninov (and implicitly the reader) in ignoring Trusotsky's

pain. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky's characters proclaim that guilt for other people's deeds is universal and unifies mankind. Although the technique of magnetic repulsion definitely plays a role in sado-masochistic psychological manipulation, or at least in what Malcolm Jones calls "driving each other crazy," in Dostoevsky,[5] much more important for my purposes is the fact that this technique is also a function of tabooing, since this function a) reveals to the reader that the mutual "driving crazy" in these dialogues operates as a means, not as a sado-masochistic goal, and b) helps Dostoevsky demonstrate that not just positive heroes, but also such petty, cruel and unworthy characters as Trusotsky (and, as I will show in the next chapter, Smerdiakov) have sore spots, and that ignoring these sore spots may implicate the one who ignores them in the petty, cruel and unworthy acts of these characters. Trusotsky is as ugly, unrefined, impure, irrational, unreliable, forgetful and unsufferable as Velchaninov's conscience, whose voice Trusotsky represents. This undertaking explains why Trusotsky stops short at intruding into Velchaninov's conscience verbally: if he verbally attacked Velchaninov's conscience, he thereby would attack himself. In *The Eternal Husband*, as in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky not only picks up the plot elements of *The Double* but also develops the motif of one's moral responsibility for the ugliness of one's double. In *The Eternal Husband* this idea is never stated explicitly. In Dostoevsky's last novel only one aspect of it becomes an overt issue: Ivan's *ideological* responsibility for Smerdiakov. I believe, however, that ideological influence is only an aspect of moral responsibility, and that its other aspects are more significant than the ideological—so significant, in fact, that they constitute the main taboos in *The Eternal Husband* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

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[5] Malcolm V. Jones, *Dostoevsky after Bakhtin. Readings in Dostoevsky's Fantastic Realism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, cf. especially Part Two. Jones modifies Bakhtin's concept saying that characters in Dostoevsky interact not only by letting their ideas clash but also by letting their emotional responses to each other's utterances clash (Jones, 26). These clashes either result from psychological manipulation or entail it. Jones's modification of Bakhtin is especially relevant for my theory of taboos, since tabooing involves non-declarative forms of presenting values.

CHAPTER 6

The Fourth Brother

> Why shouldn't my servant be as if he were my relative so that eventually I will receive him into my family and will rejoice over it?
>
> Zosima[1]

The Chief Taboo in *The Brothers Karamazov*

If *The Eternal Husband* is a fatherhood play, *The Brothers Karamazov* is a brotherhood play. The chief taboo in *The Brothers Karamazov* is on the idea that Smerdiakov is the fourth son of Fedor Pavlovich—or more precisely, equal to the other brothers in his blood-sonship. The formal element which initially allows for the reader's insecurity in this notion is "Karp-with-the-screw"—the convict whom Grigory blames for the fatherhood. In the chapter which relates the story of Smerdiakov's birth, the narrator, who hitherto was quite straightforward about describing Fedor Pavlovich's outrageous treatment of women, all of a sudden becomes squeamish and enigmatic, emphasizing that he is not omniscient and citing rumors as the only source of his information on the issue (XIV:92). The narrator also masks the obvious importance of Smerdiakov in the novel's plot quite transparently, almost admitting that he just pretends to mask it. Chapter 2 of Book 3 in Part I ("Lizaveta Smerdiashchaia") ends with the narrator's statement that, although "one should add

[1] XIV: 288. I am indebted to Adrienne Shirley for sharing her own theory about Smerdiakov's suppression as the fourth brother, a theory which she developed through teaching *The Brothers Karamazov* several years running in precepts at Princeton. Unlike Shirley, however, I believe that Dostoevsky suppressed Smerdiakov in this role only for his readers' conscious minds, as opposed to his own consciousness.

something about him [Smerdiakov] especially, [he is] ashamed to distract his reader's attention for such ordinary lackeys for such a long time—" and hopes that "concerning Smerdiakov, it will, somehow, come by on its own (*kak-nibud' sojdët samo soboiu*) in the future course of the narration" (XIV:93).

Here Dostoevsky borrows Gogol's technique. For instance, Gogol refuses to describe Selifan in Part I, Chapter 2 of *Dead Souls*: "Selifan the coachman was quite a different person... But the author is greatly ashamed of occupying his readers for so long with people of the low estate, knowing from personal experience how reluctantly they [the readers] get acquainted with the lower estates."[2] Gogol's sole purpose, however, was to tease his reader, whereas, as I will argue, Dostoevsky actually considers Smerdiakov a very important character and his "quite ordinary lackeyhood" a very important motif in the novel. Apologizing for distracting the readers' attention from matters more serious than Smerdiakov, the narrator actually distracts attention from the importance which the author does ascribe to Smerdiakov. Some readers and critics "bought" the narrator's deliberately misleading comment, and believed that Dostoevsky indeed made Smerdiakov a marginal character. E. I. Kijko, for instance, thinks that Dostoevsky decided not to discuss Smerdiakov at that point in the novel because "these details were not relevant to the meeting which took place between Alesha and Mitia." Kijko also says that Dostoevsky changed the plan of the novel to eliminate "the deviation of the plot from the main line."[3] I believe that Smerdiakov's story cannot be a "deviation of the plot from the main line" because his story is the main line of the plot, which Dostoevsky chose to mask as deviation.

Three or Four Sons?

Before any mention of Smerdiakov in the novel, Dostoevsky begins to plant the seeds of doubt in the reader as to how many

[2] Gogol, vol. 5, 21. Robert Belknap comments on the similarity of this passage from *The Brothers Karamazov* with Gogol. Cf. Belknap (1967), 91; Belknap (1990), 37.

[3] Cf. XV: 420.

sons Fedor Pavlovich had. In chapter two of the first book, describing the origins of the eldest of the three brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky's narrator uses a suggestively dubious subordinate clause:

> First, this Dmitry Fedorovich was only one of [*odin tol'ko iz*] the three sons of Fedor Pavlovich, who was growing up being convinced that he still has some capital and, once he comes of age, will become independent.
> *Vo-pervykh, etot Dmitry Fedorovich byl odin tol'ko iz trëkh synovej Fedora Pavlovicha, kotoryj ros v ubezhdenii, chto on vse-zhe imeet nekotoroe sostoianie i kogda dostignet sovershennykh let, to budet nezavisim* (XIV:11).

In English the distinction between the definite article "the" and the zero-article is syntactic. No English-speaking reader or listener will confuse the expression "only one of" with "the only one." In Russian, however, the distinction between *edinstvennyj iz* (the only one) and *odin tol'ko iz* (only one of) is idiomatic (although it conveys the same information), and therefore more subliminal, a little more masked: it functions as a Freudian "slip" which the reader may register subconsciously but ignore consciously, automatically "correcting" the sentence to make its message more coherent. The Russian reader may therefore register the message of the sentence quoted above in two ways which are actually incompatible with each other. Either Fedor Pavlovich had only three sons, and Mitia was the only one of them who hoped to become independent (the singular *kotoryj ros* suggests this interpretation)—or Fedor Pavlovich actually had at least one other child who, unlike these three, would not entertain any such hopes for fiscal or social independence. In the latter case, the plural for the subordinate clause would be more appropriate (*kotorye rosli*). Grammatically, therefore, Dostoevsky's narrator determines the reader to think that there were only three brothers, and only one of them entertained any hope for independence. The narrator, however, does not say "D. F. was the only son of Fedor Pavlovich's three sons (*edinstvennyj iz trekh*), who grew up convinced that he had some rights..." He only says "was only one of the three sons of F. P...." [*byl odin tol'ko iz trekh*]. Thus even though the singular *kotoryj ros* suggests that only Mitia was convinced that he was his father's legitimate heir, the "wrong" idiom—*odin tol'ko iz* (only one of),

instead of *edinstvennyj iz* (the only one of)—suggests that the other two also could have some claims. If so, then "three" means only the three legitimate ones. The syntax of this sentence and the distortion of an idiom in it mean two different things. This prompts the reader to subconsciously register that the claim that Fedor Pavlovich had only three sons cannot be final and definite.

Dostoevsky reinforces this subliminal ambiguity between "three" and "four" by at least one other instance of using the approximation "three or four" on the same page. Thus in the paragraph immediately preceding the passage about Mitia that I quoted above, the narrator has doubts as to how many times, three or four, Mitia changed homes (between the ages of three and four): "It seems that he then moved once more, to a fourth nest." [*Kazhetsia, on i eshchë potom peremenil v chetvertyj raz gnezdo—idem.*][4]

Three or Four Brothers?

