

Dostoevsky and the Law. By Amy D. Ronner. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2015. xiii. 308 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00, hard bound.

In *Dostoevsky and the Law*, Amy D. Ronner offers her readers an ambitious wager: “reading Dostoevsky with an intensified, legal lens . . . can be fruitful and enlightening. Such a perspective will not merely disclose the failings and salutary potential of legal institutions, but also illuminate what it truly means to live a rich, human life” (5). This opening, and the thought-provoking book that lives up to its promise, also generously draws the boundaries of Ronner’s audience to include legal scholars and students interested in the relationship between law and literature. At the same time, Ronner, a Law Professor and Literature PhD, wrote a significant book that should appeal to many in the Slavic field. The book offers a model of reframing a canonical author in an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, diachronic context (juxtaposing Dostoevskii with US legal history and practice). Ronner proves “the potential for Dostoevskii studies to improve law practice, legal education, and justice,” (6) and also provides a fresh entry point into Dostoevskii’s work, one that could be particularly useful in teaching the Russian author to American students. Indeed, the book will be a valuable teaching resource: extensively researched, it presents previous English language scholarship in an exhaustive, fair, and informative way in its copious footnotes and in a text that is consistently well-written, lucidly organized, and outlined to a fault.

Ronner warns her readers that her book is less interested in “getting gnomic sound bites on offenders, crimes, criminals,” from Dostoevskii’s writings than in tracking the ways in which “law, in its broadest sense, operates in Dostoevsky’s writings” (55). She argues that Dostoevskii takes “the law for what it is, timeless, protean, and ubiquitously presiding over all facets of human life,” as well as “anthropocentric” (54). After an opening chapter that provides a rich introduction to Dostoevskii and to the book’s methodology, Ronner helpfully focus her investigation on three large areas of law that structure the book: testamentary capacity (Chapter II), confession jurisprudence during investigation and trial (chapter III) and in prison (Chapter IV).

Chapter II cordons the concept of testamentary capacity, along with the psychiatric definition of “bizarre” and “non-bizarre delusions.” Her analysis of these “bizarre” legal concepts gives rise to some of her liveliest writing. With humor and humanity Ronner brings home to the contemporary United States a lesson learned from Dostoevskii’s *Double*—the difficulty of discerning a line between reality and insane delusion, as well as the temptation of settling for false certainties and a name calling habit that can have grave legal consequences.

Chapter III focuses on confession and develops the weightiest argument of the book, one whose force reverberates throughout. The force of the argument is rooted in its ambitious comparative scope: Ronner juxtaposes her analysis of (mostly false) confessions in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* with a penetrating analysis of American confession jurisprudence. Ronner strongly argues that US confession jurisprudence is focused on “externalities, with relevant factors being the conduct of state agents, coercive techniques, or deliberate elicitation tactics” (125). It is here that she brings in Dostoevskii to teach the US Supreme Court about the internal, psychological compulsions that can drive false confessions as powerfully as police duress, and which, Ronner believes, should also make the Court wary of the use of confession. In her piercing analyses, Ronner shows that, rather than being governed by free will and rationality, confessions in Dostoyevskii’s novels are often compulsive, blurring the boundaries between wishes, deeds, and self-punishment. Ronner argues that for Dostoevskii, most people possess “the confessant gene.” While

the genetic metaphor, which unfortunately titles the third chapter, is a misleading anachronism, Ronner's interpretations of confession in Dostoevskii yield many other felicitous terms ("inner compulsion to confess," "confession as motive") and original insights (Ronner argues, for instance, that Raskolnikov recruits Porfiry's service as a coercive catalyst for confession (153). At times Ronner's admiration for Dostoevskii may make it seem like she shares his blanket dismissal of the mundane externalities of earthly justice systems. However, Ronner's careful analysis of Miranda's erosion in police practice shows that she makes deft use of Dostoevskii *to complement*, rather than *to replace*, the focus on external forces with the inner forces compelling confession.

The fourth chapter brings Ronner's discussion of the American justice system even closer to the present. Her tone turns urgent: "Although the Court had chopped Miranda to smithereens, what little was left did apply to inmates. In two decisions, however, *Maryland vs. Shatzer* [2010], and *Howes vs. Fields* [2012], the Supreme Court categorically ousted Miranda from our prisons" (243). Ronner then expertly walks us through the erosion the Miranda protection in prisons. While the story could in the hands of a less able writer turn the reader off as a long, depressing list of bureaucratic loopholes designed to further disempower the powerless, Ronner manages to hold the reader's empathy and attention by providing real stories of the prisoners behind the changing legislation. She also spells out what hides behind the cover up of euphemistic legalese that had almost lulled me to sleep reading the *Shatzer* decision: "When prisoners request counsel, all the interrogator needs to do is ship them back to their cell, count fourteen days, and then start over without counsel present (247)." Come this sentence, I was wide-awake. And once again, she brings in Dostoevskii. After a brief description of *Dead House*, she notes: "today's readers tend to relegate the novel to the genre of historical anomaly, or as a portrayal of an archaic penal system, worlds apart from our own" (251). She jumps into the next sentence, leaving us no recourse to "such thinking [which is] delusion and denial, a way to deflect the unsettling likenesses between Dostoevsky's Omsk fortress and our own prisons (251)." She again lets Dostoevskii shine his light on the erosion of free will and human dignity in the Omsk prison, only to show that what we would like to cordon off as archaic and Russian is a dehumanization only too familiar behind our proliferating prison walls. At times the reader of *Dostoevsky and the Law* feels that the book's powerful conclusions had been reached before all the particular analyses of the novels were carried out. This makes the book less dialogic than one might expect from a devotee of Dostoevskii. The reader is richly compensated, however, by a passionately argued book that is supported by rigorous legal and literary research.

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Sowjetische Kindheit im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Generationsentwürfe im Kontext nationaler Erinnerungskultur. By Oxane Leingang. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2014. x, 324pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. €48.00, hard bound.

In her monograph, rendered in English as "Soviet Childhood During WWII: Sketches of a Generation in the Context of the National Culture of Remembrance," Oxane Leingang explores how the generation of war children reflects on their traumatic experiences as adults in the post-Soviet era. Through an extensive study of personal war accounts, autobiographical and literary texts, most of which have not been translated