

---

DOI 10.22455/2619-0311-2019-1-82-103

УДК 82+821.161.1

ББК 83+83.3(2=411.2)

*Кэрол Аполлоньо*

**О демонах и дверях: проблема онтологии  
Раскольникова**

*Carol Apollonio*

**On Devils and Doors: Raskolnikov's Ontology Problem**

Эта статья начала свою жизнь как доклад, прочитанный на XVI Симпозиуме Международного общества Достоевского в Гранаде в 2016 г. Посвящая статью памяти любезного и глубокоуважаемого коллеги Карена Ашотовича Степаняна. Карен Ашотович прочитал доклад после Симпозиума и дал ценнейшие замечания, которые я сохранила в уме и в сердце, готовя статью для печати. Я ему бесконечно благодарна. Все ошибки в статье остаются полностью на совести автора. — К.А.

**Об авторе:** Кэрол Аполлоньо, доктор филологических наук, преподаватель практики славянских и евразийских исследований, Дюкский университет, Дарем (Северная Каролина), США.

E-mail: flath@duke.edu

**Аннотация:** Шокирующее описание чудовищного преступления Раскольникова и туманность приведших к нему причин породили мощную и влиятельную традицию чтения романа «Преступление и наказание», фокусирующую внимание читателя на этической проблематике. Ключ к эмоциональному эффекту, производимому романом, заключается в манипуляциях, совершаемых Достоевским с точкой зрения читателя: читатель имеет доступ к внутреннему процессу мышления и переживаний героя и оказывается склонен сочувствовать ему, по сути — этически вовлекается в убийство. Данная статья рассматривает точку зрения как ключ к онтологическим вопросам: каково отношение Раскольникова к материальному миру, насколько он в нем «обустроен»? Как читатель различает то, что действительно происходит, и то, что может оказаться всего лишь изложением фантазий героя? Раз задавшись вопросом: «Кто видел Раскольникова по дороге к месту преступления и после, на пути домой?»,

читатель в процессе пристального чтения ключевых сцен оказывается перед необходимостью поставить под вопрос свои самые существенные заключения о мире романа — а затем и о мире за его пределами. Существует ли обиженная девочка, которую Раскольников видит на улице после получения письма от матери? Или тяжкие мысли героя о бедах его сестры и о Соне Мармеладовой заставляют ее соткаться перед ним из воздуха? В самом ли деле Раскольников слышит в трактире разговор об убийстве старухи-процентщицы, или он примысливает себе его? Дело не только в том, что детали этих сцен соответствуют его самым глубинным мыслям и желаниям; Достоевский тщательно оформляет их, заставляя читателя вспомнить о других его тщательно структурированных художественных произведениях, например о «Мужике Марее» и его системе повествовательных рамок, посредством которых автор (повествователь) движется внутрь сквозь глубинные слои своей души, пока не обретает там наконец свою историю. Для достижения этого эффекта ключевым оказывается отчуждение героя от человеческого сообщества: без укорененности в нем мы обнаруживаем себя в лиминальной (пограничной, пороговой) зоне, в фантастическом мире, где в отчаянном стремлении обрести другого мы создаем себе воображаемых других. Наиболее очевидно этот эффект проявляется в явлении чёрта Ивану Карамазову в романе «Братья Карамазовы».

**Ключевые слова:** Достоевский, «Преступление и наказание», Раскольников, онтология, фантастический реализм, точка зрения.

**Для цитирования:** Аполлолио К. О демонах и дверях: проблема онтологии Раскольникова // Достоевский и мировая культура. 2019. № 1(5). С. 82-103. DOI 10.22455/2619-0311-2019-1-82-103

**About the author:** Carol Apollonio, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor of the Practice of Slavic and Eurasian Studies, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA. E-mail: f1ath@duke.edu

**Abstract:** In the novel *Crime and Punishment*, the shocking description of Raskolnikov's crime and the mystery of its motivation have inspired a strong tradition of ethically-focused readings. The key to the novel's emotional effect lies in Dostoevsky's manipulation of point of view: from inside Raskolnikov's head the reader sympathizes with the murder and thus is ethically complicit. The current article considers point of view as a key to ontological questions: what is the hero's grounding in the material world? How does the reader know what actually takes place, and what might simply be a narration of the hero's fantasies? Asking who sees Raskolnikov on his pathway to and from the murder, this close reading of key scenes calls into question basic assumptions that readers make about the world of the novel, and by extension about the world beyond the novel. Does the abused girl that Raskolnikov sees on the street after receiving his mother's letter actually exist? Or do his thoughts about his sister's predicament and about Sonya Marmeladova conjure her up out of thin air? Did Raskolnikov actually overhear a conversation about murdering the pawnbroker in a tavern or did he fantasize the conversation? Not only do the details of these scenes match his inner thoughts and desires; Dostoevsky's narrator's careful framing of them reminds the reader of other carefully constructed fictional frames in other works, such as "Peasant Marei", where the author (with his narrator) moves inward through the deep layers of his psyche until he finds his

story there. Absolutely key to this effect is the protagonist's separation from human community: without grounding in relationship, we find ourselves in a liminal, fantastical world where in a desperate quest for company we create imaginary companions. This process culminates in the materialization of Ivan Karamazov's devil in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

