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Michael Burton
Pace University

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Michael Burton
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Advisor: Levine-Keating

The Femme Fatale and Fair Maiden in Dostoyevsky

In any listing of the great works of world literature the name of Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky will be found. Perhaps most popularly identified by his novel *Crime and Punishment*, published in 1866, he was a prolific author whose masterpieces include *The Idiot* (1868) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), along with other novels, novellas, and short stories. In these works he tackles some of the greatest themes and questions of human existence: sin, salvation, the existence of God, socialism as a growing national trend in Russia and the world at large, transgression, and forgiveness, among others. Many of these ideas are inherently opposed to each other, but Dostoyevsky introduces them into his work to give him a platform to create a dialogue with himself and to provoke a dialogue about these issues with society in general. He tries to understand how these opposing ideas will be incorporated into the rapidly evolving contemporary world and how the contradictory aspects can be reconciled.

This kind of omnipresent dialogue that deals with these contradictory ideas is, in fact, what gives his works their unique greatness, according to Mikhail Bakhtin. The concept of the double, a literary creation wholly compatible with the kinds of contradiction and opposition that Dostoyevsky employs in the creation of his dialogic works, provides us with a lens through which we can study the seldom addressed topic of the presentation of women in Dostoyevsky's works. Specifically, we will look at the Fair Maiden/Femme Fatale stereotype of the female double and how it is deflated in the novels *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Crime and Punishment*. Dostoyevsky's

denial of the false rigidity of categorizing women as either a *Femme Fatale* or a *Fair Maiden* is made more powerful when we consider his novels not as monologic but as polyphonic, as this style aids him in exposing the inadequacy of the *Fair Maiden/Femme Fatale* theory in portraying the complexity of a whole, complete person. The women in these novels are seemingly linked and epitomized by this stereotype, but Dostoyevsky cunningly shatters this type casting by showing us that the characters he is doubling are completely fleshed out individuals who cannot be restricted to one role of being either a *Fair Maiden* or a *Femme Fatale*; to understand the women beneath the stereotypes, we must turn our own critical eye towards their personalities, positions, and interactions with men.

For eminent literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, Dostoyevsky's use of contradictory ideas and his adept use of dialogue between and within characters is one of the crucial components that contributes to the greatness of his works, as these elements are integral to his role as an innovator of a powerful new approach to the construction of a novel. To Bakhtin, "all the elements of novelistic structure in Dostoyevsky are profoundly original" in that Dostoyevsky charged himself with the "task of constructing a polyphonic world and destroying the established forms of the fundamentally monologic (homophonic) European novel" that precedes him (Bakhtin 8). While the works of other acknowledged literary giants have some of the fundamentals needed to achieve the polyphony of Dostoyevsky, including British playwright and poet William Shakespeare, no one else could or have achieved the complete polyphony that Dostoyevsky reaches in his works; he "alone can be considered the creator of genuine polyphony" (Bakhtin 34).

For Bakhtin, then, what is a polyphonic novel and what sets Dostoyevsky apart from those who do not write polyphonically? Dostoyevsky's work has the "extraordinary artistic capacity for seeing everything in coexistence and interaction" and this "is his greatest strength" as a writer (Bakhtin 30). This realization and strength allows him to see in "a single thought... two thoughts, a bifurcation" and where "others saw a single quality, he discovered in it the presence of a second and contradictory quality" and he presents this duality in his work (Bakhtin 30). Indeed, to many critics "Dostoyevsky and duality are virtually synonymous" and, as all of his works to some degree include this duality, as "his engagement with the subject was lifelong" (Miller 136). Thus, this understanding and use of duality allows Dostoyevsky to create "an environment in which human consciousness could be revealed in its deepest essence," as he asserts that "there are no ideas, no thoughts, no positions which belong to no one, which exist 'in themselves'" and in a vacuum without interaction and opposition (Bakhtin 31). These principles of interaction and opposition are especially pertinent to consider in his approach to characterization, as Dostoyevsky thinks about his characters as being "actually present" people who interact with the author "and [are] capable of answering him," which allows for the formation of completely independent and rounded characters with their own world views and ideas (Bakhtin 63).