Smerdiakov's sonship to Fedor Pavlovich is actually mentionable: the prosecutor says that Smerdiakov "possibly is an illegitmate son of Fedor Pavlovich's" (XV:126); Fetiukovich (the defense lawyer) states that, at least, he considers himself one (XV:165). Objecting to the suggestion that Smerdiakov was the murderer, Mitia also says that this relationship is possible (XIV:428). A related idea, however, is absolutely unmentionable, and this is the possibility of Smerdiakov's being the fourth *brother* to the three brothers Karamazov. The word "brother" is used very densely around Smerdiakov's name, but this word never refers to him, as if there were a field of magnetic immunity to it around him. The fact that Alesha blames him for the murder is ascribed to Alesha's *brotherly* sentiments, or, as the persecutor puts it, "moral convictions of sorts, which are so natural in his capacity as the defendant's blood brother" (*v silu kakikh-to nravstvennykh ubezhdenij, stol' estestvennykh v ego kachestve rodnogo brata podsudimogo*) (XV:109). Katerina Ivanovna

[4] I owe my attention to this passage to Elina Yuffa's numerological observations.

says that Ivan blamed Smerdiakov for the murder because "he could not bear that his blood brother [i. e., Mitia] was a patricide" (XV:121, cf. also XV:135,136).

Readers often forget that not only Smerdiakov but Mitia as well was only a half brother to Ivan and Alesha. (Mitia's mother was Fedor Pavlovich's first wife, not second). Thus even Robert Belknap, a very careful reader of the novel, says of Smerdiakov: "[T]he murderer is no more than a half brother, a relationship that enables him to be a servant too."[5] If Smerdiakov's half-brotherhood is the factor that enables him to be both a servant and the murderer, then why does not the same factor enable Mitia to be either?

Smerdiakov himself actively *dis*sociates himself from the Karamazov brotherhood—so actively, in fact, that it becomes clear that he is sure he is one of them. Like Trusotsky, "the eternal husband," Smerdiakov creates a field of magnetic immunity around any designation of himself as one of the brothers. The following example will explain what I mean.

When Alesha tells Ivan of his worry about his brother Mitia, Ivan says: "Am I my brother Dmitry's keeper?" (XIV:211). He immediately proceeds to comment that these words were "Cain's response to God about his slaughtered brother." Five pages earlier, however, Alesha asks Smerdiakov: "Is brother Dmitry to return soon?"—without specifying whose brother Dmitry is (which is, idiomatically, quite acceptable in Russian). Smerdiakov, however, sweeps away a mere suggestion that Mitia might be considered *his* brother. He gives a very servile response typical of a lackey: "Why is it that I could be informed about Dmitry Fedorovich; it would be quite a different matter if I were attached to them [the Russian substitute for "him," reserved exclusively for the expression of servility] as a keeper (*Pochemu zhe by ia mog byt' izvesten pro Dmitriia Fedorovicha; drugoe delo, kaby ia pri nikh storozhem sostoial.*)"—delivering these exaggeratedly servile words "distinctly and slightingly" (*razdel'no i prenebrezhitel'no*—XIV:206[6]). The sole purpose of Smerdiakov's servile tone is to demonstrate that he means a relationship with both his listener and the subject of his conver-

[5] Belknap (1990), 65.

[6] The correlation between these two references to Cain's response to God in *The Brothers Karamazov* was initially observed by Natasha Chervinskaia-Beshenkovskaia.

sation which is the exact opposite of what he explicitly states. His use of the Biblical intertext is much more subliminal than Ivan's. Yet it is precisely this avoidance of the direct reference which ensures the efficacy of the intertext by causing the reader some irrational associative discomfort. Smerdiakov's reference to Cain's words is more effective than Ivan's precisely because it is less direct. I am convinced that when Dostoevsky cites or stylizes the Scriptures directly, without transforming either the style or the context, he aims much less at conveying a pious message, or correlating his message with that of the Bible, than when he actually "distorts" the style of the Biblical intertext or alters its context.[7] In this respect I fully share the opinion of Malcolm Jones who states that in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "unless the seeds of a Christian poetics fall to the ground and die they will stand alone and be overwhelmed. If they do submit then the fruits of reconstruction are doubly rich."[8] Here I also part with Diane Thompson's view that "Zosima quotes the Bible accurately, Fyodor travesties it and Smerdyakov corrupts it."[9] In this passage Smerdiakov travesties and corrupts the drama of Cain's words much less than Ivan does by quoting Cain directly. Like many sacred realities, Biblical quotes in Dostoevsky often are preserved sacred only if their direct, uncorrupted version is tabooed. Interestingly, even travesty violates this taboo to a lesser extent than the direct quotation.

G. S. Morson, nearly the only critic who considers Smerdiakov's neglected brotherhood as important as I do, regards the episode to which I just referred as "perhaps the most important scene for understanding Smerdiakov's motives," revealing "how even Alyosha contributes to the tragedy."[10] Morson believes that this scene shows that Smerdiakov "ruins his brothers because they do not acknowledge him as a brother" (*idem*), and he regards the way in which Smerdiakov invokes the Biblical verse 'am I my brother's keeper' as an expression of "murderous irony," "a revenge for his epithets, because he is never called 'Brother Pavel,' but 'the valet Smerdyakov' or (as he poi-

[7] Cf. my article on Old Testament Lamentations in "The Notes from Underground," *SEEJ*, November 1992, no. 3.

[8] Jones, 184.

[9] Thompson, 15.

[10] Gary Saul Morson, "Verbal Pollution in *The Brothers Karamazov*," in *Critical Essays on Dostoyevsky*, ed. Robin F. Miller, Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Haul, 1986, 234-242, 241.

sonously recalls Ivan's phrase) 'the stinking lackey'" (*idem*). Actually, Smerdiakov's practice of "poisonous irony" is an act of tabooing. In the following passage, mentioning the fact that Smerdiakov refers to Cain's words, Morson does not say that Smerdiakov alters the verse so as to avoid using the word "brother:"

> Smerdyakov (who calls his brother Dmitri Fedorovich) responds with murderous irony that **he is not his brother's keeper** [emphasis mine. O. M.]. The reference to the first fratricide [...] obliquely reminds Alyosha that while the Biblical phrase is conventionally used in an extended sense to refer to one's fellow man, in this case Dmitri really *is* Smerdyakov's brother (*idem*).

Aside from the fact that Smerdiakov's irony is murderous literally rather than metaphorically (Smerdiakov, like Cain, actually plans and commits a murder), Morson's analysis of Smerdiakov's tone is precise; yet his citation of Smerdiakov's words is not. Smerdiakov does *not* say "am I **my brother's** keeper," but rather: "it would be quite a different matter if I were attached to **my sir** Dmitri Fedorovich as a keeper." Like Petrov and other Dostoevskian tabooers and murder-tabooing murderers, Smerdiakov *de-idiomatizes* and de-automatizes the Biblical cliche in order to signal that the word "brother," accurate as it may be, is *unmentionable*, as long as one might possibly interpret it as pertaining to him, Smerdiakov. Thus Smerdiakov's "murderous irony" actually fulfills a tabooing function.

The Cain intertext example demonstrates how the tabooing of the notion of Smerdiakov's brotherhood with the brothers Karamazov elevates and strengthens the importance of this notion—at least for the purposes of Smerdiakov's own consciousness. In fact, Smerdiakov's tabooing treatment of the brotherhood aspect of this intertext provides the only proof that he *has* a consciousness—a fact that many very insightful readers of the novel have doubted. Belknap, for instance, says that apart from Zosima—who is as unambiguously positive as Smerdiakov is unambiguously negative—Smerdiakov is the only one of the five central characters in the novel for whom Dostoevsky's narrator never provides any psychological insight, be it into his motives or thoughts.[11] Belknap believes that Dostoevsky needs

[11] Belknap (1967), 86.

to abstain from any psychological insight in this case in order to demonize "the lackey" more conveniently and effectively. I believe, however, that this abstinence—or a form of narrative taboo concerning Smerdiakov—applies to the narrator alone, rather than to Dostoevsky himself. Dostoevsky *makes his narrator* demonize Smerdiakov because he, the real author, taboos the idea that Smerdiakov is a human being (i. e., a brother to other humans) not only for the purposes of his characters but for the purpose of his narrator as well. Only if the narrator is implicated in this taboo will Dostoevsky also succeed in implicating the reader in it. Although Belknap does not distinguish between Dostoevsky-the plot-maker and his narrator with regard to demonizing Smerdiakov, he is otherwise aware of this distinction and its importance. He dedicates the whole fourth chapter of his 1967 book to this issue.[12]

Another intertext confirms the importance of Smerdiakov's neglected brotherhood. When Alesha comes to visit Mitia in jail (XV:30), Mitia says of Smerdiakov: "Should I talk of this stinking dog, is that it?... I don't want to talk about the stinker, the son of a stinkeress anymore" (*chto zhe mne o smerdiashchem etom pse govorit', chto li? Ne khochu bol'she o smerdiashchem, syne Smerdiashchej!*). Mitia is quoting a folk poem about the rich and the poor Lazaruses, with which Dostoevsky was familiar because it was recorded by his close colleague Apollon Grigoriev, as indicated in the Iakushkin collection where it appears[13]:

"Oh thou, a stinking peasant, the stinking stinker's son.
How darest thou to come to [my] window?
How darest thou call me brother?...
Here, thy brothers are two mean dogs
these are more of thy brethren than me..."

Akh ty smerdin, smerdin, smerdiashchij ty syn.
Da kak zhe ty smeesh' k oknu podkhodit'?
Da kak zhe ty smeesh' bratom nazyvat'?...
A von tvoi brat'ia dva liutye psa—

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[12] *Ibid.*, esp. 77.

