

## Article

# The Poetics of Schism: Dostoevsky Translates Hamlet

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**Abstract:** F.M. Dostoevsky (1821–1881) never translated Shakespeare’s works into Russian, at least not in the common sense. His fascination, however, with Hamlet and his choices, led him to interrogate the cult of Hamlet in his own culture to better understand the political and philosophical schism of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia, torn between Western and Populist ideals. *Translatio*, in the broader sense of “carrying over” Hamlet’s character, caught on a threshold, into the Russian context represents an important aspect of Dostoevsky’s re-interpretation of modern ethics. More immediately, this *translatio* is a call to the “old morality” of the 1840s generation of Russian intellectuals, who rejected notions of rational egoism and of the means justifying the ends. Dostoevsky’s schismatic hero, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, is Dostoevsky’s reimagining of his own culture’s translation of Hamlet that produced extreme and radical forms of Hamlet. Raskolnikov mimics Hamlet’s conscience-stricken personality at war with itself but achieves a more ambiguous ending typical of Dostoevsky’s regenerative paradigm.

**Keywords:** Dostoevsky; Shakespeare; Hamlet; comparative literature; world literature; Russian literature; ethics; translation; Crime and Punishment

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*No, gentlemen of the jury, they have their Hamlets, but we, so far, have only our Karamazovs!*

—F.M. Dostoevsky, *the Brothers Karamazov*

Dostoevsky was a translator, but not of Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> He read *Hamlet* (and Shakespeare’s other works) in French translation and in Nikolai Ketcher’s prose and Andrei Kroneberg’s verse translations in Russian, but never in English. His translation of Hamlet, the character, is not a linguistic *translatio* but a canvassing of poetic kinship meant to make a political statement. Walter Benjamin speaks of such kinship between languages, the “unfathomable, the mysterious, the ‘poetic’” which a poet, who is himself a translator, could tease out and carry over.<sup>2</sup> In a letter to his brother Mikhail from 9 August 1838, F.M. Dostoevsky expresses his anguish about Hamlet: “How terrible! How petty is man! Hamlet! Hamlet!” (PSS, 28:1:50).<sup>3</sup> This should not be viewed as Dostoevsky’s disappointment with Shakespeare’s craft in writing Hamlet, since for Dostoevsky, Shakespeare “presented the correct

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<sup>1</sup> For comparative studies on Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, see (Pumpiansky 1922), which finds parallels between Hamlet’s and Raskolnikov’s performative madness; (Rowe 1976), on Russia’s reaction to Hamlet since 1748, with an especially relevant chapter, “Dostoevsky and Hamlet,” which discusses Hamlet’s association with Romantic idealism and radicalism in Russian thought and Hamlet “caricatures” in Dostoevsky; (Aleksiev 1988), a collection of essays that explores Shakespeare’s significance in Russian *belles lettres*; (Cox 1969), on the question of good and evil within the Christian context of Shakespeare’s England and Dostoevsky’s Russia; (Belknap 1984), which offers a comparison between Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, *Henry IV*, and Dostoevsky’s *Demons*; (Hunt 2015), on Christian and classical prototypes of the “divine face” that finds expression in these writers; (Stepanian 2016) on the concept and genre of polyphony and tragedy in Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and Bakhtin.

<sup>2</sup> (Benjamin 1996, p. 253).

<sup>3</sup> For Dostoevsky’s works and correspondences, I am using the complete works, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Academy of Sciences USSR, 1972–1990) (Dostoevsky [1972] 1990), henceforth noted as PSS, followed by a volume and page number. Some volumes, such as volume 28, are composed of additional books, hence the notation, 28:1 or

sketch of man" (PSS, 28:1:68),<sup>4</sup> but as a prelude to Dostoevsky's jeremiad against the Russian intelligentsia's reinterpretations and cultural appropriation of Hamlet. "Hamlet" became synonymous with the wandering Russian intellectual type prevalent in Aleksandr Pushkin's *Evgeny Onegin* (1833), re-popularized in subsequent decades by such figures as Mikhail Lermontov, Aleksandr Herzen, Ivan Goncharov, and Ivan Turgenev.<sup>5</sup> What resonated with the Russian intelligentsia was Hamlet as an outsider within his native Denmark, never quite managing to belong to either Elsinore or Wittenberg. The intrinsically nomadic Russian spirit pronounced in Russian *belles lettres* crystalized in the concept of the "superfluous man" [*lishnii chelovek*], which Turgenev's *Diary of the Superfluous Man* (1850) portrays as the Westernized educated liberal who, even though he loves humanity abstractly, is nonetheless unable to benefit it in any concrete way due to the stagnation in Russian life at the time. The generation of the thirties and forties saw a common, tragic fate in Hamlet's so-called "inaction." The fiery critic, Vissarion Belinsky exclaimed, 'Hamlet'! Do you even understand the meaning of that word?—it is lofty and deep: it is the human life, it is the human being, it is you, I, and every one of us."<sup>6</sup> Turgenev, too, three decades later in the essay, "Hamlet and Don Quixote" (1860), proclaims, "Almost everyone finds his own features in Hamlet."<sup>7</sup> Scoffing at such cultural translations of Hamlet, Nikolai Mikhailovsky, a nineteenth-century literary critic, in an 1882 essay, writes, "In a word, Hamlet, not by the depth or vastness of his mind, breeds little Hamlets and—forgive me for getting ahead of myself—Hamletized piglets."<sup>8</sup> Eleanor Rowe, in identifying these Hamlet types, or "caricatures," in nineteenth-century Russian writing, underscores the gradual decline in the romanticization of Hamlet by the 1860s. "Romantic idealism," Rowe writes, "was clearly out of fashion and even a frequent object of scorn. Hamlet continued to be associated with lofty thoughts and noble longings, but he was felt to be useless to society, like Turgenev's Nezhdanov."<sup>9</sup> Dostoevsky sensed a danger in this drift and in the simultaneous rise of radicalism of Hamlet-like figures, or as Rowe refers to them, "rodent types," in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's and his disciples' works that laid claim to Hamlet's intellectual superiority but lacked his pained moral conscience.<sup>10</sup>

For Dostoevsky, Hamlet's wavering inner voice was a window into interpreting the figure of the nihilistic Russian radical, an extreme version of Hamlet that thrived within the schismatic decade of the sixties. The times echo the seventeenth century's Raskol, the split between the official church and the Old Believers or the *raskolniki*. The two main intellectual camps in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Westernizers and the Slavophiles, in their own way, tried to synthesize what they saw as Russia's schismatic personality, the former through Western ideas and the latter by calling on the masses to go back to their roots and embrace traditional values. The goal in each case

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28:2. I will be using parenthetical in-text citations and not footnotes when quoting from Shakespeare and Dostoevsky's works. Translations from the Russian are mine except otherwise noted. For the transliteration of Russian words, I follow the Library of Congress system without diacritics; I use the *-y* and not *-ii* adjectival ending for proper names, e.g., "Dostoevsky" and not "Dostoevskii." The soft sign and the umlaut are omitted in proper names, and the *-ë* is transliterated as *-yo*, e.g., Alyona, not Alëna, and Sofia rather than Sof'ia.