In monologic works "the idea is merely placed in" a character's mouth, but "could with equal success be placed in the mouth of any other character," making the characters just tools promulgating the author's views (Bakhtin 79). The heroes in Dostoyevsky are the "idea and cannot be detached from it... we see the hero in the idea and through the idea" and this is why his work differs widely from a monologist's characters (Bakhtin

87). An idea that exists only “in one person’s isolated individual consciousness... degenerates and dies” whereas a true idea “enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas” by “meeting between two or several consciousnesses” represented by the other characters’ consciousnesses in the novel (Bakhtin 87-88). In a way that no one before him did, Dostoyevsky presents his characters as unique and completely formed people with their own agendas, values, and ideas, independent of what the author himself may believe or wish to say about a particular subject. This type of characterization is fundamental to a polyphonic novel since without it, the characters’ voices lack true subjectivity and independence. In this way interaction and interrelationships between characters become the keys to understanding polyphony and the characters themselves. In one short statement, the “polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through” because it incorporates more than just the single, monologic voice that most works have and presents a cacophony of ideas and consciousnesses interacting and overlapping with each other (Bakhtin 40).

One of the literary devices Dostoyevsky employs to help create and maintain his polyphonic approach to his work is the use of the double. In a study of his work, we can see that “almost all of Dostoevsky’s major heroes...have their partial double in another person or even in several other people” in the novel (Bakhtin 217). In a polyphonic novel where we have “a world of consciousnesses mutually illuminating on another,” what better way of creating and encouraging dialogue than presenting a character with some manifestation of himself (Bakhtin 97)? By presenting a character with another character whose personality and beliefs in some way mirror his own, they are forced to better understand themselves through their interactions with this double. To better understand

the double and its importance to Dostoyevsky's work, though, we must first understand the basic principles and theories behind the double, and for the purposes of this analysis, specifically the articulation of the female double.

The double, in its broadest sense, "can mean almost any dual, and in some cases even multiple, structure in a text" such as the characters (Hallam 5). Psychologist Sigmund Freud believed that "the Double motif may manifest itself in various ways: split, or recurring characters, automata, or relived fantasies, visions, and dreams" that are "somehow triggered" by "repressed experiences" of the character (Hammel 14-15). Otto Rank, an early disciple of Freud, states that the double can be represented in a variety of ways, including that of a "physical double... or likeness which has been detached from the ego and become an individual being (shadow, reflection, portrait)" that represents some parts of a character's consciousness (Rank 20). This character can be seen as an agent for "acting out the central character's fears and desires," as is the case of Ivan Karamazov and his half-brother Smerdyakov, who claims that in killing their father he has acted with his brother's full consent and even encouragement; when confronted with this accusation, Ivan is struck by the truth behind it (Hammel 10). For Dostoyevsky, the double is often represented in this way, as "tragic, struggling couples... who appear to one another as unified, whole beings" that "turn out to be actually only the two halves of a ... cloven entity" that sometimes are unaware of their connections (Rank 47). The psychologist, C. G. Jung, who developed the "doctrine of the shadow," argues that "the individual has not come to terms with his hidden (repressed) self" and the double in some way is a representation of that repressed part of the self (Hammel 17). This approach presupposes the idea that the "problem of knowing oneself remains a constant human

endeavor” and to “know thyself” we must understand the darker, repressed sides of our own identity (Hammel 2). These are only some of the definitions on how the double can be represented that are applicable to all characters in the works. For our purposes, though, we are most concerned with a more specific way of thinking about the double as it applies to females in literature.

The female double relies heavily on two completely opposite stereotypes of women:

... one is the Fair Maiden, alias the Persecuted Maiden, the Virgin, the Saint, the Pale Lady, the Good Woman, the Nice Girl, the Marriageable Young Lady.

Sometimes she is known simply as Wife. Her darker counterpart is the Femme Fatale, alias the Temptress, the Vamp, the Sinner, the Dark Lady, the Bad Woman, the Naughty Girl, the Trollop. Sometimes she is called Mistress or Prostitute or Eve or Whore of Babylon, depending on the circumstances. (Rogers 126-127)

We shall refer to the first type of woman simply as the Fair Maiden and the second as the Femme Fatale as representative of all of the aliases listed above. Literature is rife with examples of these juxtaposed female doubles. The depictions of the “two sets of angels,” the good and the bad, “have been with us for a long time” in religious documents as well as in literature (Rogers 127). The Biblical figure of Eve is an example of such a figure, as she is the original Femme Fatale because of her ostensible role in mankind’s fall from God’s grace when she tempts Adam to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and

Evil. However, the “Judeo-Christian tradition gives us” not just the original Femme Fatale in Eve but also “the symbol of perfect female purity in the Virgin Mary,” who is the mother figure that bears and gives birth to Jesus Christ, the salvation of mankind and redeemer of its sin (Rogers 127). These two examples underscore the role of the Femme Fatale as the “sinister embodiment of the sexuality denied” to the Fair Maiden and as such this “dark double represents the threat of both sex and death” (Fiedler 296). When the Femme Fatale is spoken of as ‘dark’ this is often meant literally, as it represents “the primeval terror of darkness, the ... ingrained European habit of identifying evil with blackness” in both the coloring of hair and skin (Fiedler 297). In literature, the Femme Fatale is thus represented as having dark hair and, in some cases, is from any of “the racial groups” that have been traditionally “excluded and despised” by a white, male dominated society (Fiedler 301). These stereotypes, however, are obviously just that and as a polyphonic writer, Dostoyevsky is ably equipped to debunk these stereotypes. Before he does this, though, he plays into the tradition of portraying his female doubles as Femme Fatales and Fair Maidens.

