

The three scenes I want us to look at during the course of my talk this morning are: Raskolnikov's confession to Sonya; Svidrigailov's last night alive; and the Epilogue—Raskolnikov in Siberia.

So if I seem to get off the subject and into too much pontificating, remember that I have these three scenes in mind and that we are coming to them some time or other. But in the meantime I have to utter a few generalities—though most of what I have to say has already been admirably set forth in the fine lectures by Dr. Allums and Dr. Cowan—as well as by Dr. Arbery in his Introductory remarks. But their talks have stimulated me to want to dip my oar in the stream. It's the group aspect of the thinking that goes on here on Routh street that is its energizing aspect. One doesn't find this kind of exchange anywhere else, I'm convinced, on the planet. One of the distinguishing things about the studies in this program is that we think of works of art as belonging to certain large groupings—not that there are rules for these categories, not that anyone can legislate that a work has to fit into one of them. But we see it as in the nature of reality that certain kinds of attitudes of the soul determine a particular form of a

work. Aristotle named the kinds back in the 5th century BC.—Tragedy, Epic, Comedy, and dithyrambic (lyric). And just as the Greeks discovered philosophy, they discovered literary theory. I don't think they discovered poetry, for poetry is natural to even the most primitive of tribes. But *understanding* poetry, seeing the significance of the world it posits—that is another matter. So you have had in this program a real introduction to the most marked, the most distinguished, examples of tragedy. And you've had a taste of comedy. We are ending the institute with two novels, both of which make use of elements of tragedy and comedy, each of them offering a different kind of totality—a different form. In its highest perfection, could we say, the Greeks produced tragedy. But a Christian world view, we might suggest, perfected the genre of comedy.

The Greeks tended to think of being as emanation: there was the realm of the gods and the plane of truth, the ideas. And then, as a kind of afterthought, there was the world of matter, farthest removed from reality and hence a realm that suffered change and death, the world of becoming. That conception underlay the Greek myth that permeated all their works of art: the human is noble, like the gods, but subject

to death. The gorgeousness of the Greek tragedies testifies to this inescapable ineluctable fate: we are mortal, we shall die. But we can leave behind us something of magnanimity; we can, as the epics testify, leave behind us Kleos, the memory of the heroic. And tragedy testifies that we can leave behind us the polis (as Aeschylus tells us) and, as Sophocles testifies, a specific blessing for it. Our lives then need not be lived in vain. Old comedy (Aristophanic comedy) testifies that we can enjoy life in the meantime; that we have certain delights that come from the body and from our wits, from our being mortal. And we are supposed to celebrate them, as though they were not tainted with what the Biblical tradition portrays as Original Sin.

What we have to see, then, is that we are heirs to two traditions: the classical and the Scriptural. It is not a matter of religion; we are not concerned in literary studies with religion as such. That is not our task. Our task is to see what myth governs the form of the works we study. And it is not always clear to people that we must distinguish between the Christian myth (that has shaped our art and our culture and our science) from the Christian faith. One may be an absolute agnostic; yet one lives in a world that has been shaped by Christianity. And if one is a good artist,

devoted to the poetic truth that comes into one's imagination through a descent into the depths (not of oneself but of one's people), then one's work is likely to be deeply Christian. So we saw with Shakespeare the way in which he worked at the end of his life toward the expression of this strange pattern: incarnation and resurrection, both of them doctrines that involve body and soul. The word is made flesh and dwells among us. But as skilled readers of literary works of art, we need to separate our personal "belief," our faith, from our insight as lovers of poetry. We have to see the truth that poetry expresses. And what we see in Dostoevsky in particular, whatever our own position, is that he has apprehended the startling shape of the Christian world view; and he sees it as based on: incarnation, forgiveness, and resurrection. The supreme Christian virtues are not justice, prudence, and temperance, but faith, hope, and charity. The final arbiter of things is not reason but grace.