<sup>4</sup> By this point Dostoevsky had read Nikolai Polevoi's 1837 prose translation of *Hamlet*, and it is possible that he also saw a production of the same translation staged in Moscow's Bolshoi Theater with Pavel Mochalov in the role of Hamlet. Yuri Levin, "Shakespeare i Dostoevsky," in (Levin 1974, pp. 108–34), postulates that considering Dostoevsky's fascination with both the play and the actor's performances, Dostoevsky might have seen Mochalov in the role of Hamlet before his arrival in St. Petersburg in 1837.

<sup>5</sup> On Shakespeare's popularity in Russia, see (Zakharov 2008). On the "cult of Shakespeare" as a philological concept, see (Stepanov 1997).

<sup>6</sup> (Belinsky 1948).

<sup>7</sup> (Turgenev 1980).

<sup>8</sup> (Mikhailovsky 1995).

<sup>9</sup> (Rowe 1976, p. 85).

<sup>10</sup> Dostoevsky's fears were soon realized when the head of the clandestine social revolutionary organization, "The People's Vengeance," Sergei Nechaev, attained a special warrant from an unwitting Mikhail Bakunin, who often traveled to Paris in the 1860s to absorb Paris's revolutionary air. Bakunin's endorsement of the spurious *Alliance Révolutionnaire Européenne*, *Comité Général* allowed Nechaev to advocate his anarchic and self-serving revolutionary methods in Paris and later, in St. Petersburg. In 1869, Nechaev orchestrated the murder of a university student, I.I. Ivanov for disagreeing with his extreme tactics.

was integrality, whether it was achieved on a large scale via finding a common denominator with the West, or on a more conservative level through various nationalist movements. Either, when taken to its extremes, troubled Dostoevsky, so much so that he used his novels as warnings against various types of absolutism which he believed widened the abyssal gap between the various intelligentsia circles. Even more so than “Hamlet the wanderer” revered by the earlier generation, the prince’s schismatic personality, his hyperconscious undulation between various performative states that either demand the exercise of conscience or the absence of it, resonated with Dostoevsky and inspired his attempts to understand Hamlet as the “man of the sixties” in his own discordant times. Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, written during the politically saturated decade, therefore, is a translation of a translation<sup>11</sup> that takes the type to task.

Dostoevsky’s agenda for his most schismatic type born out of the decade, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov, inspired by Hamlet’s antics, ambiguous bursts of madness, and seeming nihilism, is best explained by a careful look at the link between Shakespeare’s hero and the Russianized version of him that ultimately transforms into the superfluous man of the forties and fifties and only later metamorphoses into the anarchic superman of the sixties, or as otherwise known, the “man of the sixties.” The type showcased the folly Dostoevsky detested most—cynicism that hardens one against the ability to love and hold anything sacred. At first glance, it may seem like for Dostoevsky, Hamlet’s problem is his indecision—“To know that one single effort of the will would suffice to demolish that veil,” as Dostoevsky puts it in his letter to Mikhail in 1838 (*PSS*, 28:1:50), the question of “Hamlet’s delay,” as it is known, still dominating Shakespeare studies today, but a closer look at the letter shows a concern not for Hamlet’s will or lack thereof, but his *malodushie*, the literal translation of which, “small-souled,” is better fitted for this context than just translating it as “cowardice.” Within a paragraph, Dostoevsky draws out the thing that he thought corrupted his own society, “encrusting” over all that is positive and beautiful. He writes,

This earth seems to me a purgatory for divine spirits who have been assailed by sinful thoughts. I feel that our world has become one immense Negative, and that everything noble, beautiful, and divine, has turned itself into a satire. If in this picture there occurs an individual who neither in idea or effect harmonizes with the whole—who is, in a word, an entirely unrelated figure—what must happen to the picture? It is destroyed and can no longer endure. (*PSS*, 28:1:50).

Dostoevsky’s superman-like figures actively change shells [*obolochki*] and, therefore, not only do they stifle their own ethical possibilities, but also tarnish the harmony of the future “world-picture” [*obraz*], a recurring word in Dostoevsky. In that these characters are often conscience-stricken, they articulate Dostoevsky’s belief in second chances and renewal, the lesson that he took away from his careful reading of the New Testament while in a Siberian *katorga*. He did not lose sight of the apocalyptic vision of the Book of Revelations, and his copious notes on the margins of the copy of the New Testament given to him by the wives of the Decembrists while he was in prison, speak to Dostoevsky’s hopes for the future. Dostoevsky’s schismatics are solitary figures whose egotism and carelessness for the other are in constant disaccord with the ethical potential Dostoevsky gives them. In a seminal essay on Dostoevsky and Shakespeare, Pumpiansky examines the parallel motivations of each character desiring to be the agent of his own fate.<sup>12</sup> Pumpiansky’s argument, briefly, is that Hamlet and Raskolnikov are trapped in their author’s plot and subconsciously know it, hence, their aspiration to craft their own plots. Dostoevsky’s looking back to Hamlet through Raskolnikov represents looking

<sup>11</sup> Maitland (2017), acknowledges and defines the abstruse concept of cultural translation and the debates surrounding it in translation studies. According to Maitland, “Translation [ . . . ] is about infinite cultural production” (p. 33). Maitland discusses the invocation of the term “cultural translation” as belonging to two camps: “those that view translation as a form of rewriting (of an anthropological, symbolic or cultural community) and those that view it as a form of ‘transposition’ (in which foreign interpretive horizons, artefacts, texts and people are relocated into a new locale” (p. 23).