[13] Pavel Iakushkin, *Russkie narodnye pesni iz sobraniia Iakushkina*, St. Petersburg, 1865, 45. The intertext was first observed in the Academy edition, XV:589. Cf. also V. A. Mikhniukevich, "Dukhovnye stikhi v sisteme poetiki Dostoevskogo," in *Dostoevskij. Materialy i issledovaniia*, vol. 10, St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1992, 88-89.

tei tvoia brat'ia poluchshe menia.

Compared to the Gospel parable on which it is based, this spiritual poem treats the universal human brotherhood—the only kind of brotherhood which the rich man in the Gospel neglects—as biological: the two become real full brothers. And yet their biological brotherhood is transparently non-literal; it must carry symbolic meaning, since it is unlikely that two biological brothers would share the same name of Lazarus. The Gospel does not mention the rich man's name. It is only the poem that adds this detail. I will elaborate on the comparative opposition of the biological and the universal human brotherhood further in this chapter.[14] For the discussion of the folk poem intertext, it is important that thanks to the shared name of the two brothers, the transformation of the Gospel's neglected spiritual and moral brotherhood to the poem's neglected biological brotherhood actually aims at the symbolic rendering of this brotherhood. The imagery of this double transformation (universal=> biological-=> universal), however, demonstrates the interconnection existing between the two brotherhoods: as in Symbolist poetry according to Mandelshtam,[15] these two brotherhoods in this poem are valid only insofar as they symbolize each other.

Along with other issues important for the novel, the cited intertext announces both the topic of the interdependence of the universal and the biological brotherhoods and the fact that neither should be neglected. This intertext also introduces a hidden disapproval of Mitia's words: he cites the rich brother who earned hell for the same words which he adopts himself.

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[14] Nina Perlina mentions that for the poetics of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the motif of family brotherhood might function as a symbol of Christian brotherhood. Cf. Nina Perlina, *Varieties of Poetic Utterance: Quotation in "The Brothers Karamazov,"* Lanham and London: University Press of America, 1985, 58. She also speaks about the importance of Schiller's motif of universal brotherhood in *The Brothers Karamazov* (*ibid.*, 23). Franz Moor, in his first monologue in *The Robbers* tries to relativize the notion of brotherhood concerning his brother Karl. Schiller uses this monologue to introduce Franz as the villain.

[15] Cf. Osip Mandel'shtam, "O prirode slova", in *Collected Works in Four Volumes*, edited by G. P. Struve and B. A. Filippov, Washington: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1971, vol. 2, 254-255. Mandel'shtam's attitude to a pair of images that are valuable only insofar as they symbolize each other is negative. For the purposes of the imagery in the cited folk poem, however, it is important to note that such interdependence of imagery existed before Symbolism, and that it probably is typical for the folk or apocryphal perception of Scriptural and other authoritative sources.

Judging from Mitia's general habit of constantly making intertextual "slips," the two Lazaruses' intertext should be regarded as the message which Dostoevsky conveys through Mitia's words but "over his head." What Mitia omits from quoting—"how darest thou call me "brother" and "thy brethren are two mean dogs"—is absent from his consciousness, but this absence is conspicuous. It corresponds to what he overlooks in his relationship with Smerdiakov—and for that he should be held responsible. Thus, to use Freud's terminology, while Mitia represses the memory of Smerdiakov as his brother, Dostoevsky suppresses the mention of the importance of this fact for both Mitia and the reader. In other cases, indeed, Smerdiakov's magnetic repulsion from the label "brother" might imply the moral responsibility of the same kind as Mitia's not only for the characters but also for the reader himself. The following example will demonstrate how a speaking character might taboo Smerdiakov's brotherhood for the reader through compromising and thereby blocking certain associations and interpretations—when actually these associations are appropriate and are subliminally intact.

Telling Ivan that Alesha is about to impart to him a piece of important news, the devil appeals to Ivan's brotherly pity for Alesha and refers to him as "thy brother" (*brat tvoj*—the Biblical Church Slavonic inversion):

> It is thy brother Alesha with a most surprising and curious piece of news... Unlock, unlock the door to him. There is a snow storm outside, and he is thy brother [*brat tvoj*]. *Monsieur, sait-il le temps qu'il fait? C'est á ne pas mettre un chien dehors...* (XV:84).

The "most surprising and curious piece of news" is that Smerdiakov—during Ivan's conversation with the devil (if this conversation took any time)—has hanged himself. Yet the devil does not refer to *Smerdiakov* as "thy brother." The exclusion of Smerdiakov from this brotherhood is all the more conspicuous and ironic because the Church Slavonic *brat tvoj*,[16] unlike *tvoj brat*, conjures up the idea of universal or Christian brotherhood, rather than a mere blood relationship—and, according to Zo-

[16] Besides the typical Church Slavonicism of the inversion, another source specifically important to Dostoevsky conjures up the same image of universal brotherhood and the perils of neglecting it: these are the unpronounced words of Akakij Akakievich's about himself (*ia brat tvoj*) from Gogol's *Overcoat*.

sima's teaching in the novel, this spiritual brothership should not be denied anyone, especially any master's servant—even Smerdiakov.

The devil attempts to annul this linguistic suggestion of universal brotherhood by using this unambiguously religious expression with the equally unambiguous irony achieved through a cheap pun: Alesha is a *brat tvoj* because he is a *tvoj brat*, i. e., the devil reduces the Church Slavonic expression to a pretentious mannerism describing merely the blood relationship which undoubtedly exists between Ivan and Alesha but in and of itself should not provoke any assumptions about their spiritual brotherhood.

This punning irony, which prevents the reader from perceiving the brotherhood of Ivan and Alesha as universal, thereby blocks the extrapolation of the idea of brotherhood between these two (Alesha and Ivan) to the rest of humanity—of whom Smerdiakov is the first, if only because he is the first human being to be mentioned after this episode and in its context.

Such blockage of the associative extrapolation of directly related ideas plays a role in poetry and obscene jokes (e. g., " [...] it,// he stepped in a pile of sh-shaving cream"). Among its precedents in Dostoevsky, Trusotsky's rhetoric in *The Eternal Husband* is, probably, the most vivid. This blockage pushes the associations into the level of the subconscious, but it only strengthens their effect on that level. It is precisely this blockage, when combined with the technique of magnetic repulsion, which I call tabooing ideas. In the episode I just discussed, the untold and unmentionable reality behind its verbal elaboration becomes evident if one reads it the way one would decipher hidden messages—or, in Russian, "anagrams"—in poetry or in obscene jokes. This anagrammatic reading amounts to the following sentence: "Open [the door] to thy brother. It is all about Smerdiakov. Smerdiakov is thy brother." This taboo works for the reader the same way it does for Ivan and Alesha: none of the three admit the anagrammatic reading to their consciousness—and therefore all three should be held responsible for not applying the notion of brotherhood to Smerdiakov. Nina Perlina, a very careful reader of Dostoevsky, discusses the importance of poetic anagrams in Dostoevsky, in particular concerning the Karamazov family setup and what it symbolizes, as well

as the importance of reading Dostoevsky the way one should read poetry (for example, the way Taranovsky and Ronen read the poetry of Mandel'shtam).[17] But Perlina does *not* extend her discussion of anagrams to the issue of Smerdiakov.

The anagrammatic reading of the devil's words concerning Smerdiakov as "thy brother" would sound arbitrary or far-fetched, were it not that, as I mentioned before, one of the chief philosophical and moral motifs of the novel is universal human brotherhood. Zosima preaches this universal brotherhood (XIV: 285, 286, 271), also, quite naturally, addressing the monks around him as "brethren." Mitia, at the end of his trial, appealing to everyone's pity for Grushenka, calls them "brethren, friends..." (XV:178).

If the reader, following the view of Bakhtin, sees Smerdiakov through the eyes of each of the brothers, rather than through those of an outside observer, then it becomes important that Smerdiakov is the third, rather than the fourth, brother to each (that is, in relation to the brotherly "I" of each of them). In many liturgically important languages, such as Hebrew, or—notably for Dostoevsky—Greek and Church Slavonic, there exists the dual number which represents a numerical category between "one" and "many." This numerical distinction presupposes the mentality for which the watershed between "non-many" and "many" comes not after "one" but after "two," at the third element of any count. For the purposes of each of the brothers, Smerdiakov is such an element in their count of "my brethren." One may view the opposition between "many" and "non-many" as corresponding to the opposition between the universal and the particular. Such a view suggests that Smerdiakov represents the watershed element in this opposition. Being "the third," he is the first step from the concrete and mundane blood brotherhood to the universal one. Overlooking him as "my" third brother, all three brothers stumble on this step.[18]

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[17] Perlina, 55, 57-58.