We saw the beginning of this insight in the *Tempest*; and the surprise that accompanied it was the major impelling force in the play. (It takes a while for a new world view to become natural enough that a poet can use it. A poet cannot simply write about his private belief but must express

the heart of his people.) It was for Dostoevsky to retrieve the myth of holy Russia. You have heard Dr. Arbery, and Dr. Allums and Dr. Cowan speak of the impact modernity had on Russia: it tore apart the integrity of its psyche. Most of the aristocracy went with the new enlightened Western ideas; the peasants stayed with the kenotic faith of Old Holy Russia, the vitality of which, however, became less and less their governing way of life and—cut off from its cultural standing, tended to seem increasingly antiquated. Thus the modern city such as Petersburg, the world of which Dostoevsky writes, is a deeply divided world. Secularism is spreading its pall over a Christian past, hardly remembered. Yet that past is still available, still effective, and will outlive the new theories that seep into Russia from Europe. We see this old kenotic faith exemplified in *Crime and Punishment* in, of course Sonya. But her father Marmeladov, has it too. The murdered Lizaveta, the carpenter who hangs himself, the workingman who confesses to the murder in order to suffer: these are ikonic figures that point to something in the depths of the city's soul, hidden, but powerful. Katerina Ivanovna belongs in this company, rebel that she is; she knows what suffering is and despite her railing, has accepted it. At her agonizing death, she doesn't want a priest. "I have no sins," she

says. “And besides God knows them and will forgive them. And if he doesn’t I don’t care.” She dies in the arms of Sonia, “Ah, Sonia, are you here too,” she murmurs.

So what Shakespeare saw beginning in the new age before him Dostoevsky almost three centuries later completes: the vision of the necessity of forgiveness among a fallen humanity, living in cities that are no longer *polei* but that have become fantastic cities, cities that are no longer a community to which people relate, that have so little heart that they allow numbers of people to live not simply in poverty, but destitution—cities that have no festivity, no carnivals, no rituals, not being based on community but on individualism, so that in a way not possible with the ancients, people are isolated, separate units, cut off, alone, underground, the ties severed—and what Nietzsche emphasized as *ressentiment* characterizing their relation to others rather than bonds of pietas.

. Dostoevsky is the great novelist of this condition. He is writing of 19th cn Russia, where modernization has rushed in upon a traditional society with the same devastation that we are witnessing all over again today, when with the collapse of the Soviet regime, we are allowing an entire mass of

people to flounder in a global capitalism that they cannot comprehend.

This is why Dostoyevsky has been called prophetic—because he was sensitive enough to certain changes to write about them long before they had taken place on the scale that he depicts. The Petersburg he writes about is our society; it is only incipient in 19th century Russia: ideological warfare, violence, mass murder, child abuse, broken homes, destitution, alcoholism, economic greed, the degradation of woman, the substitution of sensationalism for communal wisdom, of secular humanism for Christian love.

What he writes about then is tragic material. But Dostoyevsky writes about it from within the myth of his society, which is comic. It is comic because Christianity posits another world beyond this one. Death is not the end of things. It is comic because Christianity sees the body as intimately related to soul; it is comic because love and hope dominate the Christian outlook no matter what the incidents of a person's life. It is comic because there is always a possibility of turning back—at the last moment before death one can reverse the direction one's whole life has taken. It is comic because resurrection is possible, both in this life

and the next. So Dostoevsky in his long career as a novelist studied the Ancient Russian Orthodox tradition and determined to write about it in a novel about the Petersburg of his day. He embodies Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in a prostitute, a timid little girl who sells her body so that her brothers and sisters may have food. He embodies it in a heroic young man, fatherless, misguided, miseducated, bitter at the world, abstract in his thinking, undertaking a task primarily, as he believes, to prove that he is great-souled. But he also sees in that soulless city those who accept suffering, who hope passionately, who love without question, who empty themselves to become part of the divine *kenosis*. And so the only kind of generic pattern that would fit what D wanted to construct is comedy. He takes essentially tragic material—and makes of this material a comic work of art. The beginnings before the murder are infernal: Petersburg is a lost city; money dominates every consideration; poverty and injustice abound. The purgatorial begins when Raskolnikov takes an axe and gives Alyona forty whacks, so to say. And when he must also kill her innocent and inoffensive sister, we the readers—and he, the murderer, later—see the ambiguity of any genuine act. For that axe blow was the beginning of R's salvation. It was his first step toward doing something, toward interacting in

some way with another human being. *Crime and Punishment: prestuplenie*, stepping over the line. He has stepped over the line in killing the two old women; and it will be this excess, this act, this boldness, that will engender a chain of circumstances offering him a choice. You can't kill someone without getting blood on you. And blood not only cries out for justice but redeems, saves, washes away sin. Porfiry, that strange character, (like Virgil in the Divine Comedy) embodies the possibility of purgation. The paradisaical realm is embodied in Sonia, humble, sacrificing, lowly but authoritative; but it is realized only in Siberia, when Raskolnikov falls at her feet and suddenly sees who and what she is.