<sup>12</sup> (Ozhegov and Shvedova 1922).

forward, a preventative measure of sorts meant as a warning against Hamlet-like types claiming to be misunderstood by the world and the people around them and taking matters into their own hands. Dostoevsky draws out a thread linking Hamlet and Raskolnikov: their love as an abstraction stemming from a superior sense of self that battles with their love of the neighbor.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, argues that “Dostoevsky always represents a person on the threshold of a final decision, at a moment of *crisis*, at an unfinalizable—and *unpredeterminable*—turning point for his soul.”<sup>13</sup> We see the roots of a man on the threshold as early as in Dostoevsky’s *The Double*, where the protagonist, Goliadkin, is literally split into two people with radically different personalities. Raskolnikov’s dualism is a reflection of the author’s deep awareness of, and involvement with, the schismatic intellectual culture of the time, torn between Western ideals that leaned toward secular humanism and Slavophile views that stressed the importance of faith and the people’s spiritualism. Dostoevsky encapsulates the two extremes within Raskolnikov, whose last name, Raskolnikov, means “schism” and his first name, Rodion, can be translated as “kin,” “clan,” “humankind,” or “race,” but the closest analogue is the Latin *gens* or the Greek γένος [genus]. *Rod* is a highly charged word in the Russian language; it is also the root of the words *rodit’sia* [to be born], *roditel’* [parent], *rodina* [homeland] *rodnik* [spring], *rodovoi* [labor or ancestors], *narod* [the people]. *Rod* suggests regeneration. The young university student acutely aware of the current philosophical trends of his time, wants to prove to himself that “people are divided into two classes, the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘extraordinary’” (PSS, 6:199) and that he himself belongs in the second camp. Through Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky filters the ideas of Nikolai Chernyshevsky, a disciple of the Petrashevsky Circle and its members’ views on Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> Chernyshevsky, however, had his own take on social relations, which leaned toward naturalism manifested in biological materialism. Raskolnikov’s battle with himself precisely when he is actively trying to save a drunk young girl from Svidrigailov’s lascivious pursuit, culminates in the triumph of Raskolnikov’s Darwinian inner voice, “Why did I take it on myself to interfere? Was it for me to help? Have I any right to help? Let them eat one another alive—what is it to me?” (PSS, 6:42). The physiological rationale here of the survival of the fittest is what Chernyshevsky advocated in his 1863 novel, *What Is to Be Done?* Raskolnikov’s maneuvering through Chernyshevsky’s theory of rational egoism, which claimed that a human being’s guiding principle is egoism, was Dostoevsky’s way of showing that extreme forms of positivist and naturalist trends do not leave much room for moral conscience and intuition.

Since Dostoevsky’s time, critics have scrutinized Raskolnikov’s plight as a downtrodden student, who lives in Haymarket square of St. Petersburg, in a “tiny cage of about six feet” which “suited the state of Raskolnikov’s soul” (PSS, 6:25), leading him to commit a crime. Dmitry Pisarev, a prominent critic and himself a man of the sixties, after reading *Crime and Punishment*, immediately published an essay titled, “Fight for Life” (1867) which masks Raskolnikov’s self-serving actions from a realist’s perspective. Pisarev goes as far as to argue that “if it was possible to uplift Raskolnikov by giving him happy news and by sending him money, then, it may not be too difficult to assume that the seed of his illness was not in his brain, but in his pocket.”<sup>15</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, a Russian philosopher, on the other hand, calls Raskolnikov “a child of darkness” and a precursor to much more destructive personality types in Dostoevsky, such as Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* and Nikolai Stavrogin in *Demons*, who, instead of “[putting] forward problems and riddles” like Raskolnikov, “are themselves these problems and riddles.”<sup>16</sup> Like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, where the question of the validity of the Ghost’s claims riddles and torments Hamlet’s conscience, Dostoevsky’s novel from the very beginning sets up a riddle for Raskolnikov to solve, to prove to himself that he is a Napoleon who can cross the line of morality and kill without feeling remorse. Both Hamlet’s and Raskolnikov’s serious approach

<sup>13</sup> (Bakhtin 1984, p. 61).

<sup>14</sup> Dostoevsky attended the Petrashevsky Circle meetings, a decision which cost him four years in a Siberian katonga.

<sup>15</sup> (Hunt 2015).

<sup>16</sup> (Berdiaev 1923).

to finding solutions to the riddle involve varieties of performance that are riddling to other characters, and on a narrative and dramatic level, such methods upend the protagonists into the realm of trickery. They are jesters juggling multiple personalities whose methods formulate mistrust in others and fuel their desire to find answers no matter the cost. Upon receiving his mother's letter, which reveals the circumstances of his sister, Dunia's, courtship with a petty government official Petr Petrovich Luzhin in a way that is supposed to persuade Raskolnikov that the couple's union is the best way out of their financial troubles, Raskolnikov simultaneously expresses disgust and triumph over catching the nuances of his mother's supposed "trickery" toward him. While Raskolnikov thinks himself a master of riddles, he does not like to be tricked himself. "No, mama, no Dunia, you will not deceive me!" (PSS, 6:34) is a position Raskolnikov firmly holds on to, and later reiterates in an inner monologue, "What kind of a jest is this? What is the key to the riddle?" (PSS, 6:37). Raskolnikov's suspicions toward others from the very start of the novel are microfibers which Dostoevsky weaves into the central dynamic of indeterminateness that is at the core of Raskolnikov's attitude toward life, people, and ethics.

The question of the nature of truth takes on various forms in *Hamlet* and *Crime and Punishment* and is often expressed through indecisive rhetoric and the conjunction, "or," prevalent in Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy, which Raskolnikov adopts. Speech as performance has a different flavor in *Hamlet* due to its dramatic structure and genre expectations, as it is not immediately clear whether Hamlet is genuine in his turbulent doubts or whether his famous speech is only the beginning of his madness-as-performance routine, for he is well aware that he is being carefully watched by those he is trying to trick. In Dostoevsky's novel, however, the "or" monologues continue through narrative commentary, further solidifying Raskolnikov's schism:

It was clear that now the time had come, not to languish in passive suffering, arguing that questions were insoluble, but to act, to act now and with speed. He must decide on something or other, come what might, or . . . 'Or renounce life altogether!' he exclaimed suddenly in a frenzy—'submit obediently to destiny, as it is, and stifle everything within oneself, renouncing every right to act, to live, or to love!' (PSS, 6:39).