**Key words:** Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov, ontology, fantastic realism, point of view.

**For citation:** Apollonio C. On Devils and Doors: Raskolnikov's Ontology Problem. *Dostoevsky and World Culture*. 2019. № 1 (5). Pp. 82-103.

DOI 10.22455/2619-0311-2019-1-82-103

## I. The Problem

How does Raskolnikov get away with his crime? Dostoevsky strews his path with potential obstacles, evidence and people. How is it, given the throngs of potential witnesses, the criminal's sloppiness, the utter chance that directs his actions, his erratic behavior and self-incriminations, and the suspicions of many of the people around him, how is it that no one is able to prove his guilt? An important answer, of course, is that Dostoevsky needs his hero to suffer the moral consequences of his crime. If Raskolnikov could be conclusively identified as the murderer, then Porfiry Petrovich and the others could simply index the evidence to the criminal, and bring him to justice. But in that case Raskolnikov's conscience, and his entire spiritual, psychological, and emotional being, would remain untouched. *Crime and Punishment* attacks the idea that justice is a matter of determining the facts and applying a legal formula. Justice is a matter of conscience. To communicate his message, Dostoevsky masterfully manipulates point of view. By taking his reader into his protagonist's mind and showing us the world as he sees it, Dostoevsky is exploring the relationship between the inner emotional and psychological life of the individual – which remains hidden from view – and the superficial physical features that are visible to others. The boundary between self and other is problematical, and the problem is momentous. Raskolnikov's ability to get to the murder scene unnoticed and commit the brutal acts with the door wide open and yet escape detection bears with it an

element of the fantastic. Might the hero have certain properties that render him invisible to others? The question leads us into murky territory of character, vision, ontology, and Dostoevsky's own unique brand of fantastic realism. And the key is point of view.

## II. Ethics: "Egoism" and Point of View

Dostoevsky's focus on human relationships naturally sends readers down the very productive path of ethics. His protagonists suffer an ego problem. They are profoundly selfish, and their selfishness isolates them from others; their challenge is to overcome this solipsism and find community. I propose that we step back from Raskolnikov's point of view, and try to envision the course of events from the perspective of others — primarily those who love him — Razumikhin, his mother, Dunya, and Sonya (and Nastasya). If we do take their point of view, then what most strikes us is Raskolnikov's utter selfishness, his failure of empathy, his inability to recognize others as integral human beings. Consider Sonya. Here is a girl forced into prostitution, who loses both her father and stepmother, who is viciously slandered by a powerful and malicious man, whose loved ones are thrown out onto the street, and who abruptly becomes the sole guardian of three small children who are not even blood relations, all within the course of a few days. What has her boyfriend Raskolnikov been doing all this time besides popping in now and then? This vicious axe murderer has been walking around in a fog for days feeling sorry for himself. He is utterly oblivious to anything beyond his own inner drama. At one point, after a night wandering the streets, Raskolnikov "recalled that this was the day fixed for Katerina Ivanovna's funeral, and he was relieved to have missed it. Nastasya brought him some food; he ate and drank with relish <...>" [Dostoevsky 2014: 416]<sup>1</sup>(«Он вспомнил, что в этот день назначены похороны Катерины Ивановны, и обрадовался, что не присутствовал на них. Настасья принесла ему есть; он ел и пил с большим аппетитом <...>» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 338]). Instead he stays home while Nastasya feeds him; in the meantime Svidrigailov is making the funeral arrangements, taking care of the orphans and Sonya. Dostoevsky's reader is mostly inside Raskolnikov's head, and therefore may not consider the suffering he must be causing his loved ones, or adequately appreciate their extraordinary patience and

---

<sup>1</sup> All English translations of *Crime and Punishment* are cited from this edition unless otherwise noted.

love. A more balanced, dare I say, *realistic* perception of events, entails taking a different point of view.

Raskolnikov's ego problem reflects a particular cultural context — the clash between Russian and Western values. In Russian, egoism and selfishness are the same thing («эгоизм»). Russian uses the English word for solipsism: солипсизм. Even on the level of language, Russian culture treats selfishness as an alien concept. Raskolnikov's plot demonstrates the toxic consequences of the importation of Western individualism into the Russian context: infected with this alien idea, the character becomes detached from his community and city, and himself becomes an abstraction.