And so *Crime and Punishment* is comic. Now of course as you know by now, we do not mean funny or humorous or witty when we speak of comedy. We mean that the work is a structure that moves upward rather than downward. And it has accrued to itself certain characteristics: its plot is more episodic, with more characters, more talk, with the tendency toward carnivalization, toward turning everything upside down, breaking order apart, letting chaos in. It moves toward the object of desire, the pretty girl; its hero tends to be a

poneros, a rascal—tricky and witty rather than heroic. It usually has a *pharmakos*, a scapegoat, that it chases off the stage. It is less about the family than about community. It usually contains someone that we can call a *psychopomp*, a trickster figure who bears cosmic importance, leads the soul on his journey. It tends toward stock figures, toward allegorical representation. It lacks the dignity of tragedy.

So Dostoevski's strange style—dealing with unbearable “tragic” materials as it seems in a grotesque manner—is the mark of taking the community's deeply buried myth of Holy Russia seriously. He had to ascertain what is genuinely present in the Russian soul. And he found it to be still, in a hidden way, profoundly committed to Christ. So though the death of Marmeladov, for instance, is excruciating, unbearable, “tragic,” as we might say, Dostoevsky's portrayal of it is grotesque, carnivalesque, comic. Dante is the first precursor of this polyphonic asymmetrical style that places emphasis on the voice and the soul of every person. And Dostoevski is more like Dante than any other writer we can think of. (He gives us an entire catalog of the virtues and vices, but they are displayed horizontally, alive, making their choices, whereas Dante's are vertical, frozen and unchanging in death.)

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The Confession Scene:

In his latter portion of the novel, we begin with one of the most carnivalesque scenes of the entire work: the funeral dinner given by Katerina Ivanovna. *Recall the setting for the scene, the wild, frenzied party given by Katerina Ivanovna out of her own pride but ostensibly in honor of her "late husband."* She has spent nearly all the money R. had given her for this pitiful and foolish gesture. And hardly any of the invited guests come: all sorts of derelicts have to be brought in instead. Katerina's pretensions and her hysteria mount as she battles for her dignity with the German landlady. Suddenly Luzhin enters; she fawns on him, pretends he is a family friend. But his manner is terse and business like. He accuses Sonya of stealing a hundred-ruble note; only Katerina speaks up in her defense. She goes against the apparent

facts--because she knows Sonya. Even when the note is pulled from Sonya's pocket, Katerina Ivanovna remains firm in her defense. Suddenly a voice interrupts: "How vile!" Lebeziatnikov has come into the room--he who saw the whole action when Luzhin slipped the money into Sonya's pocket. Lebeziatnikov had taken it as a noble and generous action that did not seek any praise or thanks; now he see it for what it is--a malicious and contemptible attempt to trap the young woman. It is only now that Raskolnikov speaks up: he can give the reason, he says: now he sees it all: and the young man, who has remained silent all during Sonya's humiliation, even though Katerina Ivanovna calls upon him for help, now advances a theory.

343 And yet Sonya gives him credit for saving her. "What would have become of me without you?" Sonya asks when Raskolnikov comes to her room afterward. Why does she attribute her

deliverance to him? Because she already loves him, because she hopes in him, because she is grateful to him (and we have to see that in the strange action of this novel, Sonya is saved by Raskolnikov as much as he is saved by her; for though Sonya has not been contaminated by her profession, she is nonetheless caught in it, caught in that irremediable net from which so few are able to escape in the modern city. The only fate ahead for her, without intervention, is destitution and death. (In an agrarian world, there was poverty and simplicity; but there was always something for people to fall back on, so that they could recover. In the 19th c industrial city--and in our own, even more increasingly--there is nothing to lift the destitute from their cycle of poverty.) And yet, in an earlier scene, when R. desiring to have company in his misery jeered at her: "What does God do for you?" She replied, "Hush! You don't deserve . . ." then she said quietly,

"He does everything."