Dostoevsky underscores Raskolnikov's split personality through sudden changes in his behavior. On a syntactical level, the word "suddenly" [*vdruk*] often recurs in *Crime and Punishment* connoting a sudden awakening, which for Dostoevsky belongs to the domain of intuitive truth. Raskolnikov's sister confirms her brother's schism between the heart and the head: "He is asking forgiveness and making friends again, as though it was part of his job, or as though he had got a lesson by heart" (PSS, 6:173). In *Hamlet*, the suddenness of action is the centrifugal force, beginning with a "leprous distilment" that with a "sudden vigor" corrupts, according to the Ghost, his "smooth body" (1.5.71, 75, 80).<sup>17</sup> As the audience grapples with the ambiguities surrounding the Ghost's presence, Hamlet suddenly becomes aware of the Ghost's mission for him. His sudden behavioral changes are aligned with his agenda and precipitate the haphazard deaths at the end of the play.

But before each work's appropriate ending, Shakespeare and Dostoevsky show each character's degrees of adaptivity and the logic behind their performances. Like fools on the stage, the Danish prince and Dostoevsky's want-to-be-Napoleon believe that they can successfully expose others' masks and follies through differentiating between appearances and realities. Hamlet and Raskolnikov occupy themselves with other characters' seeming gestures. "That *seems* is magnificent above all!—and Dunechka is going to marry that *seems*!" (PSS, 6:35) exclaims Raskolnikov upon reading his mother's letter. Hamlet's similar distrust for Gertrude, who encourages him "to let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark" (1.2.71) and "If it be/Why seems it so particular with thee?" (1.2.77–78), is conspicuous in Hamlet's play with the word "seems," where he proposes that unlike pretenders, he does not seem, but is "Seems," madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems'" (1.2.79) Hamlet tells the distressed queen.

<sup>17</sup> Quotes from *Hamlet* are from Folger Shakespeare Library (Shakespeare 1992).



The veneer of social niceties vexes Hamlet. “They fool me to the top of my bent” (3.2.414), he expresses in an aside. Although Hamlet and Raskolnikov elevate themselves above others, thinking they are the only ones capable of comprehending the riddle set upon them, they nonetheless engulf others in their quests. Their oracle of the “or” takes on a paradigmatic significance and establishes them as fool-like characters who move between worlds, stages, and selves in order to startle, rearrange, criticize, or manipulate the performance arena. Dostoevsky’s schismatics are dramatic figures whose movement between inner monologues, soliloquies, and fervent public declarations mimics the characteristics of drama.

The filtration of Renaissance awareness of the human experience through Hamlet’s multidimensionality finds its parallels in Raskolnikov’s attunement to the psychic drama unfolding in his dueling selves. The prismatic dispersions of his being, however, are largely based on a forced rationale. The quick embrace, by the radical democrats among the 1860s intellectual circles, of Ludwig Feuerbach’s “man-god” idea, which was to steal back from God the grandeur that once belonged to the human being, represented a departure from the Hegelian dialectical view of history to which the 1840s generation, including Dostoevsky, ascribed. The idea for a man of the sixties like Chernyshevsky and his disciples was that, since a human being is in charge of his own fate, an appeal to human reason then must dictate an autonomous morality. Raskolnikov is only a version of Hamlet and an extreme example of someone who wants to rationalize conscience and turn it into a simple arithmetic. Dostoevsky translates Hamlet’s doubts not as a problem of irresolution, but as a problem of conscience. Raskolnikov has sketched out the details of the execution of the murder plan and its validity, but there is something still missing from his equation: “No, I will not be able to endure it, I can’t endure it! Grant that there is no element of doubt in all those calculations of mine, grant that all the conclusions I have come to during the past month as clear as daylight, as straightforward as arithmetic, all the same I shall never summon up enough resolution to do it! I will not endure it, will not endure it!” (PSS, 6:50). As he tries to convince himself in a moment of shift, telling himself that by killing the old swindler he is only ridding society of a louse, conscience intervenes, and becomes even louder after he commits the deed.

The driving force behind Hamlet and Raskolnikov’s actions is a clearly marked initiative. In *Hamlet*, the Ghost’s authoritative council pushes Hamlet to set out his agenda:

Haste me to know’t, that I, with wings as swift,  
As meditation or the thoughts of love,  
May sweep to my revenge. (1.5.35–7).

And Raskolnikov’s desire to prove that he is not a louse becomes his prerogative. Through the power of will Raskolnikov wants to know that he is able to overstep ethical boundaries: “I ... I wanted to *have the courage*, and I killed ... I only wanted to dare” (PSS, 6:321). Dostoevsky translated radical “Hamletized piglets” into Raskolnikov as someone for whom the means justify the ends, and blind reverence to the established objective couched in rational egoism fomented notions of absolute license. In discussing why some texts and characters are more popular to translate than others, Benjamin states, “Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential for the works themselves that they be translated; it means, rather, that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability.”<sup>18</sup> In the Russian transposition of Hamlet’s motivations, Dostoevsky discovers Hamlet’s translatability, the Dane’s specific choices, those that attracted the Russian radicals and inspired minacious forms of behavior.

As Hamlet and Raskolnikov cross-examine their own narratives, feeling and empathy are actively pushed to the margins, leading to abstractions and distancing from the rest of the world. They choose to stand alone in a self-imposed bubble that soon enough bursts in the tragic realization of that very detachment. Hamlet alone receives the “commandment” which he resolutely states “[...] all alone

<sup>18</sup> (Benjamin 1996, p. 254).

shall live/within the book and volume of my brain/Unmixed with baser matter" (1.5.109). And while he, like Raskolnikov, has friends and allies who readily avail themselves to Hamlet's needs, the distance remains. At times Hamlet considers himself more intellectually superior to his peers. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio," Hamlet asserts, "Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come" (1.5.187–88). Horatio is often seen as not on the same intellectual level as Hamlet, for Hamlet himself treats him as such. Unsurprisingly, in a play where Hamlet is privy to the "commandment" and dominates speech, we do not get a chance to expose the dedicated friend's complexity. The innocuous Polonius whom Hamlet considers a "tedious old fool" (2.2.236), vexes him with prolixity. And his scornful conversation with Ophelia about honesty, speaks to his militant dedication to his exclusive knowledge of the riddle.

