Dostoevsky and the Woman Question

REREADINGS AT THE END OF A CENTURY

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In memory of
my Russian mother, Vanda Brazel Pelikan,
and for my daughters Laura, Rachel, and Tamara

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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLITERATION

Occasional citations in Russian are from F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-). In the body of my text I use the U.S. Board on Geographic Names transliteration system, except when quoting from translators or critics who use other transliteration systems. Quotations from Dostoevsky's works in English are taken from the following translations, abbreviated as indicated:

BK *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990).

CP *Crime and Punishment*, trans. David Magarshack (London & New York: Penguin Books, 1951).

D Boris Brazol's *Diary of a Writer* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs M. Smith Inc., 1985).

EH *The Eternal Husband*, trans. Constance Garnett, in *Three Short Novels of Dostoevsky* (New York: Doubleday, 1960).

G *The Gambler*, trans. Victor Terras (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

GC *A Gentle Creature*, trans. David Magarshack, in *Great Short Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky* (New York: Harper Row, 1968).

I *The Idiot*, trans. Henry and Olga Carlisle (New York: NAL, 1969).

P *The Possessed*, trans. Andrew MacAndrew (New York: NAL, 1962).

SD *Diary of Appolonaria Suslova* in *The Gambler*, trans. Victor Terras (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

SL A. Suslova, *The Stranger and Her Lover*, in *The Gambler*, trans. Victor Terras (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

I also quote from George Sand's *Mauprat*, trans. Diane Johnson (Boston: Little Brown, 1977) and abbreviated *M*.

CONTENTS

Introduction: Dostoevsky and "The Feminine"

This book explores Dostoevsky's major works with a focus on his women characters, his references to rape and men's abuse of women, and his construction of "the feminine." Such an approach to Dostoevsky is "feminist" mainly in the sense that "the woman question" is not subsumed within a larger frame. Intended not to impose feminist ideology upon the writer, but rather to enlarge feminist discourse through Dostoevsky, the following chapters explore new readings with a sense of their positioning at the end of this century.

The project is long overdue if we consider how much more commentary the subject of women in Tolstoy's work has provoked in contrast.[1] It is belated if we consider how critics have mined the motifs of the "margin" and the "threshold," of indeterminacy and the way "conversion hovers at the edge of perversion" in Dostoevsky's work.[2] The blurring of boundaries between erotic and spiritual experience (in Dostoevsky's life as well as in his characters' lives) suggests what is polymorphous in his psychology and polyphonic in his style. If Dostoevsky responded intellectually to a sense of crisis and with an intuition that "the master discourses in the West [were] increasingly perceived as no longer adequate for explaining the world," what he dramatized in fiction was the way men's and women's identities were thrown into question through this crisis.[3] His defense against Western secularization and breakdown takes the form of inscribing "the feminine" as the sacred; but this sacralization is undermined by a deeper intuition of the way certain masculine, sexist impulses exploit and eroticize female spirituality. His contribution to feminist discourse consists of multiple exposures of the way men's liberties conflict with women's liberations.

Elaine Showalter notes that Western consciousness about rape and child abuse has "focused on censoring art and banning pornography rather than

on examining the social construction of male sexual violence."[4] Dostoevsky contributes to that examination in ways that neither traditional nor feminist readers have fully explored. As his male convert/pervert pursues his quest for God or salvation, "the feminine" emerges as a problem associated with confusions about the meaning of masculinity and male questing. The plots and structures of the major works make explicit the various attempts by Dostoevsky's heroes to violently repress "the feminine," only to find it returning to destabilize their former assumptions.