The Femme Fatales of *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* are easily identified as Nastasya Filippovna Barashkov and Agrafena Alexandrovna Svetlov, otherwise known simply as Grushenka. In fact, they can be seen as doubles of each other as each has a similar background and is similarly judged by the majority of the societies within which they exist.

Nastasya is the daughter of “an impoverished petty landowner” who “died in delirium” when she was six years old after most of his family, except for a sister who dies soon afterwards, perish in a fire in their family home (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 41). The

orphaned Nastasya is taken in by the steward of her wealthy neighbor, Totsky. Totsky notices her several years later when she is twelve and, discovering her to be “lively, sweet, clever, and promising to be a great beauty,” arranges for her to be brought up with an educated governess (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 41). Totsky’s sudden interest in this young orphan is far from altruistic; only four years later he moves her to a “little village lost in the steppes” that is, “as if on purpose... called ‘Delight’” and begins to come “every summer” to visit his young ingénue (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 41). Nastasya, then, is clearly being coded as a kind of prostitute; even if she has not had sexual relations with Totsky, it is clear that for him her eventual fate is to be a mistress. Later, when she hears an ultimately false rumor that Totsky is to be married, she leaves her little village of Delight and goes to St. Petersburg to reveal her hatred for him and her decision to stop him from making any marriage. She wreaks havoc in his life as his friend, Ivan Fyodorovich Epanchin, “in his venerable old age” is “tempted by Nastasya” to the point of something that “almost resembled passion” (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 50). This, of course, leads to tension between Ivan and his wife, with whom he has three daughters. This idea of her being a focal point of conflict and her role as a temptress is a repetitive one; she is lusted after by Ganya, son of a poor retired general, and the rich Rogozhin, who offers her a hundred thousand roubles to marry him. At a party hosted by Nastasya, with Rogozhin and Ganya both present and vying for her attention and affection along with the hero of the novel, Prince Myshkin, she toys with the men, promising to marry the Prince and then Rogozhin, even declaring that “I’m a streetwalker!” before leaving with Rogozhin (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 169). At the end of the novel she is murdered by Rogozhin and her murder results in sending Prince Myshkin into a state of delirium and

near madness wherein “he no longer understood anything” (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 611). She is clearly being presented as destructive to all around her, including Myshkin, and as such she appears to be the archetypal Femme Fatale.

Grushenka of *The Brothers Karamazov* has a similar history and is portrayed as playing the same role of Femme Fatale as Nastasya. Like Nastasya, Grushenka comes “from an honorable family” but as a seventeen year old was “deceived by someone, allegedly some officer” who left her “in poverty and disgrace” when he abandoned her (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 343). She is found and taken in by the wealthy merchant Samsonov, “who [is] openly Grushenka’s patron” and is the only man “who could boast of her favors” (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 343-44). Not that others have not vied for her favors, as she is “a red-cheeked, full-bodied Russian beauty” who, again like Nastasya, attracts many men bent on possessing her (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 344). Grushenka, then, plays much the same Femme Fatale role as Nastasya and is even coded as such by her physical appearance. She has “abundant dark brown hair, dark sable eyebrows” and the first time she is shown is wrapped “in an expensive black woolen shawl” (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 148). The second time she is encountered she is “lying stretched out on her back... in a black silk dress... which was very becoming to her” (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 346). If we are not aware that she is obviously being flagged as the Femme Fatale through her position in life as a merchant’s mistress, Dostoyevsky makes it even clearer in her physical appearance in the reader’s first encounters with her. More than this, though, her being cast as a temptress is solidified by her overall role in the novel. The father of the Karamazov brothers, Fyodor, is in direct competition for her favors with his son Dmitri. Like Rogozhin, Fyodor tries to tempt

Grushenka to come to him by offering her three thousand roubles. It is because of this conflict and rivalry that when Fyodor is murdered Dmitri is suspected when, in truth, Smerdyakov has murdered Fyodor and stolen the money. Like Nastasya, those who love her end up suffering. If Nastasya and Grushenka represent the *Femme Fatales*, their doubles, Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin and Katerina Ivanovna Verkhovtsev, must naturally represent the Fair Maiden.