[18] An interesting intertextual evidence confirms the importance of the motif of "brethren" in dual number with regard to Smerdiakov. It is the same folk-song from the Iakushkin collection which I cited before. The rich brother throws the poor Lazarus outside to two dogs whom he calls "thy brethren" in the dual: *tvoia brat'ia poluchshe menia*. This dual, represented by the form of the possessive pronoun, also coincides with the collective plural—the only form of plural for "brethren" (*brat'ia*) in Old Church Slavonic and the one from which the Russian one—used here—stems. Cf. A. N. Gorshkov, *Staroslavianskij iazyk*,

Zosima emphasizes the Biblical motif of Joseph and his brothers (XIV:266), mentioning specifically that "for his whole life Joseph tirelessly remembered how he was sold... and wept and implored his brothers not to sell him" (*ibid.*). The Biblical plot stresses the fact that the brothers did not recognize Joseph when they came to Egypt for his bread. (The whole subplot of Benjamin and the chalices evolves around this motif.) Zosima refers to this Biblical motif when he mentions that Joseph, "not being able to endure the torment of his heart,... comes out to them, beaming and bright and announces to them: 'Brethren, I am Joseph, your brother!'"(*ibid.*). The brothers Karamazov also do not recognize Smerdiakov as their brother. Like Joseph, Smerdiakov also feeds his father and his brothers whenever they are around. The careers of both in society depend entirely on how well they feed people. The difference between these two unrecognized brothers is that Smerdiakov is abominable and Joseph is wonderful. But the similarity between the two suggests more than a mere parody. It also implies that neglecting a bad brother is not any better morally than neglecting a good one—and the further development of the plot suggests that neglecting a bad brother is also more dangerous than neglecting a good one. Smerdiakov may not exactly be Joseph, but his brothers still abuse him as carelessly as Joseph's brothers abused *him*.

The novel shows such brotherly neglect as unambiguously bad. Like Joseph's brothers, certain evil characters in the novel also wickedly ignore their siblings' brotherhood. One of Rakitin's obvious points of baseness is that he denies his cousinship (in Russian, secondary brotherhood—*dvoiurodnoe* ***bratstvo***) with Grushenka and gets annoyed when Alesha calls her his (Alesha's) sister. Ivan is filled with indignation when Fedor Pavlovich forgets that Alesha's mother was his mother too. Fe-

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Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo "Vysshaia shkola," 1963, 117 (for the plural of "brother" in OCS) and p. 137 (for the chart of pronoun declension—which chart indicates that the forms of masculine dual and feminine singular or collective coincide—and the discussion of the distinction between the forms of dual and plural). The mental association of the dual with the collective (~brother*hood*—which suggests the notion of the universal) further complicates the matter: if it came through in Dostoevsky's text, it would equate each brother's ignoring Smerdiakov's brotherhood to ignoring *the other*, in the most general sense of "thy brother." As it is, however, this particular association should be considered marginal, since it is overtly present only in the source text and not in Dostoevsky's own text.

dor Pavlovich, indeed, forgets this fact, and looks all the worse for that (XIV:127). In the case of Smerdiakov, however, nobody looks bad overlooking his relationship to them—only he himself. The value of noticing and cherishing one's brotherhood to someone—both biological and spiritual, as, for example, in the case of Alesha and Grushenka—is applied and applicable to everyone but Smerdiakov. While forgetting other relatives is a sin, forgetting Smerdiakov seems acceptable. Robert Belknap and Diane Thompson discuss the importance of memory as a positive moral value in the novel. Those who remember are better people than those who forget.[19] Belknap also notes the particular association of memory with childhood as an important motif in the novel.[20] The centrality of this motif prompts one to ascribe great significance to the fact that every character and most readers feel so comfortable *forgetting* about the importance of Smerdiakov, his childhood and his memories of this childhood. Belknap also discusses the importance Dostoevsky ascribed to emotionally implicating his reader in his characters' false views,[21] but does not mention one's attitude to Smerdiakov as such a fault.

Diane Thompson lists Smerdiakov among important forgotten and neglected orphans in the novel.[22] Thompson, however, regards Smerdiakov as a symbol, rather than a pitiable victim or object of oblivion which she considers demonic.[23] Among the reasons for which Smerdiakov cannot possibly remember his parents, Thompson mentions that Fedor Pavlovich never openly acknowledges him as his son.[24] In Thompson's interpretation, *this* memory-lapse seems to be entirely Smerdiakov's fault, not Fedor Pavlovich's (Thompson, 201). Thompson even goes so far as to maintain that Smerdiakov "never was a son or brother" (*idem*). Thus such careful readers as Perlina, Belknap, Thompson, and many others "stumble over" Smerdiakov.

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[19] Cf. Belknap (1990), 80 ff. esp. 82; Thompson, *passim*, esp. 161 ff.

[20] Belknap (1990), 84.

[21] *Ibid.*, 155-157. On the importance of implicating the reader in *The Brothers Karamazov* cf. also R. F. Miller (1992), *passim*, esp. 4: "Dostoevsky's reader is an *implicated* reader" (Miller's emphasis).

[22] Thompson, 161.

[23] *Ibid.*, 200 ff.

[24] *Ibid.*, 201.

Many other people also stumble over him. Zosima preaches that one's servants are one's brothers (XIV:285, 271-287). He says that simple folk consider themselves not "lackeys" but equal to their masters (XIV:286). But he implies that if servants are "lackeys"—which is bad—rather than free in their spirit—it is their masters' fault: he says that one should *make* one's servants equal to oneself, "freer in spirit than if they were not servants" (XIV:287-8). These words suggest that even when one's servants are not one's biological brothers, they should be considered brothers. But Smerdiakov *is* the Karamazovs' biological brother, and yet all of them ignore and/or dismiss this fact. Zosima never regards Smerdiakov as one of the brothers Karamazov. He asks Alesha if he saw "the brother," meaning not Ivan but "*the* other brother" (XIV:258). This means that among Alesha's brothers Zosima considers Mitia the only alternative to Ivan. Alesha, Grushenka, and Ivan call Smerdiakov "a lackey." Ivan labels him "lackey" and "cad" (XIV:122) in the chapter "Sipping Cognac"—precisely when Smerdiakov believes he has started developing Ivan's ideas. Ivan cites the devil (actually saying things not the way the devil said them but the way he himself thinks of them): "You [Ivan—O. M.] will announce that... *the lackey*, having learned from you, killed the father" (XV:87. NB: *Whose* father—"yours" or "the lackey's"—remains unspecified). Alesha refers to Dmitry as his brother and to Smerdiakov as "the lackey" several times (XV:108-109, 189). When Kolia Krasotkin asks him if the murderer "was his brother or the lackey," Alesha answers quite unambiguously and tersely: "*ubil lakej, a brat nevinoven*" ("The murderer was the lackey and the brother is innocent"—XV:189). Alesha does not use the possessive pronoun. Rather than saying "my brother," he says "the brother." This expression, however, is idiomatic and therefore less marked in Russian than it would be in English. The reader scores this definiteness of answer in Alesha's favor because Alesha is confident about Mitia. But both the reader and the characters, Alesha and Kolia, entirely forget that "the lackey" is also "a brother." Alesha's spiritual sister Grushenka echoes these words (*lakej ubil*) several times (in XV:9-10 and 114). Here, again, Smerdiakov becomes the exception to the application of the otherwise universal rule of brotherhood. Alesha and Grusha are morally transformed and elevated by calling each other brother and sister, and yet, they, just

like Ivan and Mitia, stumble over calling Smerdiakov their brother.

Mitia calls Smerdiakov a *smerd* (meaning "a stinking peasant" but also a metaphor for a plebeian). I have already discussed some of the implications of this word in connection with the very likely reference to Iakushkin's variant of the folk poem about the rich and the poor Lazarus. Mitia and Ivan use this word in reference to other people besides Smerdiakov. Ivan uses it to refer to the base mob: "I do not want plebeians (*smerdy*) to praise me [for my magnanimity toward Mitia]" (XV:87). Mitia labels Rakitin (XV:28) and the average American (XV:186) with this word. In all of these cases, the word is the antonym to "brother" and excludes its referent from the universal brotherhood. But Dostoevsky, the plot-maker (unlike his narrator), actually finds a way to compromise this exclusion (which, should it remain intact, would first and foremost concern Smerdiakov, if only because of his name). It is not only the Iakushkin folk poem use of "*smerd*" which testifies to this compromise but also Dostoevsky's transformation of the motif signalled by the etymology of the word *smerdiashchij* (the stinking one). In *The Brothers Karamazov*, stinking is not bad. It is Lizaveta Smerdiashchaia and Zosima who stink, and in both cases, abominating them is the moral responsibility of those who abominate them, rather than of themselves. The possible subtextual rehabilitation of stinking may come from the Gospel motifs of both Lazaruses—the resurrected and the poor one—referred to as stinking in Iakushkin and generally associated with the resurrected one in the popular conscience. The resurrected one stank in the grave. (The synodal Russian translation—which is the Russian Gospel used by Dostoevsky—says of him: "*Uzhe smerdit*"—the words which Sonia reads in *Crime and Punishment*.) Yet, although he stank, the Lord loved him so much that He resurrected him. The other, poor Lazarus earned the Kingdom of Heaven precisely by not being able to help being abominable—as both the Gospel and the Iakushkin source testify.

But although Dostoevsky rehabilitates stinking by asserting that the condition may indicate saintliness, this rehabilitation does not apply to Smerdiakov (or at least, does not seem to apply to him).