Dostoevsky's women carry what is least representable, least vocalized, most marginal, but also most modernist in his fiction. While his "positive" traditionalist women often serve as redeemers of criminal or suffering men, his "new" women perform ambiguously motivated critiques of traditional masculinity. The concept of the "new women," imported from France during Russia's politically turbulent 1860s, was central to debates about Russia's future and Dostoevsky's vision of it. His "negative," hysterical, rebellious, or suicidal women characters make us conscious of the radically transformed social relations the author struggles but fails to repress in his fiction. His obsession with the "new" woman who calls for changed relations between the sexes may symbolize a lifting of personal repression in Freud's sense.[5] The new woman's desires and sufferings, explicitly represented through Polina in *The Gambler* but interrogated in a more complex way through Nastasya Filipovna of *The Idiot* and Katerina Ivanovna of *The Brothers Karamazov*, express the pull toward modernization that Dostoevsky otherwise denies. Dostoevsky's fiction dramatizes what Charles Taylor calls the transforming powers of modern identities even while the novelist opposes them.[6]

Perhaps because Dostoevsky wrote no major novel named for a woman character (*Netochka Nezvanova* is a minor work), readers have not been drawn inevitably to his woman question as in the case of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Dostoevsky's negative responses to Nikolai Chernyshevsky's socialist heroinism in *What Is to Be Done?* and his explicit support of Slavophiles, Russian imperialism, and the Czars indicate an antifeminist stance. A late-twentieth-century woman reader, finding few direct statements of his commitment to ending women's social oppression, might feel justified in supporting Barbara Heldt's evaluation of the writer as a perpetrator of male chauvinist attitudes and female stereotyping.[7] Yet this judgment does not fit easily with intuitive judgments about the greatness and breadth of Dostoevsky's work or with theoretical justifications for that greatness, particularly in an American reading climate that has welcomed the liberating potencies of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories and deconstruction.

The end of the cold war, with its concomitant assimilations of feminist, gendered, and multicultural discourses, is strongly influencing traditional reading habits, even if gender theory in Slavic studies is still in its early stages. The tendency to line up with either "right"- or "left"-wing readings of Dostoevsky, or to identify him as a liberator or reactionary, has recently yielded to some consensus that Dostoevsky is a "dialogic" writer or, in Gary Saul Morson's terms, a writer who explores boundaries and possibilities that disclose a world of "radical instabilities."[8] Cold war critics of the 1950s who read *The Possessed* as a humorless prophetic attack on Stalinism may seem as narrowly politicized to us today as the "Yipsels" (Young People's Socialist Leaguers) of the 1930s who read *Crime and Punishment* as a guide to *The Communist Manifesto*.[9] Reading horizons necessarily change through time, but visions of change (and the desire for enlarged perspectives and syntheses) become more emphatic, as Frank Kermode reminds us, at the end of centuries.

Recent interpretations of Dostoevsky's works influenced by Bakhtin illustrate this change. Students of literary history may find significant the fact that translations of Bakhtin's texts into English occurred during the same decades that feminist discourse gained wide audiences and that Soviet Communism began to dissolve. Bakhtin, long known to Slavists as a great Dostoevsky critic, was rediscovered in the United States as literary criticism was being drawn to the problem of otherness and "the other" within a post-colonialist, post-cold war, and post-patriarchal culture. Interest in Bakhtin's interpretations of the "dialogic" Dostoevsky against the "monologic" Tolstoy became part of a climate in which the "hegemony" of Euro-American culture was criticized along with "phallocentrism." While Bakhtin's initial introducers and English-language translators of the 1970s and 1980s often discussed the cultural changes that produced Bakhtin's renewed importance, few mentioned "feminism" or "gender" as important dimensions of the change. By 1990, however, Bakhtin's theories about discourse could not be contained by conservative elements within Slavic studies. Literary critics interested in the possible "dialogicity" of writers as different as Matthew Arnold and Joyce Carol Oates were generating a "feminist dialogics."[10] What Bakhtinians shared, whether they were interested in conserving or extending the Russian critic's original insights, was an indebtedness to his model of discourse as tending toward either polyphonic/dialogic (Dostoevskian) or monologic (Tolstoyan) poetics—with the latter frequently described as a form of tyranny over the reader's consciousness.

