

The Explicator

*The last verse . . . is not
yet sufficiently explicated
—Dryden*

The Explicator

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emergence of the English language, and indeed until Miss Emily Dickinson of Amherst, Massachusetts, first saw the connection.

—PEGGY ANDERSON, *Virginia Beach, Virginia*

NOTES

1. Charles R. Anderson, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), p. 281.
2. Anderson, p. 281.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Then he struck her [Alyona Ivanovna] again and yet again, with all his strength, always with the blunt side of the axe. . . . The blow fell on her [Lizaveta's] skull, splitting it open from the top of the forehead almost to the crown of the head, and felling her instantly.

—FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY, translated by Jessie Coulton

Here with all his strength he struck a blow once and again, always with the butt end and always against the crown. . . . The blow came straight against the skull, with the cutting edge, and it immediately chopped through the entire upper portion of the forehead, almost to the crown.

—FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY, translated by Thomas R. Beyer, Jr.

Dostoevsky's CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Most critics of Dostoevsky's novel have focused on Rodion Raskolnikov and the motive(s) for his murder of the old moneylender, Alyona Ivanovna. What seems to have been overlooked in most studies is the fact that Raskolnikov commits not one but two crimes—two murders, each of which is a unique act.

Dostoevsky provides a precise description of both murders, a fact not always expressed in translation. My own literal "word-for-word" translation points to several overlapping details, but more importantly it isolates the major distinction between the two crimes.¹ While both women are struck on the head, Alyona Ivanovna suffers several blows with the blunt portion of the axe. Lizaveta, on the other hand, has her forehead split cleanly open by a single blow with the bladed, sharp cutting edge of the axe. The full horror of this second murder² is emphasized in the Russian text by enclosing in commas the word "ostriem" (with the cutting edge). The single chop of the axe also points the reader to the name of the murderer, Raskolnikov.

The name, Raskolnikov, has been traditionally identified with the denotation "schismatic." The Russian word "raskol" (schism) and "raskol'nik" (schismatic) are generally used to identify the split from the Russian Orthodox

Church in the seventeenth century. The exact form "raskol'nikov" can be found in nineteenth century Russian dictionaries in the meaning "one who belongs to" or "one of the schismatics." Dostoevsky himself wishes to leave no doubt about the signification of the name. In Raskolnikov's final conversation with Porfiry, the investigator notes that Mikolka is "one of the schismatics," a phrase repeated twice in one sentence. Dostoevsky even uses a genitive plural in order that the word be identical to the hero's name: "iz raskol'nikov" (VI.2).³ Another consideration is that Dostoevsky, at the time of the novel's composition, was keenly aware of a double axe murder in Moscow committed by Gerasim Chistov, himself a "schismatic."⁴

There is, however, a possible addition to this interpretation. "Raskol" is derived from the Russian verb "raskolot'" meaning to "split" or "chop apart" or "separate into pieces." This obvious reference to the murder is reinforced by the fact that it is only when the hero enters the apartment of the old moneylender for the first time that we, the readers, learn his name, Raskolnikov (I.1.4). A re-examination of the crime scene reveals that Dostoevsky has carefully crafted the second murder, the one clean split of Lizaveta's brow, as the real cause of Raskolnikov's own "split" from humanity.

That Lizaveta's murder is the real and perhaps only "crime" is not only consistent with the remainder of the novel, but it also helps to explain some of the ambiguity of the work.⁵ One of the most famous of Raskolnikov's equivocations is "Did I murder the old woman? I killed myself, not that old creature! There and then I murdered myself at one blow, for ever! . . . But it was the devil who killed the old hag, not I. . . ." (V.4.354).

Raskolnikov's claim that he had killed himself with *one blow* can only refer to Lizaveta's murder. If one reviews the hero's most confident moments—the times of his greatest inner strength—a pattern emerges. The theory of the "extraordinary man" is always defined in terms of the murder and robbery of the "old woman, who nobody needs." Thoughts of the old woman serve only to reinforce Raskolnikov's arguments and his intellectual fencing with Porfiry, from which bouts Raskolnikov emerges by no means a loser. The epilogue reveals that without a confession Porfiry was powerless to bring the criminal to justice. No, it is not the old woman's murder which brings Raskolnikov to his knees at the crossroads, but the *moral* guilt which Raskolnikov accepts with his admission to Sonya that he killed Lizaveta.

The death of Lizaveta has an immediate effect on Raskolnikov. Lizaveta's murder interrupts his search for money. He can think only of escape. In spite of his desire to be alone as he comes to the Haymarket Square, where the fateful encounter with Lizaveta had occurred, he now feels drawn to people.

After his assertion to Porfiry that he could kill the old woman again he thinks: "Poor Lizaveta! Why had she to turn up? . . . It is strange though; I wonder why I hardly ever think of her, as though I had not killed her. . . ." (III.5.234). But, of course, Sonya, the spiritual sister of the dead woman, will not let Raskolnikov forget Lizaveta. She not only recalls her friendship with Lizaveta, but she possesses Lizaveta's cross and her New Testament, which Sonya uses for the

reading of the raising of Lazarus. At this turning point in the novel, Raskolnikov promises before he departs: "If I do come tomorrow, I will tell you who killed Lizaveta." (IV.4.279). In all, the name of Lizaveta is mentioned *twelve* times during this first visit to Sonya.