Ivan's concern about suffering children also applies to everyone but Smerdiakov. The suffering of children prompts Ivan to return his ticket to God. But when the narrator describes the twelve-year-old Smerdiakov, he mentions that Smerdiakov liked to hang cats—which, naturally, is abominable, but which, somehow, *de facto*, manages to justify Grigory's awfully inhuman words addressed to the boy: "You are not a human being, you were bred out of bathhouse dampness, that's who you are..." (XIV:114). The narrator mentions quite matter-of-factly that Smerdiakov "could never forgive these words," which resembles Zosima's words about the Biblical Joseph which I already quoted (XIV:266), but the narrator does not seem to have any compassion for Smerdiakov. When Smerdiakov gets rebellious about the light-creation story in the Bible, Grigory beats him and thereby causes his epilepsy. This fact seems to evoke only Fedor Pavlovich's pity, which, like any other behavior in Fedor Pavlovich, seems only odious, but does not visibly score any points in Smerdiakov's favor (XIV:115). All of this happens when Smerdiakov is just barely twelve. And yet, it is not because of him that Ivan returns his ticket to God. The injustice done to him somehow eludes Ivan's (and everyone else's) indignation.

Ivan is worried by the fact that "*his*" devil is "such a lackey": "I was not a lackey; how, then, could my soul generate such a lackey as you?" (XV:83, cf. also XV:73). He never addresses the same question to Smerdiakov, even though, ideologically, he is responsible for Smerdiakov's "lackeyhood" (*lakejstvo*). It is only because he is unsure whether the devil exists independently of himself that he worries about what his soul generates. This uncertainty is not present with regard to Smerdiakov: Smerdiakov's objective existence pacifies Ivan's conscience. It never occurs to him—until it is too late—that his soul generated *this* lackey—that is, that the person would not be such a lackey, were it not for Ivan.

Finally, the most important issue in the novel's plot also stumbles over the Smerdiakov phenomenon. Zosima says that one should not judge or condemn a transgressor because the judge is responsible for the transgression of the judged (XIV:290-291). Nobody, including the reader, seems to apply this key concept to Smerdiakov, except maybe Ivan, who actually is worried about his influence on Smerdiakov because he is

forced by the events and by Smerdiakov's own reproaches. Yet Alesha carefully taboos this worry with the incantation-like words "It is not you who killed!" (Bk. 11, ch. 5).

This tabooing incantation would itself suffice to signal the importance of Ivan's responsibility for Smerdiakov's crime. But the signal concerns only Ivan's conscience, and it prevents the reader from thinking that Alesha might also mean himself as another brother of Smerdiakov's. Alesha might have addressed his "it's not you who killed!" to himself. At any rate, this possibility of the two brothers' joint responsibility for Smerdiakov is tabooed because the only reason for Ivan's worry is his *ideological* influence on Smerdiakov—rather than his, or the other brothers', *brotherly* responsibility for "the lackey."

A possible objection to my view is that what I see as the blockage of a part of the reader's consciousness, important for Dostoevsky, might be considered altogether nonexistent. But this objection ignores too many plot intricacies evolving around Smerdiakov. Why should the key values of the novel be applicable to everyone but him? Why should Dostoevsky make him Fedor Pavlovich's illegitimate son in the first place? Why should the association with stinking be redeemed for Zosima and Smerdiakov's mother and not for Smerdiakov? Why should Dostoevsky raise the concern for everyone's responsibility for their neighbor's iniquity—and then reveal as the murderer the one person whom nobody considers his or her neighbor, let alone a biological brother?

Of course, one could say that, unlike the good and brotherly Russian peasants, Smerdiakov hates his people, his mother and the story of his birth, and unlike the suffering theoretician Ivan and the passionate-yet-good-hearted Mitia and the meek Alesha, he is petty and obsessed with himself and his own illegitimacy. But he takes Ivan's atheism and Mitia's parricidal impulses more seriously and wholeheartedly than the brothers themselves do, and when he sees the ideological failure of his enterprise—manifest in the fact that Ivan is not with him—he is utterly crushed. Yet Dostoevsky, the plot-maker (unlike the wholly unsympathizing narrator), provides Smerdiakov with a glimpse of redemption: after he is ideologically and emotionally crushed, he begins to read Saint Isaak the Syrian—a great ascetic father known for his appeals to pray for the devil. As

Grigorij Pomerants puts it in his book, "Behold, Smerdiakov has finally found his heavenly intercessor."[25]

Finally, at one point following his ideological crisis, Smerdiakov sounds as pathetic as the unspoken words of Gogol's Akakij Akakievich ("I am thy brother!"). Ivan asks him: "Did you really think that everyone was such a coward as you?" Smerdiakov's response slightly changes the implicit context which the question presupposes: "Forgive me, sir, I thought you, too, were like me" (*"Prostite-s, podumal, chto i vy, kak i ia"*—XV:46). Smerdiakov's tone here smacks of more philosophical sincerity than Ivan's question actually requires. For no other character except Smerdiakov would thinking his half-brother similar to himself require asking forgiveness. Here the reader should begin to consider Smerdiakov's disadvantaged position in relation to his brothers. Of course, Ivan is not "just like him." He is a much higher version of Smerdiakov than Smerdiakov himself. In particular, he is not as cowardly as Smerdiakov is (or not definitely). The concrete context of Ivan's question, therefore, undermines, or attempts to undermine, the global significance and the pathos of Smerdiakov's answer. This objection considered, it is interesting that in the notebooks the tone of Smerdiakov's response was much more befitting that of Ivan's question in that it was more concrete and less pathetic than in the final version: "Ivan: "You think everyone is a coward like you. Smerdiakov: "Forgive me, sir [I] thought that you too were *scared* like myself" (*Prostite-s, podumal, chto i vy* ***boites'****, kak i ia*—XV:330).

This last preliminary version resembles the final one in every detail, except for the expression "are scared" (*boites'*) which immediately deprives the sentence of its pathos and reduces the scale of its significance. People are alike only in the most general way, and it is only in this way that Smerdiakov may legitimately pretend to any likeness with Ivan. The moment he compares his particular feature, such as cowardice, to the same feature of Ivan's, he is wrong. This wrongness would fit in the context of Ivan's question. But judging from the change which

[25] Pomerants, 136. Cf. also *ibid.*, 230. Pomerants mentions that the narrator does not dwell on this fact and that "this is an off-handed comment" (*zamechanie mimokhodom*). This offhandedness testifies to the fact that the issues which Dostoevsky considers important and those his narrator does—probably differ.

Smerdiakov's response underwent from the notebooks to the final version, Dostoevsky would rather have Smerdiakov's response transcend the context of Ivan's question than fit into it. That way he would endow Smerdiakov with some Bashmachkin-like pathos ("I am thy brother")—without, however, ever having Smerdiakov say so in so many words, or letting the narrator ever approve of such benevolence toward "the lackey."[26]

In light of this passage, some other seemingly accidental ambiguities also begin to look suspicious. They subliminally imply that there is something wrong in the brothers' constant dissociation of themselves from Smerdiakov. Thus, at one point when Ivan sees Smerdiakov, he "realizes that in his soul, too, there is a lackey Smerdiakov" (*...ponial, chto i v dushe ego sidel lakej Smerdiakov...*"—XIV:242). Russian grammar is ambiguous as to whether it is "*a* lackey-Smerdiakov" or "*the* lackey Smerdiakov." The possibility of the first meaning suggests that there is a Smerdiakov in Ivan's soul. The context allows for both possibilities. On the one hand, the fact that Ivan just saw Smerdiakov before he realized "that Smerdiakov was in his soul" seems to imply the meaning of "*the* lackey." The word order in Russian, however, allows for "*a* lackey," too. On second thought, the reader begins to consider the possibility that even the context itself might suggest "a lackey": one might interpret the passage as pertaining to two different Smerdiakovs—one outside Ivan, sitting on the bench, and the other inside him, sitting in his soul: "There was Smerdiakov the lackey sitting on the bench at the gate and cooling himself with the evening air, and Ivan Fedorovich [...] understood that in his soul, *too* (my emphasis—O. M.: "*i v dushe ego*") there sat a (?) lackey-Smerdiakov" (XIV:242). The word order here is crucial for my reading. If the meaning of "the lackey" were unambiguous, the position of the emphatic *i* in Russian would be different: "*Ivan Fedorovich*

[26] Jakov Zundelovich, *Romany Dostoevskogo*, Tashkent, 1963, asserts that Dostoevsky uses his own voice in the novel. Vetlovskaia also claims that one of the narrator's functions is to endow Dostoevsky's own ideas with the air of objectivity (Vetlovskaia, 48-51). I do not believe, however, that the narrator always pronounces Dostoevsky's own ideas and that the narrator's emotional attitude toward events and characters in the novel is identical to the author's. As Belknap phrased it in his 1967 comment on Zundelovich, it is not that "Dostoevsky's own voice is often audible in the novel" but rather "that Dostoevsky's narrator often echoes Dostoevsky" (Belknap (1967), 77).

ponial, chto (eto) lakej Smerdiakov ***i sidel*** *v ego dushe*"—rather than the actual "*chto* ***i v dushe*** *ego sidel lakej Smerdiakov.*" Just as with Smerdiakov's too general response to Ivan's question about fear, here too, Dostoevsky substitutes a slightly "mismatched" sentence for the one which would actually befit the context. Reading this substitution as non-accidental and informative suggests a much broader and theologically serious responsibility for another's sins than even Zosima pronounces—namely, that one is responsible for another's sins because one shares the other's sinfulness. Ignoring Smerdiakov's brotherhood, Ivan begins to share in his lackeyhood.

