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Title: “Awfully Fond of Children”: Children and the Exit from the Underground in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*

Abstract:

The question whether Dostoevsky leaves open the possibility of spiritual conversion for the protagonist of *Notes from Underground* can be answered both positively and negatively. On the one hand, in the censored part of *Notes* Dostoevsky planned to “deduce” from the underground man’s ruminations “the need for faith and Christ.” On the other hand, Dostoevsky subsequently wrote about “the tragedy of the underground” consisting in the underground characters’ belief that there is “no point in trying to improve” (Grossman 313). This presentation approaches the problem through examining the motif of the child in *Notes*. Although children have always been a major theme in Dostoevsky scholarship (see, for example, Miller), the role of the child motif in *Notes* remains little studied.

A child in Dostoevsky is always connected with the ideal of Christ, and a spiritually corrupted character’s potential for conversion (or lack thereof) is associated, in particular, with his or her relationship to children: love and compassion (Raskolnikov, the ridiculous man, Dmitry Karamazov) vs. offense and abuse (Svidrigailov, Trusotsky, Smerdyakov). Despite the fact that children do not participate in the events of *Notes*, this theme is present in the underground man’s discourse. Contrary to the underground man’s statement that he loves children “dearly,” the comparison of Liza to a child shows that the underground man belongs to the category of those Dostoevsky characters who abuse children, which seals his fate as doomed to remain in the underground permanently.

Grossman, Leonid. *Dostoevsky: A Biography*. Trans. Mary Mackler. London: Allen Lane, 1974.
Miller, Robin Feuer. “Children.” *Dostoevsky in Context*. Ed. Deborah Martinsen and Olga Maiorova. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 139-48.