> Tolstoy's world [writes Bakhtin] is monolithically monologic; the hero's discourse is confined in the fixed framework of the author's discourse about him. . . . Tolstoy's discourse and his monologically naive point of view

permeate everywhere, into all the corners of the world and the soul, *subjugating everything to its unity.*[11]

The discovery that Dostoevsky does not subjugate or impose unity, that he does not inflict his own monologic thoughts upon his characters, inaugurates this book's approach to his fictional women. Bakhtin's remarks about Tolstoy as a subjugator could be mistaken for remarks about Joseph Stalin if we interpret the dialogic-monologic distinction as code language for his criticism of dictatorships. But Bakhtin's praise of Dostoevsky's "distrust of convictions . . . formulas . . . categories and their usual monologic function"[12] also shares a vocabulary with feminist literary criticism concerned with men's monologic impositions upon women's voices. While Bakhtin never refers directly to Soviet or gender politics in his literary analyses, his critique of subjection is as implicitly feminist as it is implicitly antihierarchical and anti-Soviet.

Bakhtin's theories generate ways to analyze links between monologic and patriarchal discourse and between polyphony and women's voices. When he writes that "internally polemical discourse—the word with a sideward glance at someone else's hostile word—literally cringes in the presence or the anticipation of someone else's word,"[13] his description illuminates the psychological condition of those who speak in a context of marginality or fear, as Dostoevsky's lame Maria speaks to the "hero" Stavrogin in *The Possessed* or as the prostitute Sonya initially speaks to Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment.* The project of reading Dostoevsky with gender issues foregrounded is part of the larger problem of analyzing "master-slave" relations or what Hans Jauss describes as "the problem of alterity in many areas: . . . between producer and recipient, between the past of the text and the present of the recipient, between different cultures." The interpretations offered in the following chapters follow Jauss's intuition that "human apprehension . . . arises from productive and receptive interaction with art" and that it is "by its very nature an apprehension of the self in an apprehension of the other."[14] Yet the "Dostoevsky" received by our culture so far has mainly been "produced" by men who have not heard "the other's" voice or having heard it, found it "strained."[15]

Very recently, however, the problem of the past and present receptions of Russian texts has been scrutinized by women scholars, with the result that feminist and gender-oriented vocabularies are being assimilated by Slavic studies. In *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture,* Jane Costlow, Stephanie Sandler, and Judith Vowles revise the idea that interest in "sexuality is a Western, not a Russian, phenomenon" and find in Dostoevsky the "dark"

literary source of more recent Russian and Soviet explorations of sexual desire and dread.[16] Feminist approaches to Pushkin, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, and now Dostoevsky, are bringing "the woman question" from the margins of literary criticism to its center. This is not only because the question is bound and determined by our contemporary historical situation. In his September 1877 entry of *The Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky himself provides the clue to gender-oriented rereadings of his works:

> Can we continue to deny this woman, who has visibly revealed her valor, full equality of rights with the male in the fields of education, professions, tenure of office, she in whom at present we place all our hopes . . . in connection with the regeneration and elevation of society! (*D*, 846)

The writer's declaration provides no necessary approach to the inscription of "the feminine" in his fiction. Rather, the novels offer sufficient dramatizations of the effects of "the woman question" and Dostoevsky's growing anxiety concerning the treatment of women under the law, an anxiety registered in a story included in the diary's pages: *A Gentle Creature* (otherwise translated as *The Meek One*) of 1876. His comments on women, taken together with his confession of being "haunted" since childhood by the crime of rape, evidences a psychological tremor concerning women and sex that runs through his work as a whole. In his biography of Dostoevsky, Geir Kjetsaa describes the following incident:

> [In 1870] Dostoevsky and his guests were discussing what ought to be considered the greatest crime. . . . "The most fearful crime is to rape a child," the writer said quickly and nervously. "To take life—that is dreadful, but to destroy faith in love's beauty is an even more dreadful crime." And he related the [childhood] episode at [his father's] hospital for the poor [when he learned that a girl who was his friend had been raped and murdered]. . . . "All my life I have been haunted by that memory [Dostoevsky continued], which was the most dreadful crime, the most fearful sin. . . . It was with that crime that I punished Stavrogin."[17]

The literary game of tracing the origin of the ultimate masculinist crime in Dostoevsky's work begins with Strakhov's 1883 letter alleging Dostoevsky's violation of a young girl in a bathhouse. Robert L. Jackson has discussed that letter, Tolstoy's responses to it, and the debate surrounding it "through Bakhtin." Jackson reopens an issue that was of particular concern to psychoanalytically minded critics of the 1950s and 1960s, but it may concern readers in the 1990s for different reasons. For Tolstoy the sexual issue

involved judgments as to whether Dostoevsky's character was immoral and debauched, or whether Strakhov was spreading rumors for perverse reasons of his own. For Jackson the issue of sexual violation of females is somewhat resolved by the idea that Dostoevsky, like his own Underground Man, "is in his entirety struggle."[18] Such critical discussions of male immorality and debauchery may not register specific feminist concerns, but they nevertheless move toward the problem of what I call masculinist psychology in Dostoevsky's work.

Whether the psychology of his characters can be best understood in gendered or in sexually neutral terms is a central inquiry in this book. This inquiry acknowledges the writer as one who "in his entirety" expresses dark inner struggles, but it remains skeptical of purely Freudian interpretations of them. Biographical confessions, such as the one about the raped girl, attest to the violence "outside" Dostoevsky's fictions, undermining the idea that "there is no outside to the text"[19] as well as the idea that the novelist's interest in rape was merely a symptom of his private pathology. Because that "outside" of Dostoevsky's work today includes public Euro-American discussions of sexual abuse and sexism, as well as feminist discourse, an interaction between the novelist's work and feminism would appear inevitable.

Dostoevsky's compulsions to depict men's cruelties to women and their variable reactions to these cruelties is more than an element in his work; it is a constitutive part of his vision and his metaphysics. Dostoevsky's contribution to the literature of gender relations may not conform to Western notions of ideological correctness, but it may serve to expose contemporary feminism to some of its own contradictions and limitations: to the way "feminine" and "masculine" constructions of the self depend, for example, on the way "freedom" and "autonomy" are conceived and utilized. Dostoevsky's gift to the reader regarding masculine compulsions and socially constructed male identities stems not from the author's sightings of feminist "light" in our sense, but to his dramatizations of "Russian man's" darkness. It stems rather from an exploration of the masculinity complex in relation to women unmatched by any other nineteenth-century novelist. Dostoevsky's contributions to problems of modernist subjectivity emerge from a particularly Russian context in which contrasts between the exaltation of *symbolic* femininity and the degradation of *actual* women illuminate our ongoing cultural dilemma.

Continuing interest in the Strakhov controversy, together with Dostoevsky's punishments of Stavrogin, Svidrigaylov, Fyodor Karamazov—all of them rapists—suggests why the subject of men's relation to "the feminine" may be important even to readers skeptical of feminism. The novels depict problems of sexual difference, of master-slave relations played out in

several different spheres: in the domestic world of intimate male-female relations and family life (for example, the Marmeladov family and Raskolnikov's relation to Sonya and Dunya); in the life of the streets and brothels where men confront vulnerable young females (as the Underground Man confronts Liza and as Fyodor Karamazov seizes and violates Stinking Lizaveta); and in the life of the courts (dramatized most spectacularly in Katerina Ivanovna's reading of the incriminating letter at Dmitri Karamazov's trial for parricide and through Dostoevsky's interest in the Kornilova case, as described in *The Diary*). The domestic, "underground," and legal worlds of these relations expose multiple gender troubles, as legal experts in Dostoevsky's day well knew, and as Dostoevsky recognized as he became increasingly involved with court cases during the 1870s.

