

seiner schriftstellerischen Tätigkeit, bis zu seinem letzten großen Roman. Hervorzuheben sind neben den *Brüdern Karamazov* die Analysen der Romane *Der Idiot* und *Böse Geister* (= *Die Dämonen*). McReynolds sieht in der Auseinandersetzung des Autors mit den gegensätzlichen Positionen von Glauben und Unglauben letztlich eine Pattsituation: "Dostoevsky was still seeking answers when he died. His search seems to have led him to find some certainty in the construction of a clear opposition between the ‚Russian‘ and ‚Jewish‘ ideas of his mature imagination; [...]." McReynolds' Studie steht in einem größeren Zusammenhang, der kurz skizziert werden soll. Der Aufschwung der orthodoxen Kirche nach dem Fall der Sowjetunion und die damit verbundene Re-Christianisierung hat auch in der Literaturwissenschaft in Russland Einzug gehalten. Professor Wolgin hat sich unlängst kritisch zu Dostojewskij-Interpreten geäußert, die er als „unsere neuesten Christen bezeichnet“. Man distanziert sich, wie etwa der Moskauer Professor Jesaulow, von einer „besonderen“ religiösen Philologie“, die heute in Russland vor allem in orthodox und „patriotisch“ gesinnten Kreisen gepflegt wird. Dostojewskij wird aus dieser Perspektive vor allem als orthodoxer Denker und Repräsentant der religiösen und imperialen Aspekte der „Russischen Idee“ gesehen. Besonders in der anglo-amerikanischen Slawistik hat in den letzten Jahrzehnten die religiöse Lesart der Werke Dostojewskijs viele Anhänger gefunden, die auf unterschiedliche Weise Dostojewskij als einen Autor verstehen, der orthodoxe religiöse Werte seinen Romanen zugrunde gelegt hat. McReynolds' Buch setzt diesen „neuesten Christen“ in westlichen Dostojewskij-Studien eine originelle, exzellent argumentierte und belegte Studie entgegen, welche die Perspektive wieder zurecht rückt!

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Susanne Fusso: *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006. 216 pp.

Throughout his career, Dostoevsky demonstrated an abiding concern for the power and symbolic potential of human sexuality in all its manifestations. Susanne Fusso's new book represents a significant, beautifully argued, and welcome contribution to the scholarship on the subject, but one that by no means exhausts the potential lines of investigation.

The critic delineates a limited field of inquiry: Dostoevsky's treatment, in selected post-Siberia works, of sexual practices that were con-

sidered “deviant” in his own time, particularly as they affect children and adolescent youth. By limiting her extra-literary sources on sexuality to those available to Dostoevsky, Fusso easily dispenses with one obstacle, the formidable and distracting Freudian paradigm. Appropriately, she frames her study in the broader context of Dostoevsky’s moral universe. Beginning with his search for a suitable artistic language for dealing with this dangerous theme, she ends, as does the great writer in his last work, with a discussion of the family. Her reader leaves with a new understanding not only of the importance of sexual practices in Dostoevsky’s works and of their function in his artistic system, but also of their relevance to more urgent matters.

The subject is particularly suitable for an investigation of narrative technique, for, Fusso notes, as something normally tabooed it “requires careful decoding” (xiv). The critic begins by looking at Dostoevsky’s contribution to a polemic that unfolded in the Russian periodical press in 1861. A jumble of voices have their say in this discussion—Mikhail Katkov, a provincial dignitary’s wife, Cleopatra, a gaggle of lesser-known, but very opinionated, journalists, the great Pushkin, Dostoevsky himself—but the key issue is the author’s defense of artistic freedom. Examining a scene in *The Insulted and Injured*—published simultaneously with this debate—, Fusso demonstrates the link between Dostoevsky’s theorizing and his practice as an artist. The sexual dangers lurking in Pushkin’s poem are associated textually with various “deviations” dealt with in Dostoevsky’s novel. These include pedophilia, exhibitionism, priapism, sadomasochism, and three-way sex. While it is easy for the reader to become distracted by the details, the critic’s point is important: narrative itself can serve as a form of exhibitionistic confession: “to tell about one’s sexual deviations is itself one of the deviations” (10). Also implicated is the “discourse of originality and invention” (11) necessary to create good fiction, which can stray too easily into the realm of sexual perversion. Fusso’s reader becomes uncomfortably aware of the potential commonalities among author, narrator, guardian, teacher, mentor, and sexual predator.