Even though Dostoevsky's concern was Hamlet's soul "so utterly oppressed by woe," (PSS, 28:1:50), his ability to relate to Hamlet's inner disaccord manifests itself in Raskolnikov's mad behavior. Raskolnikov not only acts as a madman, but looks like one: "[T]here was something very strange about him; his gaze shone with enthusiasm, it held intelligence and sense but at the same time, something like madness showed in it as well" (PSS, 6:12). Though Dostoevsky presents Raskolnikov's madness as only at times methodical, he interrelates psychological and physiological states of being. The physical space of "[the] dreadful closet" where Raskolnikov resides "matures the thought of it" while his brooding over it seems to be the cause of his physical ailments when "[h]is tremors seemed to have turned into a fever" (PSS, 6:45). The limited narrator reiterates the notion that physiology determines psychology, at a time when eccentric behavior, including madness, was frequently subjected to medical evaluation. Writing against pure rationalism and medical materialism, Dostoevsky's point was to counter the positivist philosophy of Russian physiologist, Ivan Sechenov and those he influenced. Like Sechenov, his disciples, Nikolai Ogarev and Dmitri Pisarev "rejected free will as an idealistic superstition and attempted to replace the 'fatalism of predestination' by the 'fatalism of cause and effect'."<sup>19</sup> Dostoevsky's letter to his publisher, Mikhail Katkov, editor of the *Russian Messenger*, in September of 1865, during the writing period of *Crime and Punishment*, by contrast, restates that the "[novel] is a psychological account of a crime" where "the psychological process of the crime develops" before the protagonist commits the murder (PSS, 28:2:136). Although Dostoevsky attended the Petrashevsky Circle meetings only a few times in the 1840s, their psychologizing of human nature nonetheless influenced his ideas. The generation of the 1840s, which included other prominent figures like Herzen and Belinsky, considered the physiological determinism of the 1860s generation as a vainglorious attempt to stifle the free will and curtail any feelings of duty to one's fellow human beings. Herzen's influential *Letters on Free Will* (1868) struck a nerve in Dostoevsky, especially in its emphasis of the wide ideological gap between the two generations. In his response to his physiologist son, Aleksandr Jr., Herzen writes,

At all periods, man seeks his autonomy, his liberty and though pulled along by necessity, he does not wish to act except according to his own will; he does not wish to be a passive gravedigger of the past or an unconscious midwife of the future; he considers history as his free and indispensable work. [ . . . ] Moral liberty is thus a psychological, or if one wishes, an anthropological reality.<sup>20</sup>

Raskolnikov's inner disaccord through Hamlet taps into the heart of the times to present the peril of a life attempted to be lived within the strict parameters of determinism. On a larger scale, Dostoevsky, like Shakespeare, magnifies his hero's dualism to represent the rottenness of the political divide that for Dostoevsky was not only a political, but a moral issue.

Dostoevsky does not allow his conflicted hero to ride the naturalist train without any emotional stops. The novel thus portrays a series of fluctuations in the mind of the "greenhorn," something

<sup>19</sup> (Walicki 1979, p. 182).

<sup>20</sup> The passage is quoted in (Frank 2010, p. 465). The original text is in (Herzen 1876, p. 293).

Raskolnikov tries to disprove himself to be, albeit unsuccessfully, torn between trendy ideologies of the time and his conscience. In a letter to her son, Raskolnikov's mother expresses her fears in this vein: "I am afraid, in my heart, that you too may have been affected by the fashionable modern unbelief" (PSS, 6:34). The Russian literary critic, Sergei Belov, suggests that Raskolnikov's struggle is "between the conscience protesting against the bloodshed and reason justifying the bloodshed."<sup>21</sup> The premise of Dostoevsky's man on the threshold leitmotif is indirectly set up by the novel's drunk fool, Sergei Marmeladov, Sofia Marmeladova's father, who tells Raskolnikov that he is "seek[ing] the company of a man of feeling and education" (PSS, 6:15). The battle between Raskolnikov's cultivated reason and his conscience which he tries to tame only intensifies after this encounter. Shakespeare uses a similar thematic technique with Polonius, the "tedious old fool," whose advice to Reynaldo, "By indirections find directions out" (2.1.73), signals to the audience the underlying premise of Hamlet's trickery rather than being actually directed to a much less significant character like Reynaldo. It is Hamlet whose entire method of disclosure of others' seeming relies on this premise. The projects that Shakespeare's and Dostoevsky's riddling characters have taken on require them to dawdle on the threshold, whether it is between performative masks or cosmic questions. Dostoevsky paid particular attention to Hamlet's indication of the "beyond." Almost every time Hamlet mentions heaven, it is in the collective phrase, "heaven and earth." Hamlet's sense of making things just are not morally perverse, but he knows that their execution and end result will be. Everyone who is caught between his and Claudius's games, "Between the pass and fell incensèd points/of mighty opposites" (5.2.68–9), has a tragic end. Like Raskolnikov, Hamlet feels himself trapped between revenge, that which his moral compass would disapprove, and his conscience. As a man who is soon to cross the line, Hamlet asks Ophelia, "What should such fellows as I do crawling/between earth and heaven?" (3.1.138–39). Dostoevsky understood Hamlet's methodical performances not as mere jests devised to trigger the imposters of Denmark to cast off their masks of seeming and acknowledge their crimes, but also as Hamlet's own way of navigating his inner crisis and soul caught in turmoil.

Dostoevsky approaches the question of schism from a different angle. Calculations and resoluteness get overpowered with feeling and sympathy every time Raskolnikov is around nature and people who are in need of his help, despite his constant rationalization about being repulsed by company. As the novel progresses, however, Raskolnikov's feelings become more abstract even toward his mother, sister, and only friend: "The thought occurred to him that it was when they were absent that he really loved them" (PSS, 6:175). When his friend Razumikhin presses Raskolnikov on the growing distance that Raskolnikov creates between himself and others and accuses his melancholy friend of being "unoriginal" and "stealing from other authors" (PSS, 6:130), Raskolnikov protests: "[C]an't you see that I don't want your charity? [ . . . ] Surely I've shown you clearly enough today that you are tormenting me, that you are . . . annoying me!" (PSS, 6:129–30). In an earlier altercation with Razumikhin, Raskolnikov tells him, "I don't want . . . translations . . . " (PSS, 6:89). Raskolnikov is nonetheless unwittingly "stealing" from *Hamlet* the prince's jests and his riddling soliloquies only to translate them into an absurdist psychic drama manifested in the flesh, which does not deceive those with a keen eye and strong moral responsibility toward the other. When the cook, Nastasia, enquires about his "work," Raskolnikov replies with utmost seriousness that his "work" is pure "thinking" (PSS, 6:26) rather than being with others. Raskolnikov's inner monologues mimic Hamlet's soliloquies and set the stage for Dostoevsky's narrative theatrics. The defamiliarizing stance prevalent in inner monologues, however, has not always been Raskolnikov's attitude. He tells Nastasia that he once tutored children, which he no longer wishes to do, as "[it] is very badly paid" (PSS, 6:27), a response that later proves insincere through Raskolnikov's utter disregard for money, whether his mother's or the pawnbroker's whom he murders. In an epimone shared between Dostoevsky's other works in varied forms, Raskolnikov throws away the twenty-kopek piece a peasant woman and her young