Aglaya is the youngest of General Epanchin's three daughters and is "quite a beauty... distinguished by [her] cultivation, intelligence, and talent," adored by both sisters who make "some supposed sacrifices" on behalf of their "common idol" (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 17). The entire family is bent towards ensuring that "Aglaya's fate was to be not simply a fate, but the most ideal possible earthly paradise," an adoration and mission that involves the entire family and their relative affluence, especially the sisters who agree to reduce their dowry in order to make Aglaya's larger and more attractive to potential suitors (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 39). Aglaya lives in a sheltered cocoon fabricated by a family who adore her and support her. When this situation of nurturing love is juxtaposed to the lust and hatred Nastasya inspires, it is clear that Aglaya is being given preference as the Fair Maiden, a position that her family is eager to construct for her through the efforts mentioned above. Unlike Nastasya, Aglaya does not participate in the baiting and tempting of men, at least as she is first presented to us. This is evidenced in her attitude towards Ganya who, besides lusting after Nastasya, also has some kind of a relationship with Aglaya and tries to get her to profess her love for him by telling him to "break it off" with Nastasya (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 84). Aglaya, however, sees that he is trying to "trap her; that [Ganya] wished to compromise

her,” which she refuses to allow to happen as it could taint her reputation as a Fair Maiden (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 86). Ganya’s preference for the Fair Maiden Aglaya further suggests Nastasya’s role as the Femme Fatale because it is her supposed tempting that is ruining a possible relationship with Aglaya. It is interesting to note that both Aglaya and the Fair Maiden double of *The Brother’s Karamazov*, Katerina, share Ivanovna as their patronymic.

As in the case of Aglaya and Nastasya, Katerina’s Fair Maiden image is especially strong when she is contrasted with her Femme Fatale double, Grushenka. While Dmitri lusts after Grushenka, he has a prior history with Katerina and is engaged to marry her. When Dmitri’s brother Alyosha is discussing this situation with the seminary student Ratikin, the choice between the two women is made clear. Ratikin describes Grushenka as “teasing them both,” referring to Dmitri and his father and sizing up their value to Grushenka, as “she might be able to grab a lot of money from the papa” but he won’t marry her whereas Dmitri “has no money, but he’s capable of marrying her... of dropping his fiancée” Katerina for her (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 81). In a few brief words Ratikin juxtaposes the two women, a juxtaposition that defines each women’s role in their doubling, as he describes Katerina as “an incomparable beauty... rich, an aristocrat and a colonel’s daughter” similar to Aglaya, whereas Grushenka is “formerly the kept woman of an old shopkeeper, a profligate peasant, the town major Samsonov,” although he does not mention her ancestry as he does Katerina’s. (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 81). When Alyosha later goes to visit Katerina he finds that she is not alone; her other visitor is none other than Grushenka herself. Alyosha is stunned by the two together as Katerina fawns over Grushenka, calling her “a good angel” that “has flown

down here and brought peace and joy,” and she is delighted that Grushenka has agreed to “reveal to [Dmitri] that you love another man” and not him (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 150). This, however, is where the charming meeting turns sour, as Grushenka denies that she ever gave her word to the innocent Katerina who is dumbstruck by this assertion. Grushenka then laughingly says to “keep this as a memory – that you have kissed my hand, and I did not kiss yours,” which sends Katerina into a frenzy (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 152). Katerina begins hurling insults at Grushenka, calling her a “slut” and a “bought woman” to which Grushenka responds, “it’s really quite indecent for you to use such words, dear young lady” (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 152). Grushenka herself reinforces Katerina’s role as a Fair Maiden by chiding her for using language unbecoming to a woman in her position. Their role reversals indicate the interchangeability of their supposedly fixed roles as Femme Fatale and Fair Maiden.

Thus it has been clearly demonstrated that Dostoyevsky has in these two novels seemingly presented us with the typical presentation of the female double, the Femme Fatale and the Fair Maiden. Nastasya and Grushenka are just as strongly stereotyped as the Femme Fatale as Aglaya and Katerina are as the Fair Maidens. However, the qualities that categorize each woman in their respective roles are only one part of their total characters. Whereas a monologic novel would perhaps be content to leave their women with such flat, one-sided characters, the polyphonic novel of Dostoyevsky ensures that the women will have their own individual ideas and their own complexities. He does this by showing us that the distance between the Femme Fatales and the Fair Maidens of his novels is not as far apart as we would believe, bringing to each woman characteristics of her respective double. Just as with the male characters of the novels, he wants to create

characters that are “actually present” and complete, not simple and removed (Bakhtin 63). Also important to his deflation of these stereotypes is the role of the men in each novel, as they are often critical to seeing the women as more than only what they are superficially supposed to represent.

Nastasya and Aglaya are far more similar than we would expect a *Femme Fatale* and a *Fair Maiden* to be, and one of the agents who allows them to be seen as more complicated than these stereotypes is the main character of the novel, Prince Myshkin. When Myshkin is asked by Aglaya’s mother Lizaveta if she is beautiful, he responds that she is “almost like Nastasya Filippnova, though her face is quite different,” an answer that clearly links Nastasya and Aglaya (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 77). When Nastasya is toying with Ganya and Rogozhin, Myshkin reproaches Nastasya and declares that “you can’t be the way you pretended to be just now...it’s not possible!” (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 117). Bakhtin ascribes to the Prince the power of the “penetrative word” which is “capable of... helping” another “person to find his own voice,” or, in this case, her own voice (Bakhtin 242). Nastasya, the shamelessly brazen *Femme Fatale*, is “slightly embarrassed” and admits that “he guessed right, in fact, I’m not like that” before hurriedly retreating from the scene (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 117). Nastasya’s agreement and embarrassment seem to suggest that she is acting, that she is playing out a role that she may not even like. Bakhtin agrees with this reading, as he believes that Nastasya:

... considering herself guilty, a fallen woman, she simultaneously assumes that the other person, precisely as the other, is obliged to vindicate her and cannot consider her guilty. She genuinely quarrels with Myshkin, who vindicates her in

everything, but she equally genuinely despises and rejects all those who agree with her self-condemnation and consider her a fallen woman. Ultimately, Nastasya Filippovna does not know even her own final word on herself: does she really consider herself a fallen woman, or does she vindicate herself? (Bakhtin 234)

Although Dostoyevsky has portrayed her as the fallen woman, he has also presented us with a complex female character who is obviously unsure what she herself believes; as an active and rounded character, her own questions about identity spill over the traditional boundaries of the *Femme Fatale* role she has been assigned. Conversely, Aglaya's assigned role does not quite describe all aspects of her personality once we delve beneath the superficial rules that make a woman a *Fair Maiden*.

Aglaya's juxtaposition with Nastasya seems to indicate that we should see her as a *Fair Maiden*, but again this fails to take into account her entire character. Even though her family is enraptured by her, in a fit of rage her mother reveals that she, too, disbelieves in her daughter being characterized as the *Fair Maiden* when she exclaims that, "she's a despotic, crazy, spoiled girl – if she falls in love, she'll certainly abuse the man out loud and scoff in his face" (Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, 317). Aglaya herself seems resentful of her family's attitude towards her and the attention they heap upon her. Once again it is to Myshkin, who with his powers of penetration, that she admits that "I've always sat at home, bottled up, and I'll get married right out of the bottle" and she betrays her ability to think beyond that bottled up life when she says to Myshkin that, "maybe...I invited you here in order to lure you into my nets" (Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, 430). Just as

he reproaches Nastasya, Myshkin asks her if she is “ashamed... how could such a dirty thought be born in your pure, innocent heart,” to which she answers that, “I’m not ashamed at all” (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 431). She later acts out this idea of luring Myshkin into her nets when she toys with him, asking if he will marry her and what qualifies him as a husband for her. He believes her to be serious, but she is only “holding back with all her might... rapidly approaching and irrepressible laughter” over the idea of truly marrying Myshkin (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 515).

Finally, in a revealing moment, Aglaya and Nastasya run into each other with Myshkin present as a witness. Here, Dostoyevsky subtly reveals that in this case the difference between Femme Fatale and Fair Maiden is more about their class than their characters, and he combines this idea with the already revealed truth that the doubled women’s personalities are more similar than either would think. Aglaya tells Nastasya, if you “wanted to be an honest woman, you should have gone to work as a washerwoman,” unwittingly getting to the heart of Nastasya’s real position while at the same time reasserting her own privilege (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 570). For an orphaned girl like Nastasya, her options in the society are very few, as she can either become the sort of woman she has made herself into or to simply be a washerwoman. Without the money and family of Aglaya, who Nastasya sarcastically deems a “young lady... an angel,” these options are her only realistic ways to support herself (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, 570). This further deconstructs Aglaya as the Fair Maiden as it is particularly cruel for her, whom fate has blessed with money and aristocratic family, to attack a woman who has made her way in life without the benefit of either. Ironically, even though Aglaya is of the upper class and enjoys the privileges thereof, she too is unhappy with her role as an

upper class woman, as can be seen by her admitting to Myshkin her desire to escape the ‘bottle’ she has been placed within until she is married. In this sense, Aglaya is suggesting she is jealous of Nastasya’s relative freedom as a woman of ill-repute, as the same social rules do not apply to or constrict her as they do Agalya.