In the following chapters, the critic delves into Dostoevsky’s treatment of various non-standard forms of sexuality: the “insulted female child”, homoerotic desire, and masturbation. Chapter 2 examines the ethical significance of narrative point of view in plots involving sexual predators and young girls. Dostoevsky returned to the theme repeatedly, experimenting in different works with different narrative perspectives. Tragic plot lines build on dangerous secrets, “*tainy*”, which in Dosto-

evsky's world are associated with sexuality. Denial is opposed to the exhibitionism explored elsewhere. The first-person narrator of *The Insulted and Injured* does not acknowledge the obvious sexual tension in his experience with Nelli, for example. The third-person narrative structure of *Crime and Punishment* allows "greater frankness" (22), but pedophilia is displaced from the protagonist to sub-plots involving Svidrigailov. Fusso argues that this represents a conscious strategy on Dostoevsky's part. In Svidrigailov's shocking dream of the lustful child the third person narration allows a more frank treatment: the child's sexual provocation is "much more explicit than Nelli's, and Svidrigailov's horror is more responsible than Ivan's—in other words, more explicitly linked to his own sense of guilt." (24). *The Idiot* represents a "step backward": here the pedophilic plot—Totskii's seduction of the teenage Nastas'ia Fillipovna—is even more marginalized, and the predator experiences even less personal responsibility. Dostoevsky's narrative treatments of pedophilia are schematically presented as: (1) no distance, no guilt (*Insulted and Injured*); (2) distance, guilt (*Crime and Punishment*); and (3) distance, no guilt (*The Idiot*). In Stavrogin's confession, Dostoevsky arrives at the most morally potent configuration: "no distance, guilt." Fusso shows how Dostoevsky reprocessed selected material from *The Insulted and Injured* to heighten the message of moral condemnation in *The Devils*. The "guiltless and unaware" stance of the earlier narrator becomes Stavrogin's "brutal honesty." In his revisions of "At Tikhon's" Dostoevsky softened the harsh details of Stavrogin's crime in an attempt to placate his editor Katkov. Fusso suggests that in making these changes Dostoevsky took "a rather large step backward"(39), but even the new version was insufficiently tame, and "At Tikhon's" remained excluded from the novel. Fusso agrees with scholars such as Kariakin and Dolinin, who argue that Dostoevsky remained committed to the censored chapter, even though he was unable to restore it in a separate edition. Still, it was here that a guilty protagonist finally takes full responsibility for his misdeeds, and for whatever reason, pedophilia as a theme in Dostoevsky's work is put to rest.

In later works, Dostoevsky makes a conscious shift to the child's point of view, focusing on cases where children face sexual challenges alone, without parental guidance. Fusso first examines homoerotic desire in *A Raw Youth*, and then turns to the temptations of masturbation as presented in that novel and in *The Brothers Karamazov*. She makes a very strong case for the importance of homosexuality in *A Raw Youth*, presenting a wealth of fascinating evidence from external sources as well

as from the text of the novel. Arkadii's sexual questioning parallels his attempts to find a "nonstandard literary discourse" (54). The characters' experiences with (male-male) homosexual desire in *A Raw Youth* reflect a shift on the metaliterary level from the conventional narrator-implied reader relationship to the one between narrator and implied author. The critic recommends that *A Raw Youth* be read as "a conversation with Dostoevsky's earlier literary self [...] Arkadii's narrative can then be read as a parody of Dostoevsky's own breathless narrative style." This approach has the advantage of viewing *A Raw Youth* as a laboratory experiment clearing the way for the author's "supreme achievement" in *The Brothers Karamazov* (66-7).

Fusso then turns her attention to onanism, a concern in Dostoevsky's last two novels that also figures in the January and February issues of *The Diary of a Writer* for 1876. The act itself is tabooed, veiled under layers of narration, but is betrayed by unmistakable textual clues. It is a "shameful habit", a "filthy vice", a "deficiency", a "secret debauched vice", etc. Fusso focuses on "case studies" of male virgins—Arkadii Dolgorukii and Alyosha Karamazov—whose chastity is under threat. One can be corrupted "through the ears" by filthy story telling, which stirs up dangerous fantasies that can lead to the secret vice. Fusso cites authorities on the subject—including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, making a belated appearance here—, who argue that indulgence in the solitary sin is tantamount to loss of virginity. The two protagonists are suspended in a state of prolonged peril, but their red cheeks serve as an irrefutable testament to their triumphant innocence. Fusso reads Alyosha Karamazov's famous "fall to the earth" after the dream of Cana as a "spiritual consummation" that liberates him from temptation. For Dostoevsky, writes Fusso, masturbation is "the act of the individual who does not feel part of the social—the dreamer, the outsider, the holy fool. Such an individual may succumb to his powerful fantasies and descend into hysterical madness, like Lise, or commit suicide [and murder, adds the reviewer], like Smerdiakov. Or, with the help of God, he may, like Alyosha, overcome the dangerous power of 'daring and passionate daydreams,' and end by mastering the self" (79). The argument is elegant and persuasive, though given Dostoevsky's ongoing preoccupation with humanity's inborn sinfulness, Fusso's reader questions whether Alyosha's epiphany has really inoculated him for life or whether those promised but never written sequels would have reopened the question.

In Chapter Five, Fusso considers a non-fictional treatment of the theme, Dostoevsky's well-known discussion of the Kroneberg (or

Kroneberg) case in the *Diary of a Writer* in the winter of 1876. She argues that it was the abused child's onanistic tendencies that particularly attracted Dostoevsky's attention. Interestingly enough, the child's shameful vice, which in the thinking of the time represented a grave danger to her health and welfare, could have been viewed as justifying the intensity of the punishment. As in previous chapters, Fusso is particularly insightful when addressing questions of language. So, for example, when Dostoevsky accuses the defense lawyer Spasovich of "*bludodeistvie talanta*", he associates the lawyer's speeches on behalf of his guilty defendant with masturbation (An interesting side discussion leads back to the critic Belinsky's use of the phrase over thirty years before). Fusso points out that whereas Arkadii Dolgorukii and Alyosha Karamazov outgrew the masturbatory phase, the defense lawyer has apparently not done so.

The sexual aberrations that have been Fusso's focus in the bulk of her book lead to a discussion of a more general nature, in the last chapter, on Dostoevsky's concern with the disintegration of the family. Indeed, the troubled children and adolescents in Dostoevsky's fictional works all lack a stable family; the sexual dangers they face can be seen as a symptom of this greater social ailment. The miseries that the father's absence causes for the abandoned child—including their various sexual predicaments—are at the center of Dostoevsky's novelistic plots. Fusso's discussion of the family in this chapter, though insightful, leaves behind the theme of sexuality and narrative that had been her primary focus.

The book concludes with a useful appendix: a translation of the newspaper account of the Kroneberg trial (*Golos*, January 24-29, 1876). The reader of *The Brothers Karamazov* will benefit from a close reading of this account, for its importance in Dostoevsky's presentation of Dmitrii's trial will be obvious. Opinions will differ as to the centrality of the question of sexuality in the Kroneberg case, however. Little Mariia Kroneberg did indulge in the solitary vice; there is no doubt about that, for her secret is exposed in the judicial process. More relevant to this particular reader, though, is the entire complex of the poor child's sins—stealing, lying, and willfulness, as well as masturbation. Dostoevsky's supreme concern was human sinfulness, all of it. For him the Kroneberg case served as a provocative illustration of the challenges facing the new institutions of justice as they took on the age-old struggle against human sin, guilt, and shame. Lawyers, doctors, and judges represent the new secular institutions and they have a responsibility to speak openly. But can they solve the big questions? The narrative artist faces a slightly

different quandary: he strives to answer every possible question, but senses that certain things must remain unspoken. And these secret things may be what is most important. Dostoevsky is interested not simply in sexual deviancy, but in the moment in a child's life when she faces temptation; what she does at that moment will determine her moral fate. Hence the fervor of fathers, judges, doctors, journalists, and novelists, and hence their powerlessness, for the decision—and the secret—is ultimately the child's.

Thus *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky* is about more than sexuality. If the last chapter and the appendix lead away from the issue at hand, that may be as it should be. At the same time, the reader craves more sex and less of everything else. Future studies of the subject will delve into areas not addressed in Fusso's book: the pre-Siberia works; female-female homoerotic desire; the complex relationship between sexual desire and crime; and the huge subject of the "standard" form of sexuality. What is the function of male-female desire in Dostoevsky's plots—in *The Idiot*, for example? On this subject, if pedophilia, homosexuality, and masturbation represent deviations (though, as Fusso proves, Dostoevsky's views on homosexuality are remarkably tolerant) and if marriage is not an immediate option, then what is a sexually frustrated person to do? The answer of the time was, of course, *prostitution*. Widespread and legal in Russia at the time, the practice was considered a hygienic alternative to the horrors of masturbation. Men, among them great writers, took full advantage of this outlet, and readers of *Crime and Punishment* should be grateful that Dostoevsky had thought long and hard about the subject.

The Dostoevsky we meet in Fusso's book is a person some readers may not be familiar with: reasonable, not prurient, undogmatic, concerned for the welfare of the family and society, flexible and sympathetic. His books deal with dangerous themes, but he is always aware of the moral responsibility of the artist. Dostoevsky's comments on Pushkin apply equally to himself: "Reality has been transformed, having passed through art, having passed through the fire of pure, chaste inspiration and through the poet's artistic thought" (6).