The sentence substitution is subtle, and ascribing any importance to it may seem farfetched. I believe, however, that this "farfetchedness" is illusory and is important to Dostoevsky precisely as an illusory effect. It enables Dostoevsky to lull not merely Ivan, but also the reader into ignoring Smerdiakov as other than a hopeless criminal and a brother to no-one. This lulling, in turn, establishes the taboo on the important and valid notion of Smerdiakov's equality to Ivan or to anyone having "a Smerdiakov in his soul"—be it a character or a reader. I have already discussed some of the less intricate ways in which Dostoevsky implicates the reader in the brotherhood taboo of the characters, e. g., in the end of the chapter "Lizaveta the Stinkeress." When it concerns Smerdiakov, sentence substitution aims at the same effect.

Like the sentence substitution discussed above, the consistency with which the brothers Karamazov *and* the narrator dislike Smerdiakov implicates the reader in the characters' taboo on the idea that Smerdiakov too participates in the universal brotherhood. The narrator's consistently unsympathizing tone concerning Smerdiakov makes the taboo work uniformally—not only in the minds and for the purposes of the brothers Karamazov, but for the reader as well. As a result—if the reader accepts the idea of universal human brotherhood—which I believe is a very important value in the novel—the reader ignores Smerdiakov as a possible brother—and thereby is urged to share in at least some of the characters' moral responsibilities in the novel. Discussing the evolution of narrative techniques in *The Idiot*, Robin Feuer Miller argues that Dostoevsky implicated the reader in the faults of the characters by gradually moving the narrator's point of view farther from his

own and closer to that of other characters. Miller says that "[Dostoevsky] planned a plot and a narrative strategy [which amounts to removing the omniscient narrator or making his omniscience inconsistent[27]], that would force the reader to examine his own notions of responsibility to his fellow man."[28] As Miller herself indicates in her 1992 book, her argument about *The Idiot* is also valid for *The Brothers Karamazov*.[29]

Besides narrative techniques, Dostoevsky implicates the reader in the characters' neglect of Smerdiakov by creating *secondary taboos* which operate on intertextual references. A Gospel intertext suggesting a parallel between Ivan and Smerdiakov on the one hand and Jesus and His disciples on the other, would be a tabooed blasphemy.[30] As I already mentioned, however, I believe that distorted Biblical intertexts in Dostoevsky refer to Biblical messages much more sincerely than do stylizations of Biblical language, Church Slavonicisms or direct quotations. In this respect, tabooed Biblical references or parallels (the so-called blasphemous evocations of the Bible in a secular context) in Dostoevsky bear even more intensely religious messages than any other transformation of a Biblical

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[27] This paraphrase of Miller is based on R. F. Miller (1981), 228, 230.

[28] R. F. Miller (1981), 227; also *ibid.*, 228, 230. Miller's recent book about *The Brothers Karamazov* also concentrates on the techniques used by Dostoevsky to implicate the reader. Cf. also my discussion of this narrative strategy in my chapter on *The Idiot*.

[29] Cf. the previous note, R. F. Miller (1992), *passim*, esp. 4.

[30] Within the novel itself this Master-Disciple relationship definitely functions as a parody of the same relationship between Zosima and Alesha. Furthermore, as Marcia Morris emphasizes, this relationship between Ivan and Smerdiakov is not the only parody provided by Dostoevsky for the relationship between Zosima and Alesha. The other parody is the same relationship between Ferapont, the ascetic whom Dostoevsky clearly condemns, and the visiting monk (cf. Marcia Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries: The Ascetic Hero in Russian Literature*, Albany: SUNY University Press, 1993, 122). One may, of course, further extrapolate from this parallel that like Smerdiakov, Ferapont also might have a redeeming trait or a sore spot, but I tend to agree with Morris that as an ascetic figure in 19th c. literature, Ferapont is indeed designed to be structurally schematic and morally problematic, while I would argue against the schematic interpretation of such Dostoevsky's non-ascetic villains as Svidrigajlov, Stavrogin, and Smerdiakov. We think that Ferapont is irredeemable because Dostoevsky has not shown us any of Ferapont's sore spots: an ascetic is not supposed to have any. Although Dostoevsky's world has many redeemable characters who have ascetic traits (Paulina in "The Gambler," Katerina Ivanovna Marmeladova, Raskolnikov, Nastasia Filippovna, the writer himself), one must accept Morris' contention which implies that ascetics and hysteria are related in Dostoevsky, and that a Dostoevskian ascetic may be saved despite his/ her asceticism, not because of it.

source. Dostoevsky uses precisely such a tabooed Biblical intertext to demonstrate that Ivan's unconscious neglect of Smerdiakov has some implications for the reader's subconscious. Referring to Ivan's third visit to Smerdiakov (proleptically, just before he describes the first visit—possibly in order to make the sentence in question sound more casual and matter-of-fact, and less noticeable: XV:41), the narrator says: "This is now the third time that Ivan came to talk to Smerdiakov after that he returned from Moscow." (I used the awkward King-Jamesian "after that" for reasons I will discuss presently). In Russian, this sentence is a structural and phraseological calque of John, 21:14[31] in the Russian Synodal version (the only Russian version existing in Dostoevsky's times): "This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples after that he was risen from the dead." Compare:

> The novel: **Eto uzhe v tretij raz** shel Ivan Fedorovich govorit' so Smerdiakovym **po voz**vrashchenii **svoem iz** Moskvy.(XV:41)
> John, 21:14: **Eto uzhe v tretij raz** iavilsia Iisus uchenikam Svoim **po vos**kresenii **Svoem iz** mertvykh.

Like the Gospel verse, the Dostoevsky sentence inverts subject and predicate, and the possessive pronoun and the verbal noun it modifies. The morphology and the syntactic position of the verbal nouns in the Dostoevsky are also identical to those of the Gospel. Compare: *shel Ivan* vs. *iavilsia Iisus*, and *vozvrashchenii svoem* vs. *voskresenii Svoem. Po vozvrashchenii/ voskresenii svoem* instead of *posle togo, kak on vernulsia/ voskres*, sounds as markedly artificial as the King-Jamesian "after that he returned/ rose from the dead." These features are typical for the idiomatically artificial style of the Russian Synodal translation—which still reflects the style and syntax of the Church Slavonic but uses Russian vocabulary. The sentence in the novel conforms to the artificiality typical of the Synodal translation for a reason: it signals a reference to the Gospel.

The marked (enlarged) words, prepositions, prefixes and suffixes are identical, and their respective morphological and

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[31] Geir Kjetsaa notes that in Dostoevsky's copy of the Russian Bible, of the four Gospels, St. John's has 58 markings—compared to 13 in St. Matthew's, seven in St. Luke's and only two in St. Mark's. (Cited from *SEEJ*, vol. 34, no. 2, summer 1990, 255). This information suggests that Dostoevsky probably ascribed great significance to the intertext analyzed here. Cf. also Geir Kjetsaa, *Dostoevsky and his New Testament*, Oslo and New Jersey, 1984.

syntactic functions fully correspond in the two quotations. Such formal correspondence creates a situation typical of the genre of parody. It emphasizes the opposition in meaning of the *non*-corresponding elements—and yet stresses the parallelism of their functions in their own contexts. In other words, Ivan is no Jesus but Smerdiakov is related to him by discipleship—the way Jesus's disciples are related to *Him*.

Ivan overlooks the fact that Smerdiakov is his disciple. (This discipleship involves much more than a mere ideological influence, as the functional correspondence with the discipleship to Jesus suggests). Moreover, on his way to Smerdiakov, he is convinced that *he* is about to learn something from Smerdiakov. Yet this discipleship is what has led Smerdiakov to kill Fedor Pavlovich and has morally implicated Ivan in this murder.

Thus the message of the intertext provides a comment on Ivan's state of mind (or rather, state of anything-but-mind). The form of the intertext, however, also forces *the reader* to psychologically block the importance of this very comment. The Gospel parallel between Ivan and Smerdiakov on the one hand and Jesus and his disciples on the other, is shockingly blasphemous and therefore taboo for the reader. Rather than merely neglecting this parallel, the reader unconsciously considers it scandalous, and therefore *blocks* it as taboo. This complex subconscious reaction to an intertextual taboo in turn implicates the reader in the guilt for *Ivan's* neglect of his responsibility for Smerdiakov as his disciple. After all, Ivan blocks the idea of Smerdiakov's discipleship in the same way, and probably even for the same reason that the reader blocks the parallel between Ivan-Smerdiakov and Jesus-disciples: Ivan never claimed the role of Jesus in Smerdiakov's life! (Or so he thinks).