As Laura Engelstein reveals in *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*, after 1861 the Russian "intelligentsia, influenced by Jeremy Bentham and J. S. Mill, saw 'the woman question' as intrinsic to the problem of social reform."[20] Dostoevsky's personal experiences with emancipated women in the 1860s, exacerbated by his interviews with women criminals and his writing about suicides in the 1870s, brought him close to these questions even as he argued against revolutionary—socialist solutions for them. His awareness of female suffering, along with his admiration for the "new woman" of George Sand's early works, influenced him to create characters and scenes whose significance we have yet to appreciate.

Commentators have remarked upon Sand's heroines as a primary source for Dunya of *Crime and Punishment*, Polina of *The Gambler*, Aglaya and Nastasya Filipovna of *The Idiot*, Lisa Tushina of *The Possessed*, and Katerina Ivanovna of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky was particularly impressed by Sand's *Mauprat* (c. 1837). In her novel Sand tells the tale of Bernard Mauprat in his own words, so that her quasi-feminist agenda is disclosed mainly through the male confessor's self-analysis.[21] Mauprat's obsessive love for his cousin Edmée, the struggle in him between violent sensual impulse and sublimated devotion, and his being accused of attempting to rape and murder her because of frustrated passion—all this is a melodramatic version of the theme of male self-discovery through women which Dostoevsky incorporates into his own work.

Despite its Rousseauist idealism and Gothic ingredients (unmodulated passions, ruined castles, betraying relatives, cunning clergy), *Mauprat* suggested to Dostoevsky the image of a woman as a Christ figure who redeems a "fallen" man while simultaneously confronting him with her feminist advocacy of sexual equality. Resonances between Sand's and Dostoevsky's conceptions of a newly evolving gender culture occur in three kinds of scenes.

In *Mauprat* the hero attempts to rape Edmée, she threatens him with a knife, and he is shamed into releasing her. In *Crime and Punishment*, Svidrigaylov locks Dunya in a room in order to rape her, she shoots at him with a gun (and misses), and he is moved to release her. At the end of this scene, in which Mauprat, like Svidrigaylov, cries out, "you do not love me," Edmée and Mauprat are reconciled. What Mauprat threatens—"I will blow my brains out . . . [if you do not] swear to be mine" (*M*, 61)—Svidrigaylov accomplishes in *Crime and Punishment*.

In the second type of scene, the woman reads a book or books to a man and her voice influences or transforms him. Thus Sonya influences Raskolnikov through her reading of the Lazarus story from the Bible in *Crime and Punishment*, and Edmée serves as Bernard Mauprat's literary educator in *Mauprat*. "I imagined," says Mauprat, "that the ideas of these authors [Montaigne, Monesquieu, and so on] acquired a magical clearness in passing through Edmée's lips, and that my mind opened miraculously at the sound of her voice" (*M*, 143). In the final judgment scene of *Mauprat*, as in the trial scenes of *The Brothers Karamazov*, a woman reads a letter of accusation against a man, testifies to his parricidal impulses, and participates in giving evidence that leads to his conviction and punishment. In *Mauprat*, "the reading of the letter" in which Mauprat expresses his intention of killing Edmée, becomes "the final blow" in his trial (*M*, 282), although he is later released—a situation that parallels Katerina Ivanovna's testimony in court against Dmitri Karamazov.

In the conclusion to this book, I suggest that in Dostoevsky's novels women's potential to transform men emerges from the difference women's sexually vulnerable bodies makes as a conscious part of male sensitization. Sand's theme in *Mauprat* is precisely the sensitization of Mauprat to the question of rape, to what women want, and to the strength of an educated woman's point of view. The "corrected" man Edmée wants must learn that "affection cannot be commanded" (*M*, 113) and that she "would never submit to the tyranny of a man, and no more to the violence of a lover than to the blow of a husband" (*M*, 131).