Dostoevsky creates egoists like Raskolnikov, and opposes to them “paragons of moral virtue” such as Sonya Marmeladova, Zosima, and Prince Myshkin [Scanlan 2002: 81], as James Scanlon puts it. Dostoevsky's characters represent antipodes on an ethical scale running from the great evil of egoism to the great good of altruism. The human tragedy, as Dostoevsky says when he writes about Masha lying there on the table, is that pure altruism and renunciation of the ego is impossible on earth: “The law of the self is binding on earth. The *I* gets in the way”<sup>2</sup> («Закон личности на Земле связывает. Я препятствует» [Достоевский 1972–1990: XX, 172]). His novels chronicle the suffering of the ego that cannot renounce itself and the impact of this predicament on human community.

### III. Ontology and The Fantastic

Dostoevsky's concern for moral values has naturally focused readers' attention on ethics. Without denying the centrality of ethics in his works, I hope to focus narrowly on the question of ontology — that is, how Dostoevsky's art raises questions of being and reality. What does it mean to be “real”? Am I real?

“Ontology is the philosophical study of being in general, or of what applies neutrally to everything that is real <...>. The fundamental question, of course, has the form, ‘Are there Xs?’ or ‘Do Xs exist?’”<sup>3</sup>

Martin Heidegger addresses in great detail the problem of being and our grounding in it. For our purposes we may steal his concept of Dasein, “Being there,” noting among its many nuances that

---

<sup>2</sup> This translation is mine.

<sup>3</sup> See [Simons].

a human being cannot be taken into account except as being an existent in the middle of a world amongst other things (Warnock 1970), that Dasein is ‘to be there’ and ‘there’ is the world. To be human is to be fixed, embedded and immersed in the physical, literal, tangible day to day world. (Steiner 1978) [Hornsby].

Heidegger argues that to be Dasein at all means to Be-with: <...> (*Being and Time* 26: 163). <...> Ordinary experience establishes that each of us is often alone. But of course Heidegger is thinking in an *ontological* register. <...> It’s because Dasein has Being-with as one of its essential modes of Being that everyday Dasein can experience being alone. Being-with is thus the a priori transcendental condition for loneliness [Ibid.].

Basically the point is, as I interpret it, that the self does not exist outside of community. Isolation renders us unreal — this message is at the heart of Dostoevsky’s tragic novel. He puts his characters in dense human communities and renders them alone in spite of that. He surrounds them with a Greek chorus, an urban one — and even here they are alone. Dostoevsky’s proud, isolated protagonists suffer what we might call a “reality problem”. What does Dostoevsky mean when he writes to Maikov from Florence in December 1868 that his fantastic realism, or his idealism, is *realer* than the writings of the “realists”? How can the “real” even be a relative concept?

My understanding of reality and of realism is completely different from that of our realists and critics. My idealism is realer than theirs. Lord! Just try to talk sensibly about what we Russians have been through over the past ten years in our spiritual development, and you can be sure that the realists will howl that it’s a fantasy! And in fact it’s the original, genuine realism! That is in fact what realism is, only deeper, whereas theirs merely swims on the surface<sup>4</sup>.

Совершенно другие я понятия имею о действительности и реализме, чем наши реалисты и критики. Мой идеализм — реальнее ихнего. Господи! Порассказать толково то, что мы все, русские, пережили в последние 10 лет в нашем духовном развитии, — да разве не закричат реалисты, что это фантазия! А между тем это исконный,

---

<sup>4</sup> The translation is mine.

настоящий реализм! Это-то и есть реализм, только глубже, а у них мелко плавает [Достоевский 1972–1990: XXVIII, 2, 329].

Certainly he is responding to criticism of his improbable plots, his melodramatic scenes, the compressed temporality of his works, and his frequent deployment of coincidence. This territory has been well explored by scholars, who have shown the roots of Dostoevsky's fantastic poetics in literary history and contemporary political and social debates. There have been many interpretations of this famous statement; my intent here is not to add to that rich body of criticism, but to explore Dostoevsky's presentation of characters who, in Raskolnikov's perceptions, do not seem fully embodied in empirical reality. Then, by adopting alternative points of view, we can explore Raskolnikov's own shaky ontological grounding. Our orientation point is his uncanny ability to slip unnoticed to and from the murder scene.

Long after Dostoevsky, Tsvetan Todorov offered the term “fantastic” to characterize the problem of a person's comprehension of what is real, and the way works of literature present that problem. Something, or someone, seems not to follow the laws of nature:

The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality — but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings — with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty [Todorov 1975: 25].

