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Many regard Dostoevsky as the greatest psychological novelist, and some are so gripped by his fiction that it becomes more important to them than their real lives. I recall a student in high school who, after reading *Crime and Punishment*, identified with Raskolnikov so thoroughly that he carried the book with him everywhere in a self-absorbed daze. Although this response was extreme, the emotional impact of Dostoevsky's great novels, from *Notes from Underground* to *The Brothers Karamazov*, is hard to deny. In his most recent book Louis Breger, professor of psychoanalytic studies at Caltech, offers an interpretation of Dostoevsky's life and work that explores the personal sources of the emotional intensity of the novels.

Breger declares his indebtedness to Freud's method of seeking "a common underlying explanation for symptom, childhood history, and literary theme," but he is hardly an uncritical Freudian (as readers of his *Freud's Unfinished Journey* will realize). His major departure from Freud and most psychoanalytic literary study is revealed in the subtitle—*The Author as Psychoanalyst*. Rather than treat Dostoevsky as a neurotic, a patient on the couch, Breger regards him as a fellow psychoanalyst and sees his work both as an anticipation of Freud's and as a healing process similar to Freud's own self-analysis. He suggests that writing the novels gave Dostoevsky insight into his own inner conflicts, and that this insight was an essential factor in his personal and artistic growth.

Breger contends that, when read in chronological order, Dostoevsky's novels reveal a progression from earlier to later stages of psychological development. The earlier fiction, like the opening phase of an analysis, introduces themes that will become important later, and then *Crime and Punishment* gives symbolic expression to Dostoevsky's "deepest emotional conflict," his ambivalence towards a needed but depriving mother. The novels that follow move beyond the emotional issues of the mother-infant into the world of fathers and brothers, and the characters become progressively more complicated: "the evil figures become less demonic and the saintly types less angelic; in *The Brothers*, everyone is more human, more a mixture of realistic good and bad qualities."

Breger is at his best with *Crime and Punishment*, obviously his favorite novel. The framework of his interpretation is as

interesting as the interpretation itself. He suggests that we consider the novel "as a shared series of dreams." He takes the central plot concerning Raskolnikov's murder of the hateful pawnbroker and her innocent sister as the main dream and the subplots as subsidiary dreams that rework the same underlying issues and try out different imaginative solutions to a common problem. In addition, Raskolnikov's dream in which a horse is beaten to death (and which draws on a memory from Dostoevsky's childhood that he later called "my first personal insult") presents another version of the central emotional issues of the novel. I predict that even readers who are skeptical of psychoanalytic approaches to literature will come away with a keener sense of the psychological coherence of the novel and a greater appreciation of its emotional power.

After the chapters on *Crime and Punishment* and its connection with Dostoevsky's life, Breger focuses on the life, using the novels primarily as evidence for the author's emotional biography. Breger discusses Dostoevsky's family, his stay at the Academy of Military Engineering, his early success as a novelist and the nervous breakdown it helped to precipitate, the political "conspiracy" for which he spent 10 years in Siberia as a prisoner and a soldier, his first, unhappy marriage, his return to St. Petersburg and the literary scene, his epilepsy and compulsive gambling, the death of his first wife, and his second, happy marriage. The appendix on epilepsy is particularly persuasive, but all of Breger's interpretations merit consideration.

I find myself wondering about one of the book's major contentions—that

writing gave Dostoevsky insight into his own emotional issues and that this insight was essential to his growth as a novelist and a person. To my mind there is no doubt that Dostoevsky the novelist was an unusually insightful psychologist, but that does not necessarily mean that he was insightful about his own personality. I agree that Dostoevsky created characters who embody different aspects of his psychological conflicts and set them free to live out their lives; to what degree he understood and learned from this process seems to me an open question. Furthermore, I think Breger attaches too much importance to Dostoevsky's self-analysis through writing and not enough to his second marriage. For example, Dostoevsky's compulsive gambling didn't stop after writing *The Gambler*, it stopped after his wife's acceptance of his gambling or rather her acceptance of and continued love for him despite the difficulties caused by his gambling. Of course, what makes people grow, both in and out of psychotherapy, is an immensely complicated and controversial question, and it may well be that writing had a good deal to do with the change for the better that many perceived in Dostoevsky after his second marriage. But even though I would put the emphasis elsewhere, I warmly recommend *Dostoevsky: The Author as Psychoanalyst* not only to those interested in Dostoevsky but to anyone interested in the relation between a writer's life and works.

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