When Raskolnikov next meets Sonya he is still unable to completely accept his burden. His confession is made in the third person. "He . . . did not want to . . . kill Lizaveta. He . . . killed her by accident. . . . He meant to kill the old woman." (V.4.346). Naturally Sonya recognizes the murderer in Raskolnikov, even as he recognizes the Lizaveta in Sonya. As in their previous meeting, the name of Lizaveta dominates the passage, occurring nine times. Still Raskolnikov refuses to accept moral responsibility for the old woman: "I only killed a louse, Sonya, a useless, vile, pernicious louse." (V.4.351). As they part, Raskolnikov is still incapable of accepting Sonya's cross. Not until their final encounter does he accept the cross, simultaneously noting its association with Lizaveta's cross which Sonya now puts on. Only then does he go and confess.

Raskolnikov's restoration to the human family comes through a spiritual renewal as opposed to a rational theory of repentance. His guide to life is Sonya, the listener, not Porfiry, the talker. And while he is certainly deeply disturbed and perhaps remorseful for his murder of Lizaveta, there is never a hint that Raskolnikov regrets the murder of the old woman. While society's sentence focuses largely on the homicide-robbery, Raskolnikov's suffering is the result of the "accidental" and "unpremeditated" murder.

Raskolnikov cut himself off from society with one blow. That one blow, with the blade of the axe, is also Dostoevsky's trump card. Dostoevsky could not allow for the triumph of evil. By introducing the innocent lamb, Lizaveta, he insures not only a miscalculation by his hero, but a miscalculation which by its emotional impact prejudices the reader against a fair trial. It is certainly ironic that the same Lizaveta who by her conversation helps to precipitate the crime is also cause for leniency in the sentencing of the criminal. Likewise, Raskolnikov's choice to kill Lizaveta or to go to Siberia, is curiously no choice at all. Dostoevsky, a master of manipulation, with one blow cuts Raskolnikov away not only from his fellow characters but from his readers. Only when Raskolnikov repents and accepts the cross does he find a place in our hearts.

—THOMAS R. BEYER, JR., *Middlebury College*

NOTES

1. I refer throughout the article to the revised Norton Critical Edition with the English translation of Jessie Coulton (New York: Norton, 1975, opening quotation is from pp. 66, 68). My own translation is taken from F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VI (Leningrad: 1973).

2. If the rumor is correct that Lizaveta is pregnant, Raskolnikov may be guilty of three murders. This minor detail (Coulton, I.6.55) appears to have been somewhat more fully developed in the *Notebooks to Crime and Punishment*, trans. Edward Wasiolek (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967). There we find that Lizaveta was six months pregnant, and that a Caesarian section performed on her revealed a dead baby boy (p. 96).

3. Coulson's translation omits this important repetition: "And did you know he was a schismatic, and not only that, but one of those simple-minded religious zealots?" (VI.2.383, 384).

4. See Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, VII (Leningrad: 1973), 332.

5. While I am unaware of any critical commentary on the murder scene, I do not mean to imply that no attention has been given to the figure of Lizaveta. One of the finest treatments in English is by Richard Peace, *Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), pp. 34-58. Two fine Russian discussions of the meaning of Lizaveta can be found in V. IA. Kirpotin, *Razocharovanie i krushenie Rodiona Raskol'nikova* (Moscow: 1970), and IUrii Kariakin, *Samoobman Raskol'nikova* (Moscow: 1976).

THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

Lines 16-24

I pleaded, outlaw-wise,
By many a hearted casement, curtained red,
Trellised with intertwining charities;
(For, though I knew His love Who followed,
Yet was I sore adread
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside.)
But, if one little casement parted wide,
The gust of His approach would clash it to:
Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue.

—FRANCIS THOMPSON

Thompson's THE HOUND OF HEAVEN, Lines 16-24

When we read the word "charities" in line 18 of "The Hound of Heaven" we are, I think properly, a little surprised, for it is quite clear that the protagonist is speaking not of the charities of 1 Corinthians, but of sexual love, as one of a series (including love of nature and love of art) of attempted avenues of escape from the inexorable pursuit of Christ.

My suggestion is that Thompson had at least partially in mind the word *Charites*, pronounced with a hard ch, and deriving from the name *Charis* "grace" (originally another name for Aphrodite)—a name which became plural in order to personify the three leading attributes of Aphrodite: joy, bloom, and brilliance (Euphrosyne, Thalia, and Aglaia). The three Charites (or Graces) were patronesses of poets as well as of lovers and were worshipped in conjunction with Aphrodite and Dionysus.

The picture we are given in lines 16-19 is the stock romantic image of the troubadour lover luring the difficult-of-access lady with his darkling serenade ("outlaw-wise") to her casement with its familiar heart-pierced shutters. The flowering casement (jasmine?) vine is personified in the phrase "intertwining charities" (i.e., Charites), suggesting the typical picture (cf., Botticelli, *Primavera*) of the three Graces linked hand in hand in a sort of ring-dance.