The key to this state, in Todorov's formulation of it, is its uncertainty, its suspension between certainties; once the confused individual commits to a single interpretation of the phenomenon, the fantastic is no longer in effect. The world of Gogol's “The Nose”, say, is profoundly fantastical until the reader chooses to attribute the weird happenings in the text to the character's dream. Then the story is no longer fantastic. Both the character and the reader may experience these problems of perception and comprehension. I am proposing that we enter this state of suspension, and read Dostoevsky's novel without committing to one certainty or

the other; in other words, remaining in the state of the fantastic. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky places his readers inside his protagonist's head, manipulating point of view in ways that may skew our ability to appreciate the nature of his grounding in the world of the novel. What feels "real" to him, and to us, may be wildly fantastical seen from an alternative point of view. The extraordinary power of this effect certainly reflects Dostoevsky's original conception of the novel as a first-person narration; changing to an omniscient narrator enabled him to keep the intensity of Raskolnikov's inner experience, while manipulating his perceptions of the world around him<sup>5</sup>. Throughout the novel, up to the moment of his "fall to the earth" in the Epilogue, Raskolnikov suffers this condition of uncertainty as to the reality of the world around him. He is trapped in the "fantastic". Raskolnikov's lack of ontological groundedness is the direct consequence of his retreat into himself, for only through loving contact with others are we fully real. Dostoevsky populates his novel with events and figures whose reality may be cast in doubt, depending on who sees them. Ghosts, phantoms, and figures in dreams would naturally be situated at the extreme, "unreal" end of the scale. Characters who physically touch others, deliverers of food and drink, huggers, hitters, and kissers, feel real. How does this work in the novel?

#### IV. The View from Inside

Let's start with the rationale for the murder. Where does it come from? Raskolnikov spent the few weeks before the action of the novel isolated in his room, lying on his sofa plunged in thought, or, as Tatiana Kasatkina deftly notes, indulging in the sin of sloth [Kasatkina 2005: 203-235, 212]. His thoughts thus brewed have propelled him onto the path of murder. The narrator reports that a few months before, after his first visit to the pawnbroker, Raskolnikov had stopped in a tavern for tea. As he sat there thinking, "a strange idea was tapping away in his head, like a chick in its egg, occupying him body and soul" [Dostoevsky 2014: 59] («Странная мысль наклеывалась в его голове, как из яйца цыпленок, и очень, очень занимала его» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 53]).

What is this idea? Instead of expounding it directly, the narrator abruptly turns to a conversation that is taking place at a neighboring table:

---

<sup>5</sup> Gary Rosenshield provides an authoritative analysis of Dostoevsky's manipulation of point of view in his "The Narrator in *Crime and Punishment*" [Rosenshield 1972].



At another small table, very close to his, sat a student he neither knew nor remembered, and a young officer. <...> Suddenly he'd overheard the student telling the officer about the moneylender, Alyona Ivanovna, a collegiate secretary's widow, and giving him her address. This in itself had struck Raskolnikov as strange: he'd only just come from seeing her. Sheer chance, of course, but there he was unable to rid himself of one highly unusual impression only to see someone bend over backwards (or so it seemed) to oblige him: the student suddenly started telling his friend all manner of details about this Alyona Ivanovna [Dostoevsky 2014: 59-60].

Почти рядом с ним на другом столике сидел студент, которого он совсем не знал и не помнил, и молодой офицер. <...> Вдруг он услышал, что студент говорит офицеру про процентщицу, Алену Ивановну, коллежскую секретаршу, и сообщает ему ее адрес. Это уже одно показалось Раскольникову как-то странным: он сейчас оттуда, а тут как раз про нее же. Конечно, случайность, но он вот не может отвязаться теперь от одного весьма необыкновенного впечатления, а тут как раз ему как будто кто-то подслуживается: студент вдруг начинает сообщать товарищу об этой Алене Ивановне разные подробности [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 53].

“This in itself had struck Raskolnikov as strange: he'd only just come from seeing her” [Dostoevsky 2014: 60] («Это уже одно показалось Раскольникову как-то странным: он сейчас оттуда» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 53]). And again, when the conversation turns to Lizaveta, “How very strange this was!” [Dostoevsky 2014: 61] («Как это было странно!» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 54]), thinks Raskolnikov again. The student goes on to say that he could murder the old woman without the slightest pangs of conscience [Dostoevsky 2014: 61], and proceeds to offer a detailed rationale for the murder, which is Raskolnikov's own rationale, we are given to understand. Again, Raskolnikov finds this strange. The narrator conveys his reaction in detail:

<...> why had it fallen to him, precisely then, to hear precisely this conversation and precisely these thoughts... at a time when *those very same thoughts* had just been conceived in his own mind? And why precisely then — just when he had carried away from the old woman the embryo of his idea — had he chanced on a conversation about her and no one else? The coincidence would always strike him as strange. This trivial conversation in a tavern exerted the most radical influence on him in

the subsequent course of events: as if there really were something preordained in it all, some sign... [Dostoevsky 2014: 62]

<...> почему именно теперь пришлось ему выслушать именно такой разговор и такие мысли, когда в собственной голове его только что зародились... *такие же точно мысли?* И почему именно сейчас, как только он вынес зародыш своей мысли от старухи, как раз и попадает он на разговор о старухе? Станным всегда казалось ему это совпадение. Этот ничтожный, трактирный разговор имел чрезвычайное на него влияние при дальнейшем развитии дела: как будто действительно было тут какое-то предопределение, указание... [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 55]

The repetition of the word “strange” in describing Raskolnikov’s reactions signals the uncanny nature of the coincidence. And when the officer jokingly suggests that the student likes Lizaveta, the student answers, weirdly, “for her strangeness” [Dostoevsky 2014: 61] («из странности» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 54]). Dostoevsky will deploy the language of “strangeness”, along with the potent adverb “suddenly”, to signal such moments throughout the novel.

Temporally speaking, this is the first of many coincidences, which Raskolnikov interprets as signs of fate compelling him to commit the murder. He repeatedly finds these coincidences “strange”. These signals alternate with incidents of spontaneous grace and charity that offer the hero an alternative path — through connecting with others. Reading the scene realistically, we take the incident straight; our protagonist went to a tavern and heard a conversation. *But what if it didn’t actually happen?* Which, forgive me, is the chicken and which is the egg? What if Raskolnikov himself was thinking these thoughts alone in the tavern, and in his isolation conjured up the entire scene, including the two men whom he created to hatch his thoughts — thoughts he cannot, or dare not, speak aloud? This might be a more likely interpretation of the incident than that it really happened as described. It certainly would be plausible for a man who had spent weeks in complete isolation, with only his ideas for company, to create companions to convey, express, or embody various repressed elements of his inner life. Raskolnikov’s hesitation between real and fantastical worlds is emphasized by the phrase “as if really” [как будто действительно] — meaning, if we are to be pedantic, *not* really.

Dostoevsky had certainly deployed this pattern before, in *The Double*, where Golyadkin Jr. can be interpreted not as a fully “real” person, but rather as a projection of Golyadkin Sr’s shameful thoughts. Dostoevsky as we know once called the idea of the “double” his most brilliant idea. Characters consider themselves above others (usually because of their pride and superior intellect, quite like the chosen few in Raskolnikov’s article), isolate themselves from human company, and generate imaginary playmates to take the blame. Even as the writer acknowledged criticism of *The Double*, he remained committed to its central idea:

The novella was not a success, but its idea was brilliant, and I never expressed anything more serious in my literary work than this idea<sup>6</sup>.

Повесть эта мне положительно не удалось, но идея ее была довольно светлая, и серьезнее этой идеи я никогда ничего в литературе не проводил [Достоевский 1972–1990: XXVI, 65].

Given Dostoevsky’s commitment to the “idea” of *The Double*, we should be alert for ways in which he uses it in subsequent works. The problem is not the precise content of Raskolnikov’s ideas; the problem is his isolation and the phantoms it calls into being — after all, what he needs is not ideas, but people. Keeping this in mind may liberate readers from the compulsion to conclusively attribute the crime to one specific thing that someone in the novel might have said or thought.

A similar dynamic can be seen at work in numerous other scenes in the novel. What actually happens, and what might Raskolnikov have imagined (or “fantasized”) under the influence of his ideas? The day after Raskolnikov’s encounter with Marmeladov in the tavern, where he has heard Sonya’s story, he receives the letter from his mother detailing his sister Dunya’s travails and their resolution in her engagement to the odious Luzhin. Sonya’s and Dunya’s are basically the same story, that of an innocent girl who sells her chastity for money. Fresh from reading the letter, furious, confused, helpless, frustrated, Raskolnikov rushes out onto the street, whispering and mumbling out loud to himself (here again, let’s move outside Raskolnikov’s head and attempt to picture the scene he presents to any passersby). He proceeds to spend a good five pages agonizing over the problem, and who knows much actual time, mulling its

---

<sup>6</sup> This translation is mine.

every nuance. Now there is an immediate reason for him to commit the murder — to gain the means to protect Dunya from Sonia's fate:

[the thought of the murder] suddenly presented itself to him not as a dream, but in a new, threatening and quite unfamiliar form, and he'd suddenly realized this himself... It was like a blow to the head, and his eyes went dark [Dostoevsky 2014: 43].