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<sup>21</sup> (Belov 1989, p. 491).



daughter, thinking he is homeless, give him as charity. The scene is based on Dostoevsky's personal experience in Siberia, which is repeated almost verbatim in a similar circumstance in his novel, *Notes from the House of the Dead*, where the protagonist, Gorianchikov, receives a kopek in Christ's name. Instead of keeping the money, Raskolnikov gets rid of it only to "feel that he had in that moment cut himself from everybody and everything, as if with a pair of scissors" (PSS, 6:90). What Dostoevsky establishes here is more than the actions of a rational egoist who considers the fruits of labor and charity from others as acts of pity, but more subtly, a schismatic who rejects the side of himself that thirsts for the ineluctable need for another human being.

Although Raskolnikov's madness, like Hamlet's, is at times artificial, what the two characters do not feign is their loneliness. Raskolnikov shuts every open door offered to him to entirely focus on his principle remorselessly to "step over all restrictions" (PSS, 6:211).<sup>22</sup> Pisarev's deterministic justification of the poor student's actions who commits a crime ("crosses over") to save himself from hunger, thus, does not hold, considering Raskolnikov's principle and his self-imposed shell.<sup>23</sup> Raskolnikov prioritizes his reason and labors to discard conscience as something non-definitive that belongs to the metaphysical realm. He scoffs at his mother and sister's sensitivities to others, by referring to them "as Schilleresque beautiful souls" who "up to the very last minute [ . . . ] see people through rose-colored spectacles; up to the very last moment they hope for good and not evil" (PSS, 6:37). Raskolnikov, as well as Dostoevsky's contemporaries, try to explain Raskolnikov's madness as "anomy" (in Emile Durkheim's usage), which is madness defined as the alienation from society caused by the class struggle. In his *Division of Labor in Society*, a work highly influenced by Auguste Comte's positivism, Durkheim speaks of "anomy" as "abnormal form[s] where the division of labor does not produce solidarity."<sup>24</sup> George Simpson traces the etymology of anomie to the Greek *ἄνομος* [*anomos*], which means "without [Divine] law."<sup>25</sup> Moral law and divine (Christ's) truth, for Dostoevsky, were one and the same, and the slew of philosophical and theoretical "truths" that permeated the Russian mind in the nineteenth century did not hold much appeal for him if they privileged pure rationalism over feelings and intuition and deviated from the Gospel. The answer Raskolnikov gives Sonia as to why he killed Alyona Ivanovna, "to provide myself for the university," quickly shifts from rational egoism to utilitarian socialism, "I only killed a louse, [ . . . ] a useless, vile, pernicious louse" (PSS, 6:319). Both of these reasons, as Raskolnikov later confesses, are not representative of the truth. "There is much evidence in our newspapers," wrote Dostoevsky to Katkov, "about the unusual instability of ideas which push people to commit horrible deeds" (PSS, 28:2:137). In another letter to Katkov a year later, Dostoevsky declares, "All nihilists are socialists" and continues his tirade against the corrupters of youth:

Fourier, after all, was convinced that all it will take is to build one phalanstery and the whole world will immediately be covered by phalansteries; those are his own words. And our Chernyshevsky said that he only needed to talk to the people for a quarter hour and immediately he would convince them to convert to socialism. Moreover, in our poor little defenseless Russian boys and girls, there is one more, eternally persisting, *fundamental* point upon which socialism will base itself for a long time to come: enthusiasm for the good, and the purity of their hearts. (PSS, 28:2:154).

<sup>22</sup> Raskolnikov here uses the word *prestuplenie* for "stepping over," which is also the first word in the novel's title.

<sup>23</sup> Pisarev was influenced by Auguste Comte's philosophy which made waves in Russia in the 1840s and 50s and got filtered through the discourse of the 1860s nihilism. Comte's *The Positive Philosophy of August Comte* (Comte [1853] 2000, vol. 1) is a study of the development of human intelligence in three stages: the "Theological, or fictitious; Metaphysical; or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive" where the first stage is the point of departure; the second is a transitory period, and the third is a "fixed and definitive state" (p. 28). In his conjectures of phenomena, Comte argues that as the mode of "unknown quantities" (i.e., the supernatural) form into the "known," Absolute notions are discarded where "[reasoning] and observation [ . . . ] are the means of this knowledge" (p. 27) (Comte [1853] 2000).

<sup>24</sup> (Durkheim 1933, p. 353).

<sup>25</sup> (Simpson 1933, preface, p. ix).

Dostoevsky gives his reader a warning in the form of a young man whose head is filled with theories that push him onto the edge of the abyss. For an author who mourned Hamlet's tactics and his tragic end, Dostoevsky's poetics required a Hamlet with second chances.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare only intensifies Hamlet's solipsism, which Dostoevsky translates into the Russian context through varying Christian and pagan elements. The question of Raskolnikov's religious faith comes up in the novel without any strong affirmations on his part. The reader gets a faint glimpse into the question of Raskolnikov's (un)belief through his mother's letter where she writes, "Do you pray to God, Rodia, as you used to, and do you believe in the mercy of our Creator and Redeemer?" (PSS, 6:34). And again, the question is raised in Raskolnikov's encounter with Sonia in their discussion of God when Sonia asks, "What should I do without God?" to which Raskolnikov replies maieutically, "And what does God do for you in return?" (PSS, 6:278) despite showing great interest in the story of Lazarus, which Sonia reads to him from the New Testament. To Raskolnikov, who intuitively succumbs to nature's positive forces, earth itself is a restorative and necessary element for his emotional homeostasis even if he evades it. The pagan features of earthly nourishment in Dostoevsky's novel, however, do not find a pedestal in *Hamlet*. Here Shakespeare does not capitalize on nature as the material world, but rather on nature as a person's constitution,<sup>26</sup> which is not necessarily influenced by the earth's environment:

O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever  
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.  
Let me be cruel, not unnatural. (3.2.426–28).