Aside from exploiting people's natural tendency to taboo any association of a Smerdiakov with a disciple of Jesus, Dostoevsky also finds some purely linguistic ways to strengthen the taboo by burying the reference (which nevertheless is definitely present—just as the probability that Fedor is Smerdiakov's father is great despite, or even because of the fact that the narrator presents the information on Smerdiakov with deliberate vagueness). The syntactic reference to the Gospel verse is somewhat veiled by the fact that Dostoevsky uses the calque of the verse in Russian, rather than in Church Slavonic. If the sentence followed the pattern of the same verse in Church Slavonic,

any Russian reader would immediately recognize it as a quote from or a reference to a sacred source—and would be thereby deprived of the opportunity to block this reference if it shocked him/her too much. But the sentence structure of the Synodal translation almost passes for normal, and the reader remains as free to block the reference to the Gospel as he/she is to block Smerdiakov's sonhood to Fedor. Dostoevsky, therefore, intended to underplay the effect of this intertext upon his reader—or rather to make it appeal to the reader's subconscious, bypassing his/her conscious mind. But the message which the reader receives while *his/ her* conscious mind is dormant is that *Ivan's* conscious mind is also dormant. If Dostoevsky openly stated to the reader that Ivan neglected the implications of his teacher-disciple relationship with Smerdiakov, the reader would be allowed to remain above Ivan's negligence. Instead, Dostoevsky lulls the reader and puts him/her in the same boat with the careless Ivan—thus forcing the reader to share Ivan's responsibility for ignoring Smerdiakov.

In *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky created solidarity of moral responsibility between his characters and his reader, and even his narrator, by forcing them to ignore things together. For this purpose, Smerdiakov and the taboo on any sympathy or sense of brotherhood—of any kind—toward him are essential for Dostoevsky, the plot-maker. Otherwise, one would be urged to believe that Dostoevsky needed Smerdiakov only as a villain and scapegoat—an idea unlikely for a novel which teaches one not to judge by appearances.

Smerdiakov in the Context of Other Murderers Who are Experts on Tabooing

In his article on Smerdiakov, G. S. Morson writes that Smerdiakov violates many traditional taboos in his speech acts.[32] One might add to this that Smerdiakov also violates the key traditional taboo—the one on murder. These violations, however, have not prevented other Dostoevskian murderers from observing and signaling the taboos that concern *their own* sore

[32] Morson, 235.

spots. Raskolnikov, Rogozhin, Petrov and many other criminals in *The Notes from the House of the Dead inflict* such sore spots on themselves by violating the traditional taboo on murder. Their unmentionable sore spots concern their crimes. In their cases, the crime *causes* the verbal taboo. (One may classify Ivan and Stavrogin with their tormented consciences as such criminals, if one chooses to implicate them in their neighbors' crimes).

The crimes of the other two taboo-experts, Trusotsky and Smerdiakov, do not cause their idiosyncratic sore spots but rather *result* from them. These murderers' sore spots are not the crimes they have committed (i. e., Fedor Pavlovich's murder by Smerdiakov, and Liza's death which was ultimately caused by Trusotsky). Their sore spots are *their motives, the reasons* for which they have committed their crimes. Trusotsky's reason is that he was denied his fatherhood to Liza; Smerdiakov's reason is that he was denied his brotherhood to the rest of the brothers Karamazov. Consequently, if these unmentionable sore spots caused their crimes, those who initially caused these unmentionable sore spots must also be responsible for these criminals' crimes. In Trusotsky's case, this logic implicates only his unwary rival Velchaninov, Liza's natural father. In Smerdiakov's case, it implicates his natural brothers, but most importantly, it also implicates all those who deny him *universal* brotherhood—i. e., all of us. Like Smerdiakov's brothers, we treat the fact that he is Fedor's illegitimate son as a self-evident social taboo, *unconsciously* repressing the importance of this fact. Smerdiakov himself, however, deautomatizes this taboo. For him his denied brotherhood is crucial, and *therefore* unmentionable. Like Trusotsky, he remembers what those who forget him forget. Furthermore, like Trusotsky, Smerdiakov manages to implicate in his crime those who forget him.

In Dostoevsky sensitivity to the importance of taboo may be distributed in many different ways among the author, the narrator, characters and the reader. In *Demons* the author and the narrator observe the main taboo, as do the reader (albeit unconsciously) and most of the characters, except Stavrogin and, at one point Stepan Trofimovich. In *Notes from the House of the Dead* the characters (the local prisoners) observe the operative taboo, while the narrator Gorianchikov, who is also the main character, does not observe it, thereby implicating the reader in

this violation. In *Crime and Punishment* each character observes his or her own taboo, but the narrator observes each of these when speaking about that character. The reader may fall behind, unless he realizes each character's sore spot as the factor determining the nature of his or her discourse. The same is true in *The Idiot*. In these two novels taboos are internalized; they signal values personally discovered by the characters. In *The Eternal Husband* Trusotsky is the only consistent observer of taboos, and both Velchaninov and the narrator violate them until Velchaninov learns their importance. In *The Adolescent*, most of the characters understand the importance of taboos, with the exception of the main character and the narrator, who are the same person. This person has to learn the importance of taboo. Only in *The Brothers Karamazov* does there seem to be only one character that understands the chief taboo of the novel, and that is the villain. The rest—the reader, the characters, and the narrator—do not. Should this list include the author? I doubt it—although many other readers do not.

Paradoxically, *The Brothers Karamazov*, a novel that, according to Diane Thompson, ascribes immense significance to shared cultural and personal memories,[33] also demonstrates the immense consequences of an *un*shared memory of one's sonship, the memory which Smerdiakov alone possesses and cherishes.

[33] Cf. Thompson, 8, *passim*.

Conclusion

The System of Values in Dostoevsky's Fiction

The taboos in each of the works I have discussed allow one to observe the following about the system of values in Dostoevsky's fiction:

A. No taboos means no values (the initial zero-tabooing in *The Idiot*, the initial state of Arkady in *The Adolescent*, Peter Verkhovensky in *Demons*).
B. No values means no taboos (the case of Stavrogin in *Demons*, also well-bred cynics, such as Velchaninov);
C. The voice of one's conscience is absolute, inviolable and irrefutable, as opposed to any reproaches voiced by law or one's neighbor (*Crime and Punishment, The Notes from the House of the Dead*);
D. Taboos can reactivate the literal meaning of metaphors, and the literal meaning of metaphors occasionally reactivates seemingly outdated taboos (*Demons, The Idiot*, the hell image in *Notes from the House of the Dead*);
E. Demons and hell should not be tinkered with (*Demons, The Notes from the House of the Dead*);
F. Bad people should be treated as carefully as good ones (Alena Ivanovna in *Crime and Punishment*, Rogozhin, Smerdiakov, Trusotsky);
G. Murderers are often more sensitive to taboos than anyone around them (Petrov, Raskolnikov, Rogozhin, Trusotsky, Smerdiakov);
H. All people, including even the reader, are implicated in the sins of their neighbor. Therefore no one may condemn anyone else (Smerdiakov).

Dostoevsky or his characters state many of these beliefs in places where they are not tabooed. Thus Zosima preaches the

matters most (as with the adolescent and his numerous mentors of various temperaments and styles of discourse), etc.

Dostoevsky, therefore, uses the language of social interactions for non-social purposes. Rather than depicting society, he borrows the sign system of literature - anthropological and fictional -that depicts society, in order to depict and address human conscience, conscious, unconscious, and subconscious. Signs of verbal social decorum are transformed by having gained a new function; they no longer apply to the actual social decorum. The latter is constantly and scandalously violated in Dostoevsky precisely by those characters who are exceptionally sensitive to the new, *meta*-social functions of these signals of decorum. Hence the squeamish and touchy murderers (Petrov, Raskolnikov, Svidrigajlov, Rogozhin, Smerdiakov), the hypersensitive harlots (Sonia, Nastas'ia), the half-witted wedded virgin, sister of a drunken blackmailer, who euphemizes the word "devil" (Maria Lebiadkina), the cuckold who scandalizes his cuckolders (Trusotsky), the prophesying, truth-revealing fool-for, - Christ who commands his interlocutors and his own thoughts to shut up (Myshkin), and the lackey-bastard who checks his well-born half-brothers at the mention of the word "brother" (Smerdiakov). All these impure tabooers observe rules of decorum selectively, in various circumstances, but hardly ever in a high society parlor room.