[мысль об убийстве] теперь явилась вдруг не мечтой, а в каком-то новом, грозном и совсем незнакомом ему виде, и он вдруг сам сознал это... Ему стукнуло в голову, и потемнело в глазах [Dostoevsky 2014: VI, 39].

Struck thus metaphorically *in the head*, he spots a bench and heads for it, intending to sit down and think things over. The blow from inside seems to have dazed him and brought on a kind of visionary unconsciousness. For it is precisely at this moment that he spots a young girl in distress:

While looking for the bench, he noticed a woman walking twenty steps ahead of him, but at first he paid her no more heed than any of the **other objects flitting before his eyes**. It had occurred to him many times already to walk home, say, and have not the faintest memory of the route he had taken, and he was already used to walking like this. But there was something **so very strange** about the woman, something which immediately leapt out at him, that little by little she began to compel his attention — against his will at first, almost as a nuisance, but then with increasing force. He was seized by a sudden urge to understand what it was about her that was **so very strange** [Dostoevsky 2014: 43].

Выглядывая скамейку, он заметил впереди себя, шагах в двадцать, идущую женщину, но сначала не остановил на ней никакого внимания, как и на всех **мелькавших до сих пор перед ним предметах**. Ему уже много раз случалось проходить, например, домой и совершенно не помнить дороги, по которой он шел, и он уже привык так ходить. Но в идущей женщине было **что-то такое странное** и, с первого же взгляда, бросающееся в глаза, что мало-помалу внимание его начало к ней приковываться — сначала нехотя и как бы с досадой, а потом всё крепче и крепче. Ему вдруг захотелось по-

нять, что именно в этой женщине **такого странного**? [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 39].

Here again, the narrator notes the “strangeness” of the situation. Of course what is strange is not that this is a young girl, drunk and disheveled, who has been cruelly abused — such incidents are common in St. Petersburg. What is strange is that it should be at this precise moment, when Raskolnikov has been trying to solve the problem of his sister’s and Sonya’s predicament, that he should encounter a girl who clearly has suffered the same fate. Who is to say that she is “real” or simply a product of Raskolnikov’s disturbed thinking? The description of how the girl came to his notice suggests as much a process of an image rising from his subconscious mind as it does a process of perceiving something in the outside world. It should not surprise the reader that the girl seems to have no awareness of where she is and what has happened to her, and that the boulevard where Raskolnikov encounters her should be almost completely devoid of people. Her internal perspective — if indeed she even has one — is irrelevant to Raskolnikov. He only sees what is essential to his mental process and the images that, I’m arguing, it generates. The only other person on the street is a man, clearly a predator — “about thirty years old, thickset, fat, a picture of health, with pink lips and a moustache, and very foppishly dressed” [Dostoevsky 2014: 44] («Господин этот был лет тридцати, плотный, жирный, кровь с молоком, с розовыми губами и с усиками, и очень щеголевато одетый» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 40]). Here, in its purest form, Dostoevsky depicts the encounter between the sick, penniless, emaciated young man (all idea and emotion), the damsel in distress (all victim), and the fleshy, well-dressed lecher (all body and lust). The latter, Raskolnikov addresses as “Svidrigailov” — somehow realizing, *without ever having met the man*, that he in fact looks like Dunya’s tormentor — fleshy, well-dressed, pink-lipped, brimming with health. Raskolnikov, of course, imagines himself the rescuer. The point is not that we have to interpret the scene as purely a dream or, alternatively, as pure reality, but that if we hesitate between interpretations — lingering in Todorov’s realm of the fantastic — we can more clearly understand the deeper patterns at work. It is possible that Raskolnikov witnesses a fully real scene; it is also possible that in his isolation he has dreamed up figures that seem real, but are actually phantoms representing the problem that is troubling him. And once we allow ourselves to linger in the fantastic, we might accept that this street pred-

ator is actually Svidrigailov. It completely depends on the point of view and how much reality we are prepared to grant the vision.

After Raskolnikov's visit to the tavern, where he reads the newspaper accounts of the murder and taunts Zametov, and after bumping into Razumikhin, whom he demands leave him alone, Raskolnikov stands on the —sky Bridge, and gazes at the sunset until he nearly falls into a faint.

He **suddenly** shuddered, saved from another fainting fit, **perhaps, by a wild and hideous vision**. He sensed someone standing close by, to his right; he glanced round — and saw a tall woman in a shawl, with a long, yellow, drink-ravaged face and reddish, sunken eyes. She was looking straight at him, but it was obvious she wasn't seeing anything or anybody. Suddenly she leant her right arm on the railing, lifted her right leg and swung it over the bars <...> [Dostoevsky 2014: 158].

