

*Dostoevsky and the
Theology of Sin:
A Critical
Examination of The
Dream of a
Ridiculous Man
(1877)*

*Chapter 1 Speaking
of/as Sin*



Overview

- Focus: Sin, Moral Evil, and the Role of Language in Dostoevsky's Late Short Story
- Key Theorists: Mikhail Bakhtin, Ksana Blank, Pavel Florensky
- Russian Orthodox Theological Context: Augustinian vs. Irenaeian frameworks, Patristic tradition, Slavophile-Westernizer debate




Story Outline: The Dream of a Ridiculous Man

- Initial State: Contemplation of suicide
- Moral Stirring: Guilt after refusing to help a distressed child
- Central Paradox: Continues to exist post-death
- Visit to Parallel Earth:
 - No natural evil, no Original Sin
 - Perfect, untainted language
- Introduction of Sin: RM corrupts the utopian world
- Return & Conversion: Awakens transformed, embracing love and moral responsibility

Why this story?

- Berdyaev: Philosophical and theological movements of early 20c assembled under the banner of FDM.
- Bakhtin: It is “practically a complete encyclopedia of Dostoevsky's most important themes”
- John Middleton Murray: They story is a summation of FDM’s entire intellectual and literary struggle.

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- Key Research Questions
 - Bakhtinian Theory: Dialogism and Sin
 - Ksana Blank's Focus on Language & Sin
 - Alignment with Pavel Florensky: Theological underpinnings of evil
 - Methodology – An Interdisciplinary study
 - Historical Context: Silver Age Russia & competing knowledge systems.
 - Philosophical Context: Platonism vs. Aristotelian influences in Russian thought
 - Theological Foundations: Augustinian & Irenaean theodicies; Orthodox hamartiology
 - Literary Framework: Bakhtin's concept of polyphony and dialogism

Historical & Intellectual Context

- Slavophile-Westernizer Debate
 - Pre-Siberian French utopianism – sin as socio political
 - Post Siberia
 - Dostoevsky's Pushkin Speech (1880) emphasis on “universal sympathy”
 - Critique of Western rationalism vs. Russian spiritual vision
- Science vs. Religion
 - Science: Absorption of the personal paradigm into depersonalised knowledge
 - Religion/Art: Personal perspective preeminent, inductive mystical truth supersedes rational materialism

Key Theological Frames: Augustinian vs. Irenaean

- Augustinian Theodicy
 - Evil as “privation of good”
 - Misuse of free will (the Fall)
- Irenaean Theodicy
 - Human imperfection as starting point (Evil as purposive)
 - Evil/suffering as developmental
- Russian Orthodox Context
 - Evil as catalyst for spiritual growth. St Andrew of Crete

Orthodox Hamartiological Frameworks

- Patristic Perspectives

- Pseudo-Macarius: Sin as corrupting “garment of the soul”
- Maximus the Confessor: Self-love (philautia) as root of sin
- Symeon the New Theologian: Spiritual blindness after the Fall
- Gregory Palamas: Loss of divine likeness

- Modern Voices

- Vladimir Lossky: Sin as disintegration of human nature
- George Florovsky: “Decomposed” humanity
- Common Thread: Disruption of communion and communication

Bakhtinian Theory & Dostoevsky

- Dialogism & Polyphony
- Multiple voices in tension
- Language shaped by conflict, addressing an “other” (Addressivity)
- Confession & Double-Voiced Discourse (Rowan Williams)
- Inner speech vs. communal responsibility
- Language as tool for self-revelation, but also for self-deception
- Application to The story
 - “Ridiculous Man” as confessor-narrator
 - The dream as dialogic space between sin and innocence

Ksana Blank's Analysis of Sin in Dostoevsky

- Focus: The centrality of sin in Dostoevsky's oeuvre
- Language & Confession:
- Sin articulated through narrative voice
- Confessional passages as theological “nodes”
- Applicability to The story:
- Guilt as linguistic turning point
- Dream sequence as moral introspection

Pavel Florensky & Theological Resonances

- Florensky's Theological Vision
- Strong Platonic influence
- Knowledge oriented toward divine reality
- Resonance with Dostoevsky
- Truth as personal & revelatory, not just empirical
- Sin as fragmentation of the "Divine Idea"
- Comparisons & Contrasts
- Both emphasize the mystical dimension of truth
- Language as bridge or barrier to higher reality

Conclusion & Significance

- Interplay of Language & Sin
- Corruption of language as a symptom of the Fall
- Confessional discourse reveals (and enacts) moral transformation
- Integrates Orthodox patristics
- Sin as real, tragic, yet redemptive through love