It is perhaps from Sand that Dostoevsky first discovered how women's voices could produce a "loophole" in his heroes' consciousness, what Bakhtin describes as "the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words."[22] Sand's voice in *Mauprat* can be read as an attempt to bridge the gap between men's and women's socially constructed language spheres. Her discourse also mediates between traditionally religious expressions of spirituality and romantic-expressive secularizations (and feminizations) of "the spiritual." Edmée is spiritual because she insists on woman's return to a golden age of freedom and equity, but she is feminist because she demands

a transformation of Eve's subordinate position to Adam. The female protest scenes Dostoevsky "lifts" from Sand indicate the Russian's attraction to a possible future culture in which sacred and feminist impulses are no longer antithetical and sexual essentialism no longer rationalizes oppression.

With the exception of Tzvetan Todorov,[23] discussions of the philosophical problem of sexual essentialism have been missing from most commentaries on Dostoevsky's "feminine," although psychoanalytic critics have asked certain questions about the novels that also engage feminists. They have asked why, for example, Dostoevsky is drawn in his later work toward feminized male figures such as Prince Myshkin and Alyosha; why representations of rage and murder move from the maternal (in *Crime and Punishment*, 1867) to the paternal level in the final work (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1881).[24] Such readings have frequently stressed differences between masculine and feminine sexual "natures," or they have incorporated psychoanalytic emphases on a male "complex" concerning the feminine "object." Dostoevsky criticism has generally offered three kinds of interpretations of "the feminine": (1) traditional accounts of human nature written before 1970 that do not problematize gender difference, including Bakhtin's[25]; (2) feminist accounts after 1970 that do; and (3) several commentaries of the 1990s, including Taylor's, Jauss's, and Todorov's, that suggest that rereadings of Dostoevsky's work can themselves transform debates about larger philosophical issues as well as feminist controversies. A reader's-reception history of the novels would reveal the changing status of "the feminine" as it has emerged and shifted, been repressed and disinterred. Although I leave this large task to others, I believe that Dostoevsky's nineteenth-century novels, with their nerve-straining Russian depths, carry more significance for late-twentieth-century women readers than they did for earlier generations.

The novels seem positioned in an unresolved hermeneutic space, somewhere between Western and non-Western, "first" and "third-world" inscriptions; and that may be part of their strength for readers today. Because ideas about fraternity, equality, liberty, and women's rights were imports from capitalist, secularized Western Europe rather than indigenous movements in Dostoevsky's Russia, the Russian woman question serves as a Rorschach test for the wisdom of imposing Western feminist ideologies upon all the world's women. As some recent self-critical feminists argue, more knowledge about cultural and historical differences that affect women must necessarily enlarge the boundaries of gender theory. My attempt to make "the feminine" in Dostoevsky more concrete has been helped by the opening up of feminist theory to autocritique,[26] and by studies such as Engelstein's that link women's lives to larger histories of literature, modernism, and legal reform.[27]

Bringing Dostoevsky's novels into a "living presence of conversation" that emphasizes women through deliberate rereadings is a way to affirm a "unification of two image-fields in a new field of vision."[28] The notion of two image-fields expresses differences between the way men and women (like nations and like theorists) see and read. The concept draws attention to the way Dostoevsky's reception in the West has been shaped by the field of psychoanalysis after the 1920s, by French Existentialism after the 1940s, and by publications of Bakhtin in new translations in the 1980s that led one commentator to praise him as "one of the leading thinkers of the twentieth century" whose theories about "heteroglossia" would confirm a new world vision.[29] In the 1990s, in the wake of deconstruction, feminism, Bakhtin, and the "collapse" of Communism, "post-modern" readings of "the feminine" in Dostoevsky necessitate a hybrid vocabulary. Commentaries in this book on "the engendering of subjectivity"[30] in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, are intended to complete, when they do not revise, traditional readings that ignored sexual difference.