**Вдруг** он вздрогнул, **может быть** спасенный вновь от обморока одним **диким и безобразным видением**. Он почувствовал, что кто-то стал подле него, справа, рядом; он взглянул — и увидел женщину, высокую, с платком на голове, с желтым, продолговатым, испитым лицом и с красноватыми, впавшими глазами. Она глядела на него прямо, но, очевидно, ничего не видала и никого не различала. Вдруг она облокотилась правой рукой о перила, подняла правую ногу и замахнула ее за решетку <...> [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 131].

...and throws herself into the Ditch. People from the streets rush over and rescue her. The language here (suddenly; perhaps; wild and hideous vision) suggests yet again that Raskolnikov imagines everything, until the moment when other people enter the scene and rescue the woman brings Raskolnikov, and the reader, back to reality. From his point of view, the woman's leap into the water represents an option he was considering, but, perhaps because of the vision (or the actual event, if that is what it was), was saved from suicide.

These examples represent encounters with another, encounters whose "strange," coincidental nature inclines the reader to skepticism as to whether they actually occurred. The narrator's care in framing the scene focuses attention both to its importance and to the possibility that it is a product of Raskolnikov's imagination. Dostoevsky often uses such techniques when introducing scenes of dream, memory, and imagination.

Take for example, the introduction to his memory of the central episode in “The Peasant Marei” (1876):

These memories would arise on their own; I rarely tried to summon them. [A memory] would begin at a certain point, a small thing, often imperceptible, and then would expand into an entire picture, into a single strong and integral impression<sup>7</sup>.

Эти воспоминания вставали сами, я редко вызывал их по своей воле. Начиналось с какой-нибудь точки, черты, иногда неприметной, и потом мало-помалу вырасталось в цельную картину, в какое-нибудь сильное и цельное впечатление [Достоевский 1972–1990: XXII, 47].

This process of retrieving memories does not differ substantially from the way that this abused girl makes her way into (or out of) Raskolnikov’s consciousness, and from the very act of literary creation. We might subject all of Raskolnikov’s encounters to the test: which of them seem “real” and which might be seen as products of his fantasy? Patterns may emerge, calling into question the ontological grounding of the whole range of characters, minor and major. The embodiedness or ephemerality of these characters may offer clues to the nature of their function in aiding Raskolnikov’s path to confession — say, as allies or as adversaries.

Much critical attention has been paid to the dreams in the novel — Raskolnikov’s and Svidrigailov’s. We will not tarry over them, because the text clearly identifies them as dreams. In the case of dreams, which are so powerful in the novel, the reader is not in doubt as to whether the incidents depicted in them “really happen” (though in the two most vivid cases — Raskolnikov’s dream of visiting the pawnbroker’s apartment and beating her on the head and Svidrigailov’s dream of the child under the stairway — we only are informed after the fact, when the dreamer awakens). It surely is true, though, that these dreams are situated on a, call it, “reality continuum” that runs from dreaming to wakeful states. They start out fantastic and end up real. Don’t they feel more vivid, more real, than some of the scenes that are presented “straight”?

One more episode can serve as an example of the way we stake our interpretive claim on the basis of an event’s “ontology”; we may choose

---

<sup>7</sup> This translation is mine.

to remain non-committal, and thus remain in the realm of the fantastic, or to commit to a reading that accepts and respects the laws of nature. This is the scene with the notorious “tradesman in a robe” who observes Raskolnikov’s self-incriminating behavior after his visit to the pawnbroker’s empty apartment, then subsequently accosts him, calling him a “murderer”. This tradesman, we learn, was lurking behind a door during Raskolnikov’s terrifying second conversation with Porfiry Petrovich, and would have emerged and accused him directly, if only the painter Mikolka hadn’t showed up unexpectedly with his crazed confession. In an elegant and thoroughly substantiated analysis, Valentina Vetlovskaja argues that the tradesman, who shares many features with Porfiry Petrovich (robed, womanish, shrewd, focused on Raskolnikov’s guilt), is actually the investigator in disguise [Vetlovskaja 2008: 194-205; Apollonio 2010: 123-37]. Here, as in the case of other uncanny encounters, one can choose to adhere to the laws of nature and realism, as Vetlovskaja does. In other words, Porfiry himself went over to Raskolnikov’s apartment and confronted him; Raskolnikov failed to recognize him. It is plausible. This is an interpretation in what we can call the “indicative mode”. Or maybe the truth hovers somewhere in between, somewhere in the territory of «бы»: the tradesman both emerges from Raskolnikov’s guilty conscience and exists in reality. The combination of real and fantastical details may vary, but we may choose to linger in the realm of the fantastic long enough to extract deeper meanings impossible when we insist on a firm delineation between the two territories.

