

*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. Irenaean 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: The story is a summation of FDM's entire intellectual and literary struggle.

- 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