For traditionalist commentators who did not engage questions of gender in Dostoevsky's work, the novels seemed to represent an essential "human nature." In 1971 Richard Peace suggested "the Karamazovian" as a prototype for the novelist's image of "man" in his commentary on the following passage from *The Brothers Karamazov*:

> [They are] capable of containing all manner of contradictions and of contemplating at one and the same time both abysses: the abyss above us, the abyss of high ideals, and the abyss beneath us, the abyss of the lowest and most vile-stinking degradation. (*BK* xii, ch. 6)

Peace describes Katerina Ivanovna and Grushenka as each containing "within herself both a pole of good and a pole of evil." Each woman's virtue is also her vice, but Peace notes that "in Dostoevsky such obvious polarization never proves to be quite so simple on analysis." Employing no vocabulary that might distinguish the meaning of differences between male and female characters' responses, Peace turns quickly to the subject of "Dmitri's relationship to the two women . . . expressed in terms of a very important symbol—money."[31] In his reading, both sexes appear to be psychologically and emotionally one in Dostoevskian "nature," but as Peace himself notes, this description itself seems reductive.

Diane Oenning Thompson, writing in 1991, is sensitive to the way maternity and memory are linked together in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and she offers strong readings of the way Alyosha's mother affects him. But Thompson,

like Peace, also avoids feminist terms, even as she emphasizes Alyosha's identification with women. Focusing upon the Christian themes, Thompson writes that "the novel is divided along an axis whose poles are two diametrically opposed religious, philosophical positions embodied in their fictional proponents and brought face to face into intense dialogic relationships."[32] Like Peace, Thompson describes Liza, Grushenka, and Katerina Ivanovna as sharing a psychology and a religious quest with men, even as she notes the structural polarization that, in my reading, also extends to women's socially and historically constructed differences.

Edward Wasiolek initially offers a persuasive analysis of Katerina Ivanovana's character, suggesting that Alyosha's difficulty in understanding her is "our difficulty." But he solves the difficulty by subordinating it to the phenomenon of *nadryv* (self-laceration or strain), which he finds Katerina sharing with several male characters, although not with Grushenka. "*Nadryv* is for Dostoevsky a primal psychological fact," Wasiolek writes in 1964. "It is the impulse in the hearts of men that separates one man from another, the impulse we all have to make the world over into the image of our wills." Men who have the power to expedite this impulse more easily than women are not factored in to produce a discussion of difference. "Katerina *loves* from *nadryv*; Father Ferapont *fasts* from *nadryv*; . . . Ivan raises *nadryv* to a level of universal revolt against God."[33] Like Peace's commentary eleven years earlier and Thompson's twenty-seven years later, Wasiolek interprets Katerina in terms of universal human traits that both Dostoevskian sexes are understood to share.

Robert Belknap's 1967 commentary on the function of *nadryv* in *The Brothers Karamazov* is more suggestive to readers interested in the literary resonances of female "willfulness." Belknap emphasizes a "hierarchy" of human responses that "embody perversity, willfulness, self-consciousness, self-dramatization, absurdity" and "buffoonery." He notes that all the characters in the novel "may be ranked hierarchically along [*nadryv*], with Katerina Ivanovna near one end and Maximov near the other."[34]

Katerina's high-class, feminine self-laceration can be understood, from a feminist perspective that follows upon Belknap's commentary, as a form of resentment against men and against the inhibitions of "the feminine" role—a form distinct from the buffoonery and resentment of Fyodor Karamazov or Maximov. Dostoevsky dramatizes two scenes of "strained" behavior and absurd hand-kissing in the novel—one in which Maximov kisses Grushenka's hand and the other in which Katerina kisses it. Comparisons between these two hand-kissing scenes indicate socially constructed gender differences that have repercussions for the novel as a whole. While