## V. The View from Outside

Up to this point we’ve been considering things from Raskolnikov’s point of view. Viewing him from outside may help us better understand his “reality problem”. We focus only on the key event of the novel, returning to the question with which we began: How does Raskolnikov get away with the crime? Along his path that evening, from his room to the murder scene and back, he moves through a crowd. Who notices him?

- The first witness is Nastasya. On his way downstairs, he had planned to stop in the kitchen and take the axe from there. But when he looks through the open door, “he suddenly saw that not only was Nastasya in the kitchen, she was busy working as well: taking laundry out of a basket and hanging it on washing lines! Casting sight of him, she stopped



what she was doing, turned towards him and kept her eyes fixed on him until he passed” [Dostoevsky 2014: 67] («он вдруг увидел, что Настасья не только на этот раз дома, у себя в кухне, но еще занимается делом: вынимает из корзины белье и развешивает на веревках! Увидев его, она перестала развешивать, обернулась к нему и всё время смотрела на него, пока он проходил» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 59]). Nastasya not only notices him, but also makes a point of scrutinizing him. And her presence in the kitchen means that he cannot get his hands on the axe there. She is an obstacle on his path to the crime, and of all the characters in the novel, she is the one who nurtures and feeds him. In terms of her material groundedness, she may be the most fully material of all characters, somewhere near Razumikhin on that scale of physicality.

- Raskolnikov proceeds to the caretaker’s lodge, where there is no one present, only the devil – whom we will deal with in due time: “He looked around – not a soul! <...> ‘Better the devil than the best-laid plans!’ he thought, grinning strangely» [Dostoevsky 2014: 68] («Он осмотрелся кругом – никого. <...> не рассудок, так бес!» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 59-60]).

- The courtyard of his house is full of people but no one sees him there.

- The courtyard of the pawnbroker’s house is also full of people. A cart loaded with hay passes between him and them, and “several voices could be heard shouting and arguing, but no one noticed him and no one crossed his path” [Dostoevsky 2014: 69] («слышно было, кричали и спорили несколько голосов, но его никто не заметил и навстречу никто не попался» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 60]).

- “The staircase, too, was completely deserted at that moment. All the doors were shut. He met precisely no one. True, there was one empty apartment on the second floor with the doors flung open and decorators working inside, but they didn’t so much as glance in his direction [Dostoevsky 2014: 69]” («Но и лестница на ту пору стояла совсем пустая; все двери были закрыты; никого-то не встретилось. Во втором этаже одна пустая квартира была, правда, растворена настежь, и в ней работали маляры, но те и не поглядели» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 61]).

- Of course both of his victims see him.

- After the murders, having locked himself in the pawnbroker’s apartment with the corpses, Raskolnikov hears Koch and the student Pestriakov talking on the other side of the door, but of course they do not see him. When his companion leaves to get help, Koch is left alone on his

side of the door, with... yes, the devil of my title: “But he, the devil...”; and then again, “But the devil!” («– Однако он, черт... Однако черт!» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 68-69]). (These are my translations, just to tease out the devil; Ready has “Where’s he got to, damn it?” and “Damn it all!” [Dostoevsky 2014: 79] – CA). It is at this moment that our devil behind the door, the murderer, appeals to the Lord: “God, now what?” [Dostoevsky 2014: 79] («Господи, что же делать!» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 69]).

On his way downstairs, Raskolnikov hears (but does not see) the painter shout “Oi! Wait there, you devil! Wait there!” [Dostoevsky 2014: 79] («– Эй, леший, черт! Держи!» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 69]). Of course this is one of the painters shouting at the other as they launch into their playful little fight – but to us (and to Raskolnikov), it refers to Raskolnikov.

- As Koch and the other come back up the stairs, Raskolnikov barely manages to slip into the apartment that has precisely at that moment been abandoned by the painters. Only the wildest coincidence has saved him.

- The moment they pass, he sneaks out and down the stairs: “No one on the stairs! Or at the gates. He passed quickly under the arch and turned left down the street” («Никого на лестнице! Под воротами тоже. Быстро прошел он подворотню и повернул налево по улице» [Ibid.]).

Where is everyone? Did every last one of them abandon their activities in the courtyard to go up the stairs?

Out on the street, only one unnamed person («кто-то») notices him, sweaty, distraught, disheveled, and takes him for a drunk [Dostoevsky 2014: 80], [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 70]. We do not see this person, and hear nothing more from him after this moment.

The caretaker is out, so he returns the axe unnoticed, after which “he met no one, **not a single soul**, all the way back to his room» [Dostoevsky 2014: 81] («Никого, **ни единой души**, не встретