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"Crime and Punishment"

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Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* is “a work whose timeliness increases rather than diminishes with the years, and whose artistic power has scarcely been matched since it was first published in 1866” (*Crime* vi). The novel evolved from the original title of *The Drunkards* into a seven-part story depicting the decline of a murderer in the days following his crime. Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov struggles with the mental implications of killing an old, heartless pawnbroker and her innocent sister who stumbles into the murder scene. The heinous axe-murder results from Raskolnikov’s philosophy he created while lazily despising his poverty. His theory destines some men (himself included) to be free from the moral laws of humanity.

Throughout the course of the novel, Raskolnikov becomes caught in a tug-of-war between further spiritual degeneration and moral rebirth. Raskolnikov develops relationships with two unlikely individuals that represent the polar opposites: the pious prostitute Sonya Marmeladov and Svidrigaylov, the would-be seducer of Raskolnikov’s sister. Raskolnikov is increasingly drawn to the righteous Sonya and progressively more disgusted with Svidrigaylov. Svidrigaylov signifies the evil double of Raskolnikov, while Sonya stands as a person who has been through worse circumstances than Raskolnikov and remains holy.

Underneath the intricate psychology lies a subtler layer of *Crime and Punishment* that is equally complex. Throughout the novel, symbolism hints at the coming regeneration of Raskolnikov that the novel’s epilogue explicitly promises. Dostoevsky’s “symbolism . . . draws on images established by the Christian tradition and on those common in Russian” culture (Gibian 75). Overall, it can be divided into two categories: symbols pointing toward resurrection and symbols depicting death. By the end of the novel, Raskolnikov disassociates himself from Svidrigaylov and all of the symbols of death. Instead of setting Raskolnikov on a downward
spiral, his “crime becomes the source of his moral rebirth and leads to [his] spiritual restoration” (Mochulsky 282). Throughout *Crime and Punishment*, religious symbolism points to the resurrection of Raskolnikov’s soul, since he is increasingly intrigued by and excepting the symbols of regeneration.

According to George Gibian, “I am the Resurrection and the Life’ is the refrain’ of *Crime and Punishment* (79), and all Christian symbols clearly connect around this focal point. Dostoevsky’s ‘sinners are saved through their love of ‘living life’’ (Mochulsky 142), but their rebirth into life must follow a period of separation from humanity. To symbolize suffering Dostoevsky uses the symbol of the cross, which is the greatest symbol of Christ’s struggle before his resurrection. The Lazarus story functions as the application of resurrection to ordinary people by divine intervention. The idea of regenerating a common individual expands in the image of the New Jerusalem which, as written in the book of Revelation, is the city God will create after the destruction of the world. The New Jerusalem points to the resurrection of the earth and all people. As one of Dostoevsky’s sinners, Raskolnikov must experience spiritual resurrection before he can genuinely live life and love—the symbols of Christ, the cross, Easter Sunday, Lazarus, and the New Jerusalem promise Rakolnikov’s eventual rebirth.

The figure of the New Jerusalem is first introduced in Raskolnikov’s speech about the article he wrote before he committed the double murder. Raskolnikov is explaining to police inspector Porfiry Petrovich his theory, which divides humankind into two classes. The larger group of people consists of those who live under the law and uphold it; a minority group is above the law and challenges it by breaking it. In this theory, the majority of obedient citizens preserve the present while the transgressors push society into the future. However, Raskolnikov believes the need for these two classes will end when the New Jerusalem is set up on earth. Through this
comment it is obvious that Raskolnikov recognizes the need for the resurrection of the world. Porfiry Petrovich pushes this concept to a more personal level. Suspecting Raskolnikov to be the murder, Porfiry asks him if he believes in God and the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. With these inquisitions the police inspector notes the need for individual rebirth in a more immediate time frame.

Also, after Raskolnikov’s first encounter with the mysterious man who calls him a murderer, Raskolnikov’s mind fills with memories from his childhood, when he had not developed the theory of humankind’s division into two classes. He remembers “the belfry of the church at V... and the Sunday bells floating in from Somewhere” (Crime 254)—he is wishing for the New Jerusalem. A much later instance of Raskolnikov’s desire for the New Jerusalem comes from the dream he has in the epilogue. In this dream a plague sweeps over the entire earth, causing men to act evilly toward each other. A few chosen people are not affected by this plague and are “destined to... renew life and purify the earth” (Crime 502). Raskolnikov’s vision is “reminiscent of the Book of Revelation with its last seven plagues coming just before the millennium and the establishment of the New Jerusalem” (Gibian 81). After mulling over this dream, Raskolnikov “sees intellect as a plague; salvation lies in feeling, not thinking” (Rising).

The Lazarus story, which Porfiry Petrovich uses to bring the idea of resurrection to a more personal level for Raskolnikov, is “one of Russia’s most popular parables and icons” (Anderson 85). Dostoevsky weaves the mention of this miracle through Crime and Punishment. For Dostoevsky “the raising of Lazarus from the dead is... the best exemplum of a human being resurrected to a new life” (Gibian 79). The climax of the Lazarus symbolism is found in
Raskolnikov's first interview with Sonya when she reads him the story from the Gospel of John. Konstanin Mochulsky writes:

The readings of the Gospel occasions an outburst of diabolic pride. Ruin and destruction are set in opposition to the Resurrection . . . love of power stands and defiles humility; the figure of the man-god [Raskolnikov] opposes the image of the God-man.” (308)

The image of Lazarus is significant because it shows the resurrection of an ordinary man who has died. Raskolnikov occupies a position similar to death—he is ostracized from life because of his desire for power and will remain in such a state unless he experiences resurrection. Lazarus represents where Raskolnikov will be in the epilogue, and the image of Lazarus continues to be linked to Raskolnikov when he has begun to take the first steps toward resurrection. After he first realizes the need to become a new man, Raskolnikov started to keep “the New Testament . . . the one from which [Sonya] had read the raising of Lazarus to him” under his pillow (*Crime 505*).

As much as Raskolnikov mirrors Lazarus, Sonya is a Christ-figure. In Dostoevsky’s *Notebooks on Crime and Punishment*, the selfless prostitute who guides the murderer from death to life “is explicitly tied to the image of Christ” (11). After her first night of prostitution, Sonya originally returned with thirty rubles in silver (*Notebooks* 19). In the final edition, Dostoevsky choose to drop “silver,” but the connection between Sonya’s loss of innocence and the betrayal of Christ remains substantial. Critic George Gibian writes, like Christ, “Sonya sees that all exists in God: she knows, and helps Raskolnikov to recognize, what it means to anticipate the millennium by living in rapt love for all creation here, in this world” (81-2).
Through her daily existence Sonya also embodies Christ’s suffering. Sonya is a “spiritually superior ‘fallen women’” ([The Seeds] 111), who also symbolically acts out the suffering of Christ. Dostoevsky pictured “Christ [as] the grand type of voluntary suffering,” and felt “the road to Golgotha [is] the best expression of the dark road of sorrow” (Gibian 79). Sonya voluntarily prostitutes herself for her stepfamily, and her silent suffering sets an unswerving example for Raskolnikov. Though Raskolnikov questions and argues against her sacrifice, “Sonya struggl[es] with Raskolnikov not through ideas and sermons, but by her deeds and example. She does not reason and does not moralize, but believes and loves” (Mochulsky 289). Though her name means “wisdom” (Murov 67), Sonya expresses only “concern and does not wrestle with [Raskolnikov’s] intellect, [and therefore] she triumphs” (Gibson 96). Sonya takes on the role of Raskolnikov’s conscience, even accompanying him to Siberia where he regenerates. In [The Notebooks for Crime and Punishment] Dostoevsky wrote that Sonya “follows [Raskolnikov] to Golgotha [the crossroads], forty steps behind” (231). Like Raskolnikov’s conscience pricking him after he committed the murders, Sonya remains following Raskolnikov until he embraces her on the banks of the river in Siberia. At that point Raskolnikov again connects with humanity.

Even the physical presence of Sonya mimics Christ to such a great extent that she can be considered an icon. In the Russian Orthodox Church icons are prevalent and significant, representing “the precise point at which human limitation in nature intersects with divine grace” (Anderson 86). Sonya’s physical presence promotes change in Raskolnikov. During Raskolnikov’s first visit to Sonya’s rooms, he recognizes the path of suffering they both must traverse saying, “let us go our way together . . . it’s the same goal” ([Crime] 306). Raskolnikov begins to grasp his need for resurrection. The second time Raskolnikov talks with Sonya in her
apartment “he met her uneasy and painfully anxious eyes fixed on him; there was love in them; his hatred vanished like a phantom” (Crime 378). In the end, it is the sight of Sonya on the crossroads that causes Raskolnikov to return to Ilya Petrovitch and confess.

The image of Napoleon, which serves as a figure of self-assertion, directly opposes Sonya’s sacrificial Christ-figure. Napoleon also stands out as a symbol of life without regeneration since “Napoleon’s image is used as a symbol of a will-to-power uncontrolled by moral consideration of any kind” (Crime xv). Though Raskolnikov occasionally tries to tell himself that his murder was for utilitarian purposes, the money and valuables he stole sit untouched even with his mother and sister in need of financial assistance. By killing the pawnbroker, Raskolnikov is out to prove he is a Napoleon (Mortimer 67). In Raskolnikov’s article about ordinary and extraordinary men, Napoleon stands out as “an exalted self-image” for Raskolnikov (Rising). Raskolnikov explains that Napoleon was great because he “did not stop short at bloodshed either, if that bloodshed—often of innocent persons fighting bravely in defense of ancient law—were of use to [his] cause” (Crime 242). Raskolnikov, too, has murdered in an attempt to go against the social standards of his day. Noting Raskolnikov’s enthusiasm, Zametov (clerk for Porfiry Petrovitch) muses, “Perhaps it was one of these future Napoleons who did for Alyona Ivanovna last week?” (Crime 248). At this point Raskolnikov keeps silent. During Raskolnikov’s second interview in Sonya’s rooms, he admits he “wanted to become a Napoleon, [and] that is why [he] killed” the pawnbroker (Crime 383-4). For Dostoevsky, Napoleon becomes the antithesis to the image of Christ; Napoleon brings physical and moral death, while Christ gives new life.

According to Christianity, Christ’s universal offer of resurrection follows his suffering on a coarse Roman cross. In Crime and Punishment, Sonya’s whole existence is suffering. Even
her drunken father believes that in the end Christ will ask for Sonya saying, "'Where is the daughter who gave herself for her cross?'" (Crime 21). Fittingly, Sonya has two physical figures of crosses in her possession, one of which she pins on Raskolnikov before he goes to confess his crime. Sonya's complaint-free suffering, which Raskolnikov is keenly aware of, teaches him the meaning of the cross. When Raskolnikov "accepts Lizaveta's cypress cross from Sonya, he shows recognition in the significance of taking it . . . 'this is the symbol of my taking up the cross'" (Gibian 79). Sonya, donning the bronze cross replies, "We will go to suffer together and we will bear our cross" (Crime 391). Even Raskolnikov's mother asks him to let her "sign [him] with the cross" during their last meeting (Crime 476). She knows he is on his way to suffer, and accordingly signs the symbol of the cross over him.

Besides the explicit cross imagery, the Marmeladov family's green shawl becomes a symbolic cross. Returning from her first night as a prostitute, Sonya walked straight up to Katerina Ivanovna and laid thirty roubles on the table before her in silence. She did not utter a word, she did not even look at her, she simply picked up [the] big green drap de dames . . . put it over her head and face and lay down on the bed with her face to the wall; and her little shoulders and her body kept shuddering. (Crime 16)

Sonya has assumed the responsibility of her stepfamily, the cross that brings her suffering. Similarly, Katerina Ivanovna "throw[s] over her head that green shawl which Marmeladov had mentioned to Raskolnikov . . . [and left] with a vague intention of going at once somewhere to find justice" (Crime 374). She continues to wear the shawl while forcing her children to act as street performers, and at that point Katerina Ivanovna's suffering has reached its climax. She
dies after bearing the shawl, giving up the unendurable combination of consumption and starving fatherless children.

Sonya also faces her hardships under the green shawl; she first is seen wearing it after returning from her first night from prostitution. Because of the prostitution, Sonya loses her chance of marriage and family, and also loses her home because she receives a yellow passport—the identification papers of a recognized prostitute. After Katerina Ivanovna’s death and after her stepsiblings have been placed in orphanages, Sonya takes up the shawl (and suffering) for a new reason. As Raskolnikov prepares to go turn himself in, “he crossed himself several times. Sonya took up her shawl and put it on her head. It was the green *drap de dames* shawl of which Marmeladov had spoken, ‘the family shawl’” (Crime 483). Whenever Sonya dons the green shawl it coincides with suffering. At the moment Raskolnikov realizes his need for resurrection Sonya is still seen wearing her green shawl—her suffering under it has yielded results.