But in the present scene, Raskolnikov wants to justify himself in his own eyes and in hers before he makes his confession: If he can convince Sonya that in certain circumstances she would think it all right to eliminate a vicious and dangerous person (Luzhin), then he can feel more self-righteous when he tells her of his own crime. So he strings out a sequence of "If's" and "Supposes."

344 And then the big question (middle of page)
"Why do you ask about what could not happen?" said Sonya distastefully. And then "I can't know God's intentions!" "Oh, if you're going to mix God up in it, we shall get nowhere," R. grumbled.

346 When he does finally confess to her that he is the murderer,
she makes a gesture that is reminiscent of the strange pushing gesture made by the

unfortunate Lizaveta when she looks up and sees the face of her slayer. Sonya's actions too are bizarre and unexpected: this strange shy girl leaps to her feet, strides about the room wringing her hands, falls on her knees before Raskolnikov, then embraces him fiercely, exclaiming, "Oh God, what have you done, what have you done to yourself?" Her behavior explains the puzzling reaction of Lizaveta (68), that holy fool who, as we see now, was concerned more with what he was about to do to himself in murdering her than with her own safety. She is the other half of the deed: all our deeds are big with ambiguity: all can go one way or the other: all, in eliminating an evil, eliminate also a good; we pull up the wheat with the weeds, as we are warned not to do. And yet conversely, Dostoevsky

would imply, all our sins contain within them elements that can save us.

The old pawnbroker, who looks so much like a witch, is a figure of the ancient Russian witch Baba Yaga, who can be both benevolent and malevolent. (She seems also akin to the fearful Erinyes, the Furies.) In his dream, when she is laughing at him in her maliciousness, he knows her to be willing his damnation. But in the grotesque symmetry of Dostoevsky's structure, Raskolnikov has good forces allied for him against every evil force arranged against him. (Joanna Stubb's book Mother Russia tells us that Yaga preceded the goddess Mother Moist Earth, who was merged with the figure of the Blessed Mother in Christian thought. So, as Bainard Cowan said yesterday, the two the pawnbroker and her sister symbolize both inimical and friendly forces. Russia is indeed, at least traditionally, under the protection of the feminine; the land itself, the great plain of dark

earth to which every Russian knows he will return, is her image and her territory. The iconic figure of holy wisdom, Sonya, is her apotheosis. (Sophia)

Sonya's injunction to Raskolnikov: Go to the crossroads. Kiss the earth you have profaned. Proclaim to everyone I am a murderer. Then God will give you life again..

Svidrigailov hears all of this. And we begin understanding the truly sinister side of Svidrigailov; he is not just a bad man; he is an agent of the enemy, though he may not have realized this fact until sometime during the course of the novel.. What Dostoevsky attempts to make us see is that the devil too wants the good. He is a rival of God. He wants to build the "golden age," a time when people will all be happy and free from care. And so instead of *caritas*, active love, instead of suffering, he offers humanitarianism—doing good for others by simply donating money to them impersonally without giving any portion of oneself. ("Though I sell all my goods to feed the poor and have not love, I am nothing.") As we see in Dostoevsky's final novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, the aim of the Grand Inquisitor is to take care of people, to feed them and allow

them to sin so that they can be happy. And as we see in that novel, if Raskolnikov has become Ivan, the doubting intellectual, Svidrigailov has become his devil, who offers the same kind of amiability and plausibility Svidrigailov offers. Ivan's devil longs more than anything else for incarnation; he longs for the body; if he could he would be an ordinary overweight housewife—the more flesh the better. So Svidrigailov, though viewed from a different stage of demonization, longs for the flesh; his sensualism is an attempt by an isolated spirit to become incarnate. He does not know that he is working against God (He thinks he is merely amusing himself and staving off boredom with his “vice,” until he encounters Raskolnikov and attempts so earnestly to draw him into an acknowledgment of commonality. But it is not until that one final terrible dream sequence on the last night of his life that Svidrigailov has any sort of genuine self knowledge. Before that he tries to help KI's children, gives money to Sonia, is really relieved when his idol Dounia manages to fend him off but does not shoot him. Yet he must continue his mission: to try to win over R's soul. It is obvious that Dostoevsky is using medieval allegory here. But this is a novel, a form that is by its very nature skeptical; and Dostoevsky has read the Greeks; and the Oresteia hovers heavily over the whole