The same argument about monetary and family situations can be made in the case of Grushenka and Katerina. What are Grushenka’s choices after being left in poverty by a deceitful army officer? Just like Nastasya, she can either struggle through life in odd jobs or marry a peasant or she can follow the path that she ends up following, and became a rich merchant’s mistress. Katerina’s labeling of Grushenka as a “slut” and a “bought” woman are particularly unfair given her own background, which Grushenka is alluding to when she replies to these slurs that “you yourself as a young girl used to go to your gentlemen at dusk to get money, offering your beauty for sale, and I know it” (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 152). In both novels, the women’s negative reactions to each other are wholly consistent with psychologist’s thoughts on the nature of the double. Marie-Louise von Franz argues that “if you feel an overwhelming rage come up in you when a friend reproaches you about a fault, you can be fairly sure that at this point you will find a part of your shadow, of which you are unconscious,” although in these cases the women are not friends but rivals (von Franz 691). When Dmitri was a young officer, one of his commanding officers was Katerina’s father, a colonel who has stolen forty-five hundred roubles from government funds, which, if discovered, would leave his family on the brink of poverty. Dmitri learns of this and tells Katerina’s older sister that he will give the family that amount if Katerina comes asking for it. She does come, and he taunts her by saying that he doesn’t have “four thousand – it’s too much money, miss, to throw

away” on her salvation (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 115). However, he does finally give her the money and she bows “way down... with her forehead to the ground... like a Russian woman” before she runs away (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 115). In a symbolic sense, Katerina, like Grushenka, has shown that she is not above betraying her nobility for money. However, through a stroke of fortune she inherits “eighty thousand rouble outright” from a distant relative and subsequently writes to Dmitri proposing to marry him, but Dmitri sees that “she loves her own virtue, not me” and the marriage is an attempt to regain the virtue she lost in taking money from him in the low manner she did (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 116-117).

Also, as with Nastasya and Aglaya, the same parallels can be made in Grushenka and Katerina’s transcendence of their assigned stereotypes of Femme Fatale and Fair Maiden. Alyosha possesses the penetrative power of Myshkin, except that all he needs do is listen. When he is with Grushenka, in a moment reminiscent of Nastasya’s own realization that she is more than the act she puts on for the world, she admits that “I’m a low woman, I’m a violent woman, yet there are moments, Alyosha, when I look upon you as my conscience... will you believe, Alyosha, really I look at you sometimes and feel ashamed, ashamed of myself” (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 350). Further paralleling the idea that Grushenka is not entirely unredeemable, Alyosha tells her that “you restored my soul just now” as he “came here looking for a wicked soul... but I found a true sister, I found a treasure – a loving soul,” which is obviously far from the usual reaction people have to Grushenka (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 351). Like Myshkin, Alyosha is able to look past the ‘wicked’ person she pretends to be, even though Grushenka, too, argues with his assessment and tells him that, “I’m wicked, not

good” (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 352). Perhaps key to Alyosha’s empathy is the idea that in Grushenka he recognizes part of himself, making her a kind of double for him.

As mentioned, Katerina also fails to live up to the exacting standards of her role of the Fair Maiden and not just because she takes money from Dmitri. While the Femme Fatale is the one who is seen as the destructive force, at Dmitri’s trial it is arguably Katerina’s intervention, in a moment of anger, that leads to his condemnation for the murder of his father. Her supposed love for Dmitri is tainted by the fact that his brother Ivan is ‘tempted’ by her and is desperately in love with her, a realization that leads her to betray Dmitri. After watching Ivan fall apart during his examination and seemingly profess his guilt for the murder of his father, she produces a letter where Dmitri “writes to me how he’s going to kill his father” in order, in her mind, to save Ivan (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 689). She tells the court her history with Dmitri and about the letter that incriminates him because by betraying Dmitri she believes she has “sacrificed herself in order to save Ivan” who, in his delirious ramblings, has just stated that he has murdered his father (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 691). She has failed to live up to her standards as a Fair Maiden as she has acted as the agent of Dmitri’s symbolic destruction in helping convict him for a crime he has not committed. She also sullies her own reputation by detailing the way she took Dmitri’s money and bowed to him, scandalous acts for an upper class woman to admit to as they reveal her more sordid past. Finally, at the end of the book, in Dmitri’s cell, when Katerina accidentally runs into Grushenka, her only words to Grushenka are “forgive me,” perhaps realizing that she has treated Grushenka unfairly (Dostoyevsky, The Brothers K, 767). This last image of the Fair Maiden asking the Femme Fatale for forgiveness is a powerful one, since if these stereotypes were true

we could never expect such a moment to happen. Indeed, the idea of switching roles is taken a step higher when Dostoyevsky chooses to portray a woman who is the embodiment of not just the Femme Fatale or the Fair Maiden, but both at the same time.

These four women clearly do not fill their assigned roles, as they are full characters beyond such simplistic stereotypes. These, however, are not Dostoyevsky's most powerful critique of the confining and ultimately inadequate way to define the female double. Although, as has been demonstrated, they are all fully individualized and complex characters, they are often dependent on the men in the novels to help them realize that they transcend the roles they have been assigned to play. To find a woman who not only discounts the ability of the rigid Femme Fatale and Fair Maiden figures to define women as doubles we must turn our attention to *Crime and Punishment*.

Sofya Semyonovna Marmeladov, most often referred to as Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*, is one of the most important and influential of the women in Dostoyevsky's works. She represents the Femme Fatale and the Fair Maiden in one person, but like the other characters she completely defies this simplistic method of identifying herself and is a sympathetic character who epitomizes some of the bleak choices a woman has in the society. Beyond this, though, she is unlike the other women in that she plays a pivotal role in the redemption of the main character, the murderer Raskolnikov, rather than have him redeem her.

Sonya's role is first hinted at when Raskolnikov, as he is wandering about the city, sees a young girl pass out on a bench by a riverbank. He quickly ascertains that she is drunk and notices a man following behind her, who would "have liked very much to approach the girl with certain intentions" such as to take sexual advantage of her in her

drunken state (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 47). As she rests on the bench, Raskolnikov gets into an altercation with the man until a policeman intervenes and agrees to help the young girl home. This girl is not Sonya as she is “about sixteen years old, perhaps only fifteen” and thus too young, but she does in some ways foreshadow Sonya even beyond her representation as a victim of sexually predatory men (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 46). She is dressed askew and, more importantly, she is seen by Raskolnikov and the policeman as “quite a child still” (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 48). Raskolnikov’s role as the young girl’s savior is crucial to one of the final scenes of the novel, which will be touched on later.

This encounter is important as it first brings up the question of prostitution and Raskolnikov’s thoughts about it. He is angered by the idea that “a certain percentage” of girls will end up as prostitutes and he objects to the justification to that it is “so scientific... there’s nothing to worry about” since it is naturally going to happen (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 50). The entire problem is brought close to home when he considers the position of his sister Dunya. This is reflected in his thoughts when he wonders “what if Dunechka somehow gets into the percentage” that turn to prostitution to support themselves or others (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 50). He believes his sister’s impending marriage to a relatively wealthy man, Luzhin, is comparable to prostitution because he is sure that her sole purpose in marrying the man is to help him out financially. It is worth noting that he objects to his sister’s sacrifice in this manner, but Sonya’s similar sacrifice transcends his condemnation and is instead seen as noble.

Sonya is certainly part of the ‘percentage’ that Raskolnikov ponders. She has “received no education” and her father, who should be providing for the family, is an alcoholic incapable of holding down a job (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 17). Without education, which might allow her to become a governess or school teacher, Sonya’s only other option is to “earn by honest labor,” which would pay her “not even fifteen kopecks a day,” a paltry sum (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 18). When her family is about to be evicted from their apartment, Sonya becomes a prostitute, just like Nastasya and Grushenka, and in doing so she is able to instantly contribute “thirty roubles” to financially aid her family. (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 18). Although she can become the washerwoman or take up some other menial work, her choice delegates her to the role dictated by the dichotomy of the female double. As a prostitute, she is identified as the Femme Fatale, but this is an unfair and untrue characterization. Her decision to become a prostitute is similar to that of Nastasya and Grushenka, who realistically have little choice to do so, but in choosing this she is sacrificing herself for her family, an arguably noble trait. Although she has lost her real virginity, Sonya still possesses a kind of innocence, and this innocence is integral to Raskolnikov’s redemption. This innocence and her ability to see the good in people can be seen when Raskolnikov goes to visit her and questions her about her relationship with her step mother Katerina, who used to mistreat and beat her. Sonya defends her by saying that Katerina “is just like a child... she’s pure” and as she says this “some sort of insatiable compassion... showed suddenly in all the features of her face” (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 318). These sentiments are something we should expect from a Fair Maiden, not from a prostitute.

Sonya's doubling with Lizaveta, sister and unfortunate victim of Raskolnikov's intended murder victim Alyona, helps lead him to realize the true enormity of his crime and set him on the eventual path to redemption. Raskolnikov originally intends only to murder the mean pawnbroker Alyona in order to steal her money and set himself up on a path to greatness. However, her sister Lizaveta, herself abused by Alyona, accidentally walks in on the murder and Raskolnikov in panic murders her, too. Had he only killed Alyona he might not have been troubled by pangs of conscience since he has justified her murder through his own twisted logic. Lizaveta's murder is unconscionable even to him as she is just as much a victim of Alyona as Raskolnikov perceives himself to be. He finally admits his crime to Sonya, perhaps because Sonya acts as Lizaveta's double because of her own innocence and strong faith in God. This doubling suggests Sonya's role as the Fair Maiden for she is innocent at heart, much as Lizaveta is. When he starts to confess his crime to Sonya, he sees "in her face...the face of Lizaveta" which instantly brings back a recollection of "the expression on Lizaveta's face as he was approaching her with the axe" to strike her (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 410). He also sees on Sonya's face at this critical moment "the same *childlike* smile" and in an empathetic moment, Sonya suddenly realizes Raskolnikov's guilt (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 411). Driven by the unjustifiable murder of Lizaveta and his strong identification of the innocent Sonya to her, Raskolnikov eventually turns himself in. Raskolnikov's idealization of Sonya is yet another example of her ability to switch from Femme Fatale to Fair Maiden. More than either of these limiting roles, though, is her role in the eventual redemption of Raskolnikov.

Raskolnikov admits his guilt in the murders of the two women and is sent to Siberia without really recognizing or admitting his crime to himself. Indeed, “this alone he recognized as his crime: that he had not endured it, but had gone and confessed” to it (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 544). Instrumental to that confession, as we have seen above, is his first confession to Sonya of his guilt. However, his attitude and thoughts about his sentence to Siberia shows that he is still miserable and is unable to really accept guilt and achieve any kind of redemption. His redemption comes not from within himself, but rather from Sonya who follows him to Siberia.

In a scene entirely reminiscent of the first scene with the young drunken girl Raskolnikov finds this inner peace and redemption. One day he is sitting “looking at the wide, desolate river” contemplating his fate when “suddenly Sonya was beside him” (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 549). She offers him her hand and as they sit there, he suddenly feels “as if something lifted him up and flung him down at her feet... he wept and embraced her knees” and “all at once... she understood everything” he is feeling and going through (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 549). She sees beyond “any doubt that he loved her, loved her infinitely, and that at last the moment had come,” as she understands that now he not only admits his love for her but has finally achieved some form of redemption through accepting his crime (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 549). In her he finally comes to see “the dawn of a renewed future, of a complete resurrection into a new life... the heart of each held infinite sources of life for the heart” of the other (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 549). Sonya is neither Femme Fatale nor Fair Maiden, but something entirely beyond these inadequate representations of the different selves, or doubles, of women. Instead of seeing the

suffering and torment of his life, Sonya's dedication and love for Raskolnikov inspires him to use his newfound "infinite love" to "redeem all her sufferings" (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 550). Through her he begins "his acquaintance with a new, hitherto completely unknown reality," a sentiment that closes the novel (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 551). Although in the first part of the novel it is Raskolnikov who saves a girl who is drunk and is victimized by the evils of the world in the Epilogue, it is a different woman who sits by a Siberian riverside and transcends the superficial roles assigned to her by society and thoughts on the female double that ultimately saves him: "her convictions... her feelings, her aspirations" are where he finds his "new life" and "gradual transition... from one world to... a new, hitherto completely unknown reality" of "renewal" and "regeneration" (Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 550-551).

As we can now see, through the female characters in *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Crime and Punishment* and the polyphonic style he uses to write these novels, Dostoyevsky emphatically rejects the traditional beliefs about the female double, specifically those that assign women to being either the Femme Fatale or Fair Maiden. His refutation of this is obvious as he initially sets the women up in these stereotypes, only to show that as doubles these oppositional roles fail to embrace a wholly developed and realistic character. Dostoyevsky is a polyphonic writer and his new way of presenting women helps him achieve his goal of creating developed and individually conscious women characters who move beyond the monologic author's tendency to portray women in one-dimensional roles, without taking into account the fact that real women are much more complex, with multi-faceted and often contradictory aspects to their make-up. All of the women from these three novels are doubled into each other and to their seeming

opposites and the fact that their doubling is not covered by the Femme Fatale and Fair Maiden structures suggests that these confines are not conducive to accurately portraying women. Dostoevsky's female characters display a duality, being neither wholly Femme Fatale or Fair Maiden. They exhibit ambivalence and their own awareness of this ambivalence causes them turmoil. Dostoevsky's female characters demonstrate that ascribing the role of Femme Fatale or Fair Maiden is too simplistic and does not take into account the actual paradoxical complexity and consciousness of women in either Dostoevsky's era or the present one.

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