The timing of Raskolnikov’s realization is not incidental. It follows Easter Sunday, the day Christians celebrate Christ’s resurrection. Easter therefore becomes the final purely Christian symbol of Raskolnikov’s resurrection. Raskolnikov’s sentence in Siberia is not sufficient to bring in him the will to be spiritually reborn. He is called an “atheist” by fellow prisoners, but then later takes part in the Easter sacrament. Two weeks after Easter, Raskolnikov experiences “a full resurrection of into a new life” (Crime 504). Raskolnikov “had risen again and he knew it and felt it in all his being” (Crime 504).

The Epilogue not only takes place the second week after Easter, but also is in the springtime, uniting both Christian and more traditionally natural images of rebirth. The symbols of water, plants, the earth, the sun, and air do not typically full under the category of religious
symbols. However, in Dostoevsky’s writing, natural symbols become religious symbols. In the author’s mind, nature connects to God:

Little sticky green leaves are a favorite symbol of Dostoevsky’s. For him all the beauty of God’s world is contained in this humble image. A little green leaf is to his heroes the most irrefutable proof of the existence of God and of the coming transfiguration. (Mochulsky 135)

Dostoevsky transforms natural symbols into religious symbols. In Crime and Punishment most symbols focus on regeneration and rebirth.

For Dostoevsky “water is . . . a symbol of rebirth and regeneration” (Gibian 75). For the characters heading towards regeneration, like Raskolnikov, water is a good omen. For Svidrigaylov, Raskolnikov’s damned double, water is repulsive. He moves away from rebirth, “never hav[ing] liked water . . . even in landscapes” (Crime 466). The “symbolism of water is the language used to express the conflict; Raskolnikov’s reaction to water is a gauge of his inner state” (Gibian 77). On telling his sister that he contemplated suicide, Raskolnikov taunts, “You don’t think, sister, that I was simply afraid of the water?” (Crime 478). Ironically, Raskolnikov is afraid of the water because it symbolizes a source of resurrection. The line “water wears out a stone” (Crime 481) penetrates Raskolnikov’s thoughts as he walks to confess his murder of the pawnbroker. The symbolism of water continues when Raskolnikov serves his time in Siberia. His prison is located “on the banks of a broad solitary river” (Crime 491), and it is by this river Raskolnikov’s soul resurrects. The water imagery alludes to rebirth throughout the novel, and is present for the moment Raskolnikov decides to spiritually regenerate.

Plants also serve as a symbol of recognizing future life. Razumihin, Raskolnikov’s one remaining friend from his days in the University, is “like a summer rose” in his affection for
get out the next night he again takes up his plan of murdering Alyona Ivanovna. At that moment, he sees “the glowing red sun setting in the glowing sky” (Crime 58). Raskolnikov is about to divorce himself from humanity and from meaningful life, by murder. The sun setting marks this decline. Earlier Raskolnikov had thought about how the sun will shine when he commits his murder. Then when considering turning himself in, Raskolnikov contemplates, “depending on the sunset or something, one can’t help doing something stupid” (Crime 395). During Porfiry’s final visit to Raskolnikov’s room, he encourages Raskolnikov saying, “Be the sun and all will see you. The sun has before all to be the sun” (Crime 425). Using the sun as a prime example, Porfiry reminds Raskolnikov to avoid theorizing and simply live life. Porfiry’s words become somewhat prophetic. On the day that Raskolnikov experiences his unexplainable change “the vast steppe [was] bathed in sunshine . . . [and] there time itself seemed to stand still, as though the age of Abraham and his flocks had not passed” (Crime 503). Raskolnikov once again stands under the sunlight, ready to live life.