work. But the typological readings of the Middle Ages don't just disappear. All our best novelists gather up the usable past. And one of the usable things they inherit is a tendency to use allegory as a kind of hovering device, touching their narrative lightly, in the same way that they employ myth and symbol.

When, for instance, Rask confesses to Sonya, Svidrigailov is listening on the other side of the wall. So as Rask confesses to God, the devil hears him. Just as with the two old women he murdered: one is in the other world working for his damnation; the other for his salvation.

This overtone of the morality play working in the medium of the novel provides a strange balance indeed for the postmodern polyphonic novel that is the new form Dostoevsky invented.

The Death of Svidrigailov

One of the great mysteries confronted in this novel, then, is the mystery of evil--not just of sin, but of that kind of evil that seeks to corrupt others, to entrap them in the life of opposition to the good. Raskolnikov is a sinner; Svidrigailov is so far gone in sensuality that his life is empty without

it; the content of his life is boredom, that ennui that affects the burned-out, the depraved and perverse. He married Marfa Petrovna for her money; beat her, was untrue to her; pursued Dounia, damaged her reputation, murdered his wife; caused a servant to commit suicide, violated a child, who committed suicide. He sometimes sees ghosts, tries to establish a bond with Raskolnikov, plans to marry a very young girl, counsels despair.

Yet he wants to give money to Dounia, does give it to Katerina's children and Sonya. Outwardly a gentleman, and even a kind person who +wants to do good,+ Svidrigailov is lost; and his attraction to Dounia is called forth by his utter emptiness, the vacancy that stems from a self locked in its own narrow confines.

417 Let's look at that scene:

419; the gun ;

420-1 the look of relief;

426 Then later, in the hotel: he lit a candle
 where does reality end and dream begin?

431 the revelation: the face of a harlot,

 His dream, the night before he commits
suicide, conveys to him a revelation: he sees the
inevitable: he would always corrupt the
innocent—until finally there would be no more
innocence in the world; the little five year old girl's
face takes on the look of the harlot before his
horrified eyes, (Dostoevsky writes of the sensitive
subject of childhood sexual abuse long before it was
considered even mentionable in public.)

432-33: it is decided. "Just say I'm going to
America."

(I think there is no ambiguity about the
eternal loss of Svidrigailov's soul; it is just that we
are enabled through D's art to see with a larger
perspective and to lament the loss--to weep tears
such as angels weep.

Siberia

The third scene I want us to look at today in the time that's left is the scene in the Epilogue: in Siberia in which Raskolnikov is finally given the grace to see who Sonya is. (We have to think again of Oedipus at Colonus and of Prospero on his island. Both of them are outcasts accompanied by daughters. Both of them have "stepped over the line." Both of them have come to a place outside the city where they can find respite.)

In his exile, Raskolnikov is miserable, hated by the other convicts, sentenced to serve seven more years in prison, angry at Sonya, who visits him every day; unregenerate, unable to see the severity of his crime--until one day he falls ill and is confined to the infirmary. There he has a strange dream:

451 The dream of solipsism that comes, like a
strange virus

462 he sees Sonya; but the next 2 days she does
not come. She is ill.

. One morning Raskolnikov is sent with other
convicts to a river bank to pound alabaster and
bake it in a kiln: (463)

[He] sat down on a heap of logs by the
shed and began gazing at the wide
deserted river. From the high bank a
broad landscape opened before him, the
sound of singing floated faintly audible
from the other bank. In the vast steppe,
bathed in sunshine, he could just see, like
black specks, the nomads' tents . . . There
time itself seemed to stand still, as though
the age of Abraham and his flocks had not
passed. Raskolnikov sat gazing, his
thoughts passed into daydreams, into con-

temptation; he thought of nothing, but a vague restlessness excited and troubled him. Suddenly he found Sonia beside him . . . He stole a rapid glance at her and dropped his eyes on the ground without speaking. They were alone, no one had seen them. The guard had turned away for the time. How it happened he did not know. But all at once something seemed to seize him and fling him at her feet. . .