Hamlet is willing to go as far as cruelty, but not murder, which would be "unnatural." He would instead only "speak daggers, [ . . . ] but use none" (3.2.429). His pernicious attitude toward "rotten Denmark," even if predominantly directed toward Claudius, concocts a visionless world-picture that could only end in tragedy. Earth to Hamlet seems "a sterile promontory" (2.2.322) sullied by "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" (2.2.326) and "[ . . . ] an unweeded garden/That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature/Possess it merely" (1.2.139–41). Earth as a reawakening force cannot figure in Hamlet's universe, for he does not separate earth from its people. His question to the gravedigger, "How long will a man lie i' th' earth ere he rot?" (5.1.168), identifies the sole function of the earth, which is to rot the flesh. Dostoevsky drops the bleakness of Hamlet's outlook through the reversal of environmental attitudes that reflects his character's moral compass and to some extent, influences it.

Raskolnikov's escape from the city's noise to its pockets of nature enforce intermittent sensory awareness and attunement to nature that positively affect his moral conduct. The baptismal nature of rebirth through water is at play in *Crime and Punishment*, which Dostoevsky complexifies by adding the pagan idea of rebirth in Rodion Raskolnikov's brief moments of regeneration when around nature. While out walking by the Little Neva, Raskolnikov "took a particular interest in the flowers and looked at them the longest of all" (PSS, 6:45). Raskolnikov walks to Petrovsky Island and "turns into some bushes, lets himself fall to the ground, and falls asleep at once" (PSS, 6:45). The contrast between his "rotten" apartment, where madness ensues, and nature, is that the latter setting evokes feelings of empathy. The eminent folklorist, Andrei Siniavsky points out that the earth worship, although pagan in its origin, was an expression of love of God and its creation, and a custom still widespread in the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> People would usually expiate their sins by asking forgiveness from Mother Earth and kissing it. At the end of the novel, Raskolnikov, like nature's guilty child, "knelt in the middle of

<sup>26</sup> A now-obsolete entry for "nature" (in usage from 1385 to 1836) in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is, "The power or force which is fundamental to the physical and mental functioning of a human being." Another definition (1390–1992) is, "The inherent dominating power or impulse in a person by which character or action is determined, directed, or controlled."

<sup>27</sup> (Siniavsky 2007, p. 173). In one spiritual verse, Siniavsky notes, Mother Earth complains to God:

How she does weep and grieve,

the square, bowed to the ground, and kissed its filth with pleasure and joy. He raised himself and bowed down a second time" (PSS, 6:405). Raskolnikov's Christian ethics with its pagan associations, battling with his refined reason, speak to Dostoevsky's "dual faith" [*dvoeverie*]<sup>1</sup>—a form of Russian medieval spirituality prevalent in Russia to this day. The paganistic devotion to Mother Earth in the literary scene of the 1840s was the backbone of the Populist ideology. Slavophiles Alexei Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky, and Konstantin Aksakov had their influence on major Russian literary figures of the time, including Dostoevsky, who avidly read Aksakov's Slavophile magazine, *Day*. This is not to say that Dostoevsky unrelentingly agreed with all the anti-Western positions, but he certainly appreciated the Slavophiles' fervent opposition to Western thought and the Slavophile proclamation of the "new word" [*novoe slovo*]. Dostoevsky's poetics of schism is a canvas for the opposing viewpoints of his time that are anthropomorphized in his schismatic characters like Raskolnikov. To Dostoevsky's view, the intellectual, blinded with Western philosophical ideas that prioritized logic and reason to emotion, was a wanderer, uprooted from his native earth and soil, and thus could not understand the simple peasant's spiritual existence. The literary and philosophical movement was popularized by Dostoevsky, his brother, Mikhail, and the contemporary poet, Apollon Grigorev in the 1860s through the two brothers' journals, *Time* and *Epoch*. The movement, which was called *pochvennichestvo*, where *pochva* means soil, is the oppositional viewpoint dramatized in Raskolnikov's schism.

The battle between mind and spirit [*dusha*] accentuates Raskolnikov's movement between polarities of being and signal a possibility of change. His observations of the palace and the dome of the cathedral, two places with differing visions, are part of the "picture" [*kartina*] reflected in his opposing views:

He stood for a long time gazing steadily into the distance; this spot was particularly familiar to him. A hundred times, while he was at the university, had he stopped at this very place, usually on his way home, to fix eyes on the truly magnificent view and wonder each time at the confused and insoluble sensation it woke in him. An inexplicable chill always breathed on him from the superb panorama, for him a deaf and voiceless spirit [*dukhom*] filled the splendid picture [*kartina*]. . . . Each time he marveled at his gloomy and mysterious impression, and then, mistrustful of himself, deferred consideration of the riddle to some future time. (PSS, 6:90).

Raskolnikov is attracted to a world-picture that does not exclude feeling but occasionally embraces it in its sudden "voicelessness" and mysteriousness. Dostoevsky here uses *dusha*, which can be translated as "spirit," "soul," "harmony," or "feeling" to counteract Raskolnikov's rational thinking that constantly demands a highly formulaic and explainable reality. Real progress in the world-picture would include Raskolnikov or any of Dostoevsky's schismatic types, like Stavrogin or Ivan Karamazov, truly feeling the gravity of their deeds and atoning for them. Stavrogin commits suicide after confessing his crimes to the monk, Tikhon. Ivan Karamazov, like the Grand Inquisitor of his legend, is conflicted with feelings of despotism and the "sticky little leaves" that he keeps returning to in his monologues, the earth which calls him to atonement. Justice, therefore, would not be served when Raskolnikov confesses to the murder, but when he genuinely feels like he has failed his own moral conscience in thinking that murder is the right way to change the world to the better and in righting wrongs. The moments of hesitation speak to this problem which these characters' wavering constitution presents as a paradox.