As Raskolnikov is sensitive to the sun, he is also sensitive to air. Raskolnikov calls his garret a “hole . . . [an] awful little cupboard” (Crime 51). Throughout Crime and Punishment the readers find Raskolnikov delirious, ill, or worried in this small, shabby corner. According to Konstantin Molchulsky, Raskolnikov’s windowless room is comparable to a coffin (292). No air moves in the room, creating a stagnant environment. Meanwhile Sonya’s airy room was on the third story of a building and “looked like a barn . . . [having] three windows looking out on to the canal” (Crime 293). In this more spacious environment, Raskolnikov is able to see his beliefs and actions in a clearer light. Here he acknowledges his wrong (though he displays no guilt over the murders), and here he decides to confess. Towards the end of the novel Raskolnikov tells
Raskolnikov’s sister. In Dounia’s presence Razumihin is “red as a peony” (Crime 231). For Raskolnikov vegetation serves as medium that first separates him from his theory involving the two classes of humans, and later nurtures him towards the confession of his crime. Before Raskolnikov killed the pawnbroker, he dreamed about the mare while sleeping in the bushes. The “natural surroundings reawakened in him the feelings of his youth, through which he came close to avoiding his crime and to finding regeneration without having to pass through the cycle of crime and punishment” (Gibian 77). Later, after breaking from his family and withdrawing from Sonya, Raskolnikov begins falling asleep in random places and not remembering how he got there. Sometimes “he woke up before morning among some bushes” (Crime 408), and through this time away from the cramped city which partially drove him to murder, Raskolnikov prepares to start life afresh by confessing his crime. While under the redefining influence of the Siberian steppe in the springtime, Raskolnikov experiences his regeneration.

Vegetation, like water, also symbolically serves as a distinguishing factor between Raskolnikov, who will regenerate, and Svidrigaylov, who commits suicide. Svidrigaylov’s “property consists chiefly of forests and water meadows. The revenue has not fallen off; but I am not going to see them, I was sick of them long ago” (Crime 255-6). Nature fails to move Svidrigaylov towards rebirth. His dreams about flowers the night before his suicide “suggest the last outburst of his craving for life” (Gibian 78). Svidrigaylov will not change his ways and dare renewal of life. Therefore, “the forces symbolic of new life, vegetation [heard in the wind] as well as rain” disturb Svidrigaylov during his last night alive (Gibian 78).

Like vegetation, the sun acts as an indicator of Raskolnikov’s regeneration. Konstantin Mochulsky argues, in “Dostoevsky, the sun is a symbol of ‘living life’” (295). When Raskolnikov overhears Lizaveta, the innocent sister of the pawnbroker, telling friends she will
Razumihin that "yesterday a man said to [him] that what a man needs is fresh air, fresh air, fresh air" (Crime 410). Air gives Raskolnikov the ability think and to change.

Not all of the natural symbols are as specific as air, sun, water, and vegetation. The "universal symbolism of the earth" appears throughout Crime and Punishment (Gibian 79). The earth symbolizes the community that Raskolnikov must be reborn into. The first significant image of the earth is with the man (who may possibly be in Raskolnikov's imagination) who calls Raskolnikov a murderer. Raskolnikov ponders, "Who is that man who sprang out of the earth?" (Crime 255). The nameless accuser is a representative of the earth. Later Raskolnikov's "visitor from underground" (Crime 330) revisits him to apologize and bows to the ground. When admonishing Raskolnikov to turn himself in, Sonya tells him to "kiss the earth at the crossroads—a distinctly Russian and pre-Christian acknowledgement of the earth as the common mother of all men" (Gibian 79). However, Sonya immediately then tells Raskolnikov, "'God will send you life'" (Crime 389). Raskolnikov obeys Sonya; he kneels "down in the middle of the square, bow[s] down to the earth, and kiss[es] that filthy earth with bliss and rapture" (Crime 485). Kissing the earth signifies a step towards rebirth.

The natural symbols of Crime and Punishment develop into a larger picture, which complements the resurrection message of the Christian symbols. The sun and vegetation are frequently linked to water, creating a setting of nature for Raskolnikov's mind in the midst of (and in contrast to) a dirty crowded city. These symbols invoke promises of rebirth and renewal. Raskolnikov, still unchanged, wonders how the peasants "could... care so much for a ray of sunshine, for the primeval forest, the cold spring hidden away" (Crime 500), but the regeneration foreshadowed by the natural symbols filters into Raskolnikov. The final scene of Raskolnikov's
transformation occurs outside in warm air, under the sun, near the river, and in the midst of springtime vegetation.

Crime and Punishment’s natural symbolism is not exclusively images of rebirth. The novel contains images that hint at the horrible fate that lies opposed to regeneration. While these symbols of death fall outside the traditionally categorized religious symbols, Dostoevsky uses them to serve an equally important spiritual role. The naturalistic symbols of blood, insects, and the color yellow become indicators of evil and death. They occur in relation to Raskolnikov’s crime, his target victim (Alyona Ivanovna), and his double (Svidrigaylov). Raskolnikov’s opposition to these non-traditional religious symbols demonstrates he will avoid evil they symbolize, and instead eventually experience resurrection. Raskolnikov fears blood’s telltale appearance on his person, is disgusted by the presence of insects, and continually notices the yellow in his surroundings. On the other hand, Svidrigaylov who embraces two of these symbols ends his life before the novel’s close.

Hours before carrying out his murder plot, Raskolnikov lies down in his pathetic room. He falls asleep and dreams of being a child and seeing a mare beaten to death by a cruel drunk owner. The dream of the mare introduces the symbol of blood. Dostoevsky constructed this dream from a personal experience:

As a youth (in 1837) on his way to a military engineering school in St. Petersburg, Dostoevsky witnessed a scene that remained in his memory for the rest of is life: he saw a state courier beat his coachman with his fists, and the coachman beat the horses. The rhythm of hurt passing from one being to another was an early instance of what was to be a premise of his mature psychology. (Notebooks 64)
In Raskolnikov’s dream he sees a worn out mare savagely beaten to death by a drunken master, who is trying to show off. Though Raskolnikov is disgusted in his dream, upon waking he continues with his plan to kill the pawnbroker. The mare obviously connects with the pawnbroker since both are killed with an axe (Mortimer 69). In his dream, the blood of the mare shows the cruel sinfulness of the master. Blood will continue to represent the sinfulness Raskolnikov faces after murdering Alyona Ivanovna.

Raskolnikov’s first physical interaction with blood occurs during his crime. Although the act of the murder was unavoidably bloody, Raskolnikov carefully robs the rooms “trying to avoid the streaming blood” coming from the slain bodies of Lizaveta and Alyona Ivanovna (Crime 74). Once back in his room Raskolnikov worries about the physical presence of the pawnbroker’s blood on his clothing. He searches and discovers faint traces on his socks. Later when he falls unconscious, Raskolnikov begs those who are present for the ragged socks. The marks of blood eat at his conscience. As Raskolnikov searches his clothing again, he worries that “his perceptions were failing, were going to pieces . . . his reason cloud[ing]” (Crime 87). The day after the murder when Nastasya is nursing Raskolnikov, she ironically comments that his disease was because of “the blood” (Crime 111). Nastasya reasons that “when there’s no outlet for [blood] and it gets clotted, you begin fancying things” (Crime 111); Raskolnikov recognizes the murder has already begun to wear on his mind. Even after Marmeladov’s accident, Raskolnikov notes the blood on his clothes “with a peculiar air” (Crime 176). Blood reminds Raskolnikov of his sin and the death associated with it.

Insects symbolically provide hints of evil presences, sources of sinfulness, and connections to death. In Crime and Punishment Dostoevsky uses the presence of “everyday”
pests to provide a religious sign of evil. The three insects Dostoevsky includes in the novel are lice, spiders, and flies.

Lice only show up in connection to Alyona Ivanovna. Raskolnikov calls the pawnbroker a “louse” thirteen times in the course of the novel (Matlaw 655-6). Not only does this emphasize that Raskolnikov did not view the pawnbroker as a human, but also it shows the evil that surrounded Alyona Ivanovna. The pawnbroker treated her sister Lizaveta cruelly, and desired that all of her money should go to masses for her soul once she died (instead of to dependent Lizaveta and the poor). Though Raskolnikov recognizes the nasty truth about Alyona Ivanovna, but he also connects his own crime to her evil. Raskolnikov blames his poverty on the system that holds him down (represented by Alyona Ivanovna), and in turn responds with evil.

The symbol of spiders is also shared between Alyona Ivanovna and Raskolnikov. In Dostoevsky’s writing spiders mean either sinners or “evil principles” (Mochulsky 555). Alyona Ivanovna’s apartment is described as a “neat web of a spider” (Mochulsky 292). This again reflects on Raskolnikov’s feelings towards her: she is a figure of the evil system that he feels is keeping him held down. Later in Crime and Punishment Raskolnikov begins to see his similarities to the pawnbroker, and these observations manifest themselves in the image of a spider. Raskolnikov tells Sonya that he did not try to help himself or his family, and instead “sat in [his] room like a spider” (Crime 386). He also admits he did not care “whether [he] became a benefactor to others, or spent [his] life like a spider catching men in [his] web and sucking the life out” when he committed his crime (Crime 388). Suicidal Svidrigaylov later haunts Raskolnikov by asking about life after death. Twice Svidrigaylov asks Raskolnikov the haunting question: “What if it’s one little room [with only] spiders in every corner, and that’s all eternity is?” (Crime 269).
Though Svidrigaylov mentions spiders to Raskolnikov, flies surround Svidrigaylov more frequently. In his paranoia, Raskolnikov at one point worries that a fly might have seen his murder after his first criminal investigation. Later he falls asleep and dreams about murdering Alyona Ivanovna, only now she is made of wood and laughs hysterically at him while he beats her with the axe. At the end of this dream the buzz of a fly torments him, and when he wakes he discovers “a big fly” in his room (*Crime* 259). This happens the first time Raskolnikov meets Svidrigaylov who, for the rest of the novel, is then associated with flies. Flies epitomize Svidrigaylov’s character perfectly. Both are unclean (Svidrigaylov in a moral sense), live off others, interfere with the lives of others, and are associated with death. Svidrigaylov squanders his late wife’s money, preys on innocent young women, and does not care about whose life he messes up. He is said to be responsible for the deaths of his wife and two of his serfs. The only exceptions of Svidrigaylov showing generosity happen shortly before his suicide. Svidrigaylov realizes his own wretchedness as a human and tries to correct his wrongs. Evil, however, is rooted deeply. Flies infest the veal in Svidrigaylov’s hotel room when he awakes from his turbulent dreams. In vain,

he stared at them and at last with his free right hand began trying to catch one. He tried till he was tired, but could not catch it. At last, realizing that he was engaged in this interesting pursuit, he started . . . . (*Crime* 471)

Svidrigaylov soon left the hotel room with his revolver, and ended his life.

Raskolnikov’s stealing gold from the pawnbroker introduces the image of yellow that haunts the rest of the novel (Anderson 91). Throughout *Crime and Punishment* yellow continually conjures up Raskolnikov’s crime. As Raskolnikov psychologically deals with the implications of his crime he notices few details of what is around him. Yellow, however, stands
out to him again and again. It frequently is the most distinguishing characteristic of a room, and often mentioned when Raskolnikov’s mind is focusing on his crime. Porfiry Petrovitch’s “government furniture [was] of polished yellow wood” (Crime 309), and even in Raskolnikov’s dream about the wooden pawnbroker there is a yellow sofa. The wallpaper in both Sonya’s and Raskolnikov’s rooms was “yellow, scratched and shabby” (Crime 293). While various caregivers of Raskolnikov discuss the murder he feels the need to search the “dirty, yellow paper [and] pick out one clumsy, white flower with brown lines on it and . . . examining how many petals were on it” (Crime 127). He is desperately trying to forget the crime and unable to do so. When facing his crime, Raskolnikov notices the yellow of his surroundings. During Porfiry Petrovitch’s first interrogation, Raskolnikov imagines his face “a sickly yellowish colour” (Crime 233). After passing out in the police station, Raskolnikov is handed “a yellowish glass filled with yellowish water” (Crime 101).

For Raskolnikov’s double, Svidrigaylov, yellow is also a symbol. The color appears many times immediately preceding Svidrigaylov’s suicide. In the hotel where he spends his last night, “the walls looked as though they were made of planks, covered with shabby paper, so torn and dusty that the pattern was indistinguishable, though the general colour—yellow—could still be made out” (Crime 465). Then during Svidrigaylov’s last walk, he passes “bright yellow, wooden, little houses look[ing] dirty and dejected with their closed shutters” (Crime 471). In front of these houses Svidrigaylov ends his life.

Crime and Punishment concludes after Raskolnikov has experienced his moment of transformation. The novel promises
that is the beginning of a new story—the story of the gradual renewal of a man, 
the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, 
of his initiation into a new unknown life. (Crime 505)

Crime and Punishment does not offer a solution to the social problems it shows but, “rather . . . insist[s] that any solution would turn out to be inhuman and morally unendurable if it lost sight of the values of compassion and love that inspire Sonya” (Crime xxii). The natural symbols of death surround Svidrigaylov even in his last living moments, while Raskolnikov’s disgust and rejection of these symbols grows through the book. The Christian and natural symbols depicting regeneration constantly appear near to Raskolnikov. Their presence, combined with his acceptance of them, promises the resurrection of Raskolnikov’s soul throughout the entire novel. As Boyce Gibson determined, “Raskolnikov was fit material for redemption” (95). The “religious dissenter” (Rising), as the root of Raskolnikov’s name denotes, is transformed by the religious influences symbolized in Crime and Punishment.
Works Cited


This translation is used as the primary source for this paper.