On the evening of the same day, when the barracks were locked, Raskolnikov lay on his plank bed and thought of her. He had fancied that day that all the convicts who had been his enemies looked at him differently; he had even entered into talk with them and they answered him in a friendly way Under his pillow lay the New Testament. He took it up mechanically. The book

belonged to Sonia; it was the one from which she had read the raising of Lazarus to him.

The opening of his heart seems to stem from something that happens to him when he sees the nomads in their tents in the steppes of Siberia. Viewed from across the river, they have reminded him, we are told, of the days of Abraham. Why has this scene been able to strike deeply into him as nothing before has been able to do?

Let's look for a moment at the influences that should have been able to move him: his mother, his sister, his friend Razumihin; his own impulses (rescuing the girl from the dandy; his pity for the landlady's daughter, his sympathy for Marmeladov, his genuine empathy for the suffering of

M's family; his dream of the little mare; the death of Lizaveta-----a coin that a stranger gives him in the street, the great domed cathedral:

Porfiry has tried to get him to confess, to give himself up and seek mercy. In the unusually intense dialogue of this scene, Porfiry reveals his true nature: he himself is, like Virgil for Dante, limited to; he has gone as far as he can, he says. He recognizes in Raskolnikov a heroic soul that is capable of much; he urges him to give himself up. See pages

Raskolnikov follows his advice; but his heart does not change. "I only killed an old louse," he says of his crime.

Not until a year and a half later, in penal servitude in Siberia does he

experience the revelation that shatters his pride and opens his heart. A call from a transcendent God, enabling him to embrace, as he does, both earth and sky. The story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead echoes by analogy what has happened in Raskolnikov's soul.

of Sonia's devotion, the malice of his own pride and cruelty, the mystery of who God is. Not the God of the philosophers, as Pascal wrote after his own blazing experience of seeing and understanding: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

"As though the age of Abraham and his flocks had not passed " The nomadic life, preceding the agricultural revolution, is the

dominant pattern of life favored by the Old Testament God. Yahweh dwelt in the desert; and his seekers have constantly resorted to the desert to find the one who made heaven and earth.

Henri Frankfort has pointed out that "the desert as a metaphysical experience loomed very large for the Hebrews and colored all their valuations."

Are we to think that for a soul as far gone as Raskolnikov's, the common bonds of culture cannot redeem: a mother's and sister's love, friendship, justice (Porphyry), beauty (the cathedral)? It has required the formless transcendent to rouse him out

of himself; and then the redeeming, suffering love of Sonya.

463 Suddenly Sonya appeared. How it happened he did not know.

[Something seems to seize him and throw him at her feet. He recognizes +who+ she is, her meaning in his own life.] Later he takes up the New Testament: a difficult life lies before them; but it is the new life; and it will lived in hope and love.

Conclusion

The journey is complete: it began in isolation and the sin of pride. In D's work, the sequence is from sin to crime; the crime--the actual murder--is the first step toward Raskolnikov's salvation; its first remedies were brought to him by the sufferings of the Marmeladov family: the

father himself, the mother, the children--all of whom led him to Sonya. The ordinary family ties with mother and sister could not prove efficacious; nor could the friendship with Razumikhin; nor could the sense of justice, as represented by Porfiry. Something so touching and so horrifying as the affliction of the Marmeladovs had to bring him to the pale, pitiful, courageous young prostitute Sonya. And it is through the saint Sonya that Raskolnikov will be made whole: by her taking his sin, his crime, his guilt, his suffering, his lack of suffering that ought to be done, upon her frail self.

The novel is about, as we have said, resurrection, the new life, with all its implications. The Lazarus story is central to it. For Raskolnikov was "dead" before he committed the crime. The sequence is

from sin to crime —and an acknowledged act of wrongdoing becomes the only way back for the isolated person, the rebel who had shut himself off from God and the community.

The crime begins his redemption.

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