Aside from consistently identifying with the same epithets he ascribes to Claudius, when speaking about "The Mousetrap," Hamlet aligns his "soul" with Claudius's: "Your Majesty and we that have

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Mother Damp Earth before the Lord:  
It's hard on me, Lord, to stand under people,  
It's harder still to hold people,  
Sinful, lawless people.

free souls, it touches us not" (3.2.265–66). It certainly has a satirical ring to it, but on a pathological level, Hamlet matches with his "mighty opposite":

Am I a coward?  
 Who calls me "villain"? breaks my pate across?  
 Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?  
 Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' th' throat  
 As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?  
 Ha! 'Swounds, I should take it! For it cannot be  
 But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall  
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this  
 I should have fatted all the region kites  
 With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!  
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless  
 villain!  
 O vengeance!  
 Why, what an ass am I! (2.2.598–611).

The ambiguity of these lines showcases Hamlet's tormented conscience, as it is not immediately clear whether Hamlet refers to himself or to Claudius at instances where he does not use a personal pronoun. Dostoevsky's pining in his letter to Mikhail about Hamlet's languishing soul speaks to Dostoevsky's deeper understanding of Hamlet's schismatic spirit caught between his willingness to either follow the Ghost's word to vengeance or to let his conscience dictate his actions. In Claudius's soliloquy about his unsuccessful repentance, which Hamlet does not hear, the King considers his soul "caught," but not by Hamlet. He uses the phrase, "O limed soul, that struggling to be free" (3.3.68) where "limed" means "to smear (twigs or the like) with bird-lime, for the purpose of catching birds."<sup>28</sup> Claudius momentarily catches his own conscience:

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!  
 The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,  
 Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it  
 Than is my deed to my post painted word.  
 O heavy burden! (3.1.49–54).

Claudius, however, prays without faith in God's pardon, "Yet what can it when one cannot repent?" (3.3.65–6), and even more importantly, "My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent" (3.3.44). In Dostoevsky's ethical-moral universe, Claudius's prayer would be considered a moment in moral awakening against which any punishment—legal, natural or unnatural—loses its poignancy because the accused had already realized his moral predicament.

Dostoevsky and Shakespeare operate on similar ethical grounds where the focus is on active engagement with one's own conscience. Raskolnikov's sacrificial sister, Dunia's statement, "Words are not deeds" (PSS, 6:32) and Claudius's "Words without thoughts never to heaven go" (3.3.103), are proverbial concepts that rather than preaching what *ought to be* state what *is not*. Both formulae indicate active negation:

SHAKESPEARE: WORDS ≠ THOUGHTS	because THOUGHTS = active
DOSTOEVSKY: WORDS ≠ DEEDS	because DEEDS = active

<sup>28</sup> (OED Online 2020a, 2020b).

The differences in the two propositions lie in their theological nuances. In Shakespeare, serious self-reflection has redeeming qualities. The biblical verse, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven”<sup>29</sup> neither in the Vulgate nor in Erasmus’s 1519 translation gives any examples of what “repent” entails in terms of elaborate actions. The same verse in Dostoevsky’s copy of the New Testament is *pokaitesia*, which means “confession” or “penitence.” Dostoevsky treats Raskolnikov’s act of “thinking” satirically, as nothing more than mere words the raw youth has adopted from popular ideas of the time, whereas Raskolnikov’s sudden, intuitive self-reflections are accentuated through their instigation of Raskolnikov’s good deeds, and vice versa. Every time Raskolnikov helps someone in need, reason abandons him, and he feels the force of life. After giving the Marmeladov family the last of his twenty rubles, “he was in a fever again, but unconscious of the fact, and full of a strange new feeling of boundlessly full and powerful life suddenly welling up in him, a feeling which might be compared with that of a man condemned to death and unexpectedly reprieved” (PSS, 6:146). Dostoevsky’s own highest value of Christianity, the ethic of Christian charity is what characterizes the “deed.” Dostoevsky translates amplified individualism in *Hamlet* into the Eastern Orthodox context and into a version of the Slavophile concept of the commune [*obshchina*], where each person is in harmony with others through acts of charity.<sup>30</sup> This was also Dostoevsky’s response to the individual Ego that was foundational to so many of the theories of the time, which Dostoevsky’s apocalyptic vision deemed as extremely dangerous to the young generation’s still-budding morality.

In lieu of the schismatic’s wavering conscience as a constant work in progress, plot endings do not offer solace to readers who seek finalization in *Hamlet* or *Crime and Punishment*. Shakespeare kills most in *Hamlet* in what seems like a haphazard ending to the play, and Dostoevsky sends Raskolnikov to a prison in Siberia. The novel’s “Epilogue” reveals a man wavering on the threshold, a *raskolnik*, who is still capable of questioning the method of atonement, “what did all that hardship and suffering matter to him?” (PSS, 6:422), while at the same time being open to the possibility that “[Sonia’s] feelings, her aspirations” can become his (PSS, 6:422). It is a familiar sequence of the inconstant spirit Shakespeare captures in Hamlet whose weariness in performing his madness in order to expose others, but with nefarious motives, catches up with him as he faces his own folly in others. The skull’s wisdom in infinite jest and its reminder of death propel a moment sans masks, sans vengeful fury. “Let be” (5.2.238), Hamlet decides. But even in an instance where Hamlet takes off his coxcomb on an exhausting stage, he protests against the rest being silence. “You do remember all the circumstance?” (5.2.2), Hamlet asks Horatio. And again, he pleads with Horatio before dying, “tell my story” (5.2.384), a story that is quintessentially different from the bloodshed of the last scene, a story of a fool of “feeling and education” whose spirit was vitiated by revenge. The last words of *Crime and Punishment* perhaps utter what Hamlet does not:

But that is the beginning of a new story, the story of the gradual renewal of a man, of his gradual regeneration, of his slow progress from one world to another, of how he learned to know a hitherto undreamed-of reality. All that might be the subject of a new tale, but our present one is ended. (PSS, 6:422).

No other “perfect” endings were promised. The paradox of the schism remains:

[ ... ] we fools of nature  
So horribly to shake our disposition  
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?  
Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do? (*Hamlet*, 1.4.59–62).

What Shakespeare and Dostoevsky grant with certainty, however, is the idea that in jesting to suppress ethical gestures, Hamlet and Raskolnikov inadvertently allow for conscience to raise the question of

<sup>29</sup> Matt. 4:17 (KJV).

<sup>30</sup> “Spiritual community of many jointly living people” is the definition of *obshchina* in (Ozhegov and Shvedova 1922).



the sacredness of human entity against all odds, in an ongoing battle that speaks to the human ability to deliberate and yearn for ethical choices.

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