In his *Gift*, Vladimir Nabokov describes Dostoevsky's poetics as "the backward transformation of Bedlam into Bethlehem." This definition of the fallenness of the world presented by Dostoevsky is much more favorable than any assessment of Dostoevsky in Nabokov's *Lectures on Russian Literature*, but the great twentieth century pseudo-apostate (a "morano") of Dostoevsky's poetics is unaware that Dostoevsky might have considered his label a compliment. Dostoevsky indeed strove to transform a madhouse into a holy place, and he would be glad to learn that Nabokov believed he succeeded. Apparently, the objection that Nabokov had to such a poetics was that it was too chaotic. My study of taboos reveals that Dostoevsky turned his characters' madness, or at least their inability to endure even the mention of certain matters—into a method. Furthermore, like Dostoevsky's holy fools whom Harriet Murav has described in her study, Dostoevsky's tabooers manage to "turn the world upside down, but in order to show it the kingdom of

heaven."[1] Nabokov underestimated the newness and unconventionality of the "upside-down" order symbolized by Bethlehem: to some the original Bethlehem looked like Bedlam. As the whole Orthodox church sings on the day of Nativity,

Today the **Virgin gives birth** to the

Preexistent One,

And the earth offers a **cave** to the **Unapproachable** One;

Angels with **shepherds** give praise,

And the magi travel with a star;

Since for **our sake** was born

The **Eternal God** as a **little child**.

(The Nativity Kondakion)

The oppositions (marked here graphically) bring together the incompatible: a virgin gives birth; birth - Preexistent; cave - Unapproachable; Angels [above] - shepherds [below]; our sake - God; Eternal - little child. Orthodox liturgical poetry often uses antinomies and expresses amazement, and it traces the legitimacy of its antinomian approach to Bethlehem. The Bethlehem event drastically alters and upsets the established order - spatial, temporal and hierarchial. This upset order could be considered a Bedlam even by standards which Nabokov may find more rational than those of Dostoevsky. Here I part with Robert A. Maguire who maintains that since Pseudo-Dionysius Orthodoxy has influenced Russian literature (Gogol in particular) mainly as the religion of hierarchies.[2] Orthodox liturgics stress the upsetting of purely celestial hierarchies in many feasts besides the Nativity. Thus at Christ's Ascension the angels are

[1] Murav, 10.

[2] Cf. Robert A. Maguire, *Exploring Gogol*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994, 85-87, 279; also Maguire, "Gogol and Pseudo-Dionysius," *in Russianness, in Honor of Rufus Mathewson.* ed. Robert L. Belknap, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988.

surprised to see a human being rising above them; at the Entrance of the Mother of God to the Temple they "are amazed that a Virgin [a woman!] comes to the Holy of Holies," and at Her Assumption or Dormition they "wonder how a Virgin comes from earth to heaven." To the angels Bethlehem certainly has many elements of a Bedlam - only they eventually accept them out of obedience to *their own* place in celestial hierarchy. The fact that the new order upsets the old does not imply that the new order is a chaos, but to many people concerned with the old order the new one may indeed appear as a Bedlam.

Dostoevsky's sensitivity to this "Bedlam" element in the actual Good News prompted him to develop his poetics (which he himself always believed to be Christian) around "mad" people who proclaim their ideas through the language of pain rather than through coherent discourse. Taboos befit this pain because they provide more viable signals than expressed ideas: what compromises the latter often does not affect the validity of taboos. Unlike spoken ideas, taboos do not have to originate with worthy or even intelligent people in order to be taken seriously. In order to *pronounce* a truth convincingly, one has to stick to it, whereas the validity of taboos does not require that their signalers be morally and intellectually consistent. Anyone's "gut" reaction to the "indecent" violation of an unwritten law or of his or her own sore spot speaks for itself and requires no further proof of its genuineness. A "gut" reaction does not need any justification by deeds. Maria Lebiadkina's madness or possessedness does not compromise the validity of the taboo on the demonic, to which she is sensitive; neither do Petrov's criminal background, Rogozhin's beastly temperament and the baseness of Trusotsky or Smerdiakov compromise the importance of their own sore spots that they regard as taboo. Even the villain Svidrigajlov has sore spots and taboos them.

A person who does not perceive the prominence of Dostoevsky's characters' taboos may not know how to deal with all the villains, criminals and madmen listed above. Thus Nicholas Berdiaev, who of all people believed that in the end of history everyone shall be saved,[3] and who, on the other hand, was fascinated by what he called Dostoevsky's "Christian

[3] Cf. *Samopoznanie*, ch. 11, the section on eschatology, in Nikolaj Berdiaev, *Sobranie sochinenij*, tt. 1-4, Paris: YMCA-Press, 1983-1989, vol. 1, 350-351.

anthropocentrism,"[4] considered Dostoevsky's fools and criminals to be lost for Salvation. In his "Revelation about the Human Being in Dostoevsky's Creative Work," Berdiaev finds Trusotsky, Smerdiakov, and Svidrigajlov as irredeemable as Peter Verkhovensky:

> [The reader eventually] [...] reaches maturity and inner freedom in his attitude to evil. But Dostoevsky also has a secretion of doubles [*vydelenie dvojnikov*], the reverse likenesses [existing] in a shadowy world, who are **the refuse of the ways of development [*otbrosov putej razvitiia*]. These beings do not have any independent existence, they live as shadows.** Such are Svidrigajlov, Peter Verkhovensky, the Eternal Husband, Smerdiakov. These are not worth a straw, they do not exist. These beings drag out vampiric existences.[5]

Berdiaev would have been right if Smerdiakov, the Eternal Husband, and Svidrigajlov did not have important sore spots and did not taboo them. (The problem with Peter Verkhovensky, in fact, seems to be that he feels no pain, moral, emotional or physical, which he would signal by tabooing it—even though, like Smerdiakov, he is full of envy and complexes.[6]) Since these villains feel and signal pain, however, the ignoring of their sore spots implicates any character or reader who considers them "not worth a straw"—including Berdiaev. Only the language of taboos, in which the pain of this "refuse" expresses itself, reveals that Dostoevsky neither discarded this refuse nor wanted his reader to discard it. These "refuse" characters, leading shadow-lives "not being worth a straw," *valorize* themselves by feeling pain and signalling it as unmentionable. Ivan Karamazov's *proclaimed* concern about the suffering of innocents, on the other hand, being purely theoretical, still needs valorization and confirmation. This concern is compromisable and compromised by the fact that in practice, Ivan rarely commits a charitable deed for his immediate neighbors—children or

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[4] Cf. Berdiaev (1968), esp. 3, where Berdiaev maintains that "having lost the Humanist belief in the human being, Dostoevsky nonetheless remained faithful to the Christian belief in the human being." Also: "Otkrovenie o cheloveke v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo," in Berdiaev (1989), vol. 3.

[5] Cf. "Otkrovenie o cheloveke v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo, " *ibid.*, 84. Cf. also Berdiaev (1968), 105.

[6] See also my note on Ferapont in the *Brothers Karamazov* chapter.

adults.[7] There exist non-authoritative ideologues or speakers in Dostoevsky's works, but there are no non-authoritative tabooers and taboo-signalers. Taboos in Dostoevsky reveal that his system of values can afford mad or unworthy signalers—the only kind that our fallen world can provide. The ultimate proof of the validity of any idea or notion in Dostoevsky's fiction is whether in any work or context this notion turns out to be an unmentionable sore spot to a person or a group of people, whether or not these people are worthy of subscribing to this idea. Thus Dostoevsky found a way to make fallen people in our fallen world testify to absolute values. His Bedlam can be transformed into Bethlehem by expressing itself in this elaborated language of pain. In Chapter 8 of his 1990 book on *The Brothers Karamazov*, Robert Belknap maintains that Dostoevsky implicates his reader in his characters' concerns by showing the reader from the inside the minds of murderers, radicals, and other sinners.[8] In my book I have tried to show how Dostoevsky implicates his reader in his characters' concerns by forcing the reader to share the taboos existing in the minds of murderers, radicals, and other sinners in his fiction.

The manner in which Dostoevsky establishes taboos in his fiction reveals not only his system of values but also his anthropology. Anyone who is capable of feeling pain and signaling his or her sore spot, or is sensitive enough to his or her neighbors' sore spots, is still human. This anthropology excludes anyone who is insensitive to the pain of Dostoevsky's characters, including those readers who may find Dostoevsky's poetics annoying because characters in his fiction "overreact" to pain or express their reaction in an indecorous, hysterical way.

[7] The one significant exception is the drunken peasant whom Ivan himself at first almost kills (XV: 57) but later, after his last visit to Smerdiakov, saves in a manner very similar to that of the Good Samaritan in the Gospels (XV: 68-69).

[8] Belknap (1990), 156.

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OLGA MEERSON was born in Moscow in 1959 and emigrated to Israel in 1974, where she completed her high school education at the Hebrew University High School in Jerusalem in 1977. She subsequently moved to the United States and received the BA in Liberal Arts from Hunter College in New York City (1984) and the MA (1986) and PhD (1991) in Russian Literature from Columbia University. She is married (1977—present) to an Orthodox priest and theologian and has three children (ages 14, 8, and 4). Currently she is an Assistant Professor of Russian at Georgetown University. Dr. Meerson's interests range from Old Testament exegesis (she is fluent in Hebrew) to Russian Orthodox liturgical poetics and musicology (she has served as a reader and choir director in a Russian Orthodox parish for twelve years) to Ilya Zdanevich, Andrej Platonov, and contemporary Russian women writers, especially poets. Her strongest professional asset is her ear. She is particularly interested in the hidden motivation for apparent non-sequiturs. Although she knows and likes to teach 19th c. Russian Literature, her interest in Dostoevsky stems from her fascination with 20th c.

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