

General Context

Sonya and holy fools

Rask calls Sonya and Lizaveta “holy fools.” (iurodivaia) 226 A holy fool can connote either extreme religious devotion by rejection of social norms and/or mental illness/madness. See Ware 108. There is a positive religious sense and a negative mental illness sense which can come apart or travel together. Some other holy fools in D’s work include Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* and “Stinking Lizaveta,” the mother of Smerd in *Brothers K*. Myshkin is an example of the former and Stinking Lizaveta is an example of the latter. There is a stronger tradition in Eastern Orthodoxy of saints and ascetics who took on the role of “holy fools.” E.g., Saint Basil the Fool for Christ. The religious kind tend to have the gift of spiritual insight and mind reading of others, a kind of clairvoyance. Sonya shares this more mild “madness” with Myshkin, Tikhon, Alyosha, and Zosima. Rask uses the term ambiguously about Sonya, implying she is close to madness, a kind of religious mania. Of course, she thinks *he’s* a madman. Who’s right?

Sonya as Icon

In the midst of the various cat and mouse conversations taking place, Sonya is rather inarticulate. She doesn’t speak so much as make faces, act, and give off vibes. She didn’t speak in the Marmeladov death scene she just embraces him. When she does talk, her speech is full of breaks with ellipses. Here Rask looks at Sonya more than listens to her. In this scene he even bows to her as a symbol of all human suffering. Harriet Murov puts it like this: “Sonya appears as an icon, on which only suffering is expressed...Raskolnikov, above all, *looks* at Sonya.”

Reading Notes

Sonya description: how is Sonya and her apartment described? 219 what’s her “deformed” room have to do with symbolizing her? Why is she described as childlike so much? What does it mean to reflect “insatiable compassion” and why is that important for Rask? 221

Cruelty in Sonya: what is Sonya’s story about cruelty? Does this mean she is not as pure as she appears?

Lizaveta and Sonya: Rask connects Lizaveta and Sonya once again. Why does he do this? What are their similarities regarding: suffering, holy fools, and childlike innocence? What does this doubling mean given Rask has killed Lizaveta and now faces Sonya, seemingly obsessed with her for some reason? 222

Sonya, faith, and miracle: what is Sonya’s faith? What miracle is she waiting for? Why is Rask so malicious about this when talking with her? 223

Bowing: Why does Rask bow to Sonya and to all human suffering? How does that make sense given he has added to human suffering by killing two people? 223

Rask and Sonya: How does Rask connect Sonya and himself in his mind? In what ways does Sonya double Rask? Why is Rask so interested in this connection? 224 How has Sonya “overstepped”? 228 What is the thing keeping Sonya sane which isn’t working for Rask? In what ways is this comparison fair and in what ways does it fall flat? Are they connected as the murderer and the prostitute? 228 (Nabokov criticism)

Miracle and Lazarus: Why do they read the Lazarus story? What does this resurrection have to do with the miracle which Sonya and Rask are looking for? Is it the same thing? Where else have we heard about Lazarus? (182) Is it religious madness to believe in miracles? Does Rask believe in miracles? 182

Power: Rask seems to be interested in the religious option Sonya represents, but then he talks about power and freedom. He says they need to take suffering upon them and then immediately that “power’s the main thing.” Why this contradiction? What is he thinking? Can you take on all suffering and have power to “destroy what’s necessary” and take power “over all trembling creatures”? 229

Chosen: What does it mean that Rask has chosen Sonya? What is he going to tell her and her alone? What does Sonya think about this? 229

Svid: Svid heard this whole conversation. What is his interest in all this? 230

Porfiry and Rask: What happens in Rask’s interview with Porfiry? How is this like watching a police interrogation in a movie or TV show? What are Porfiry’s tactics? How does Rask respond? How directly do they talk about it? Does Porfiry have any evidence at this point?

Porfiry and psychology: What are some of the psychological principles Porfiry shares about crime? How do they exactly describe what’s been going on with Rask? How “candide” is Porfiry 234-237

Rask snaps: At a certain point Rask snaps and demands he be officially accused instead of tormented without a definitive position. How does Porfiry respond? Is he still messing with Rask? 238-239

False confession: The whole interview is ruined for Porfiry because Nikolai/Mikolka comes in and confesses to the crime. 244 Why would he do this when we know Rask did it? How does everyone respond? Note that ironically Porfiry foreshadows this unexpected event. 240

Exit: How does Rask leave this interrogation? What is the current status between him and Porfiry? Does Porfiry still suspect him? How does Rask tease him now that he has the upperhand? 246

Tradesman: The tradesman appears out of nowhere. What happened with him in the timeline of the interrogation? Why does he bow to Rask and ask for forgiveness twice? 249

Boldness: How does Rask feel after the tradesman leaves? Is he going to give in or is he going to fight? Why does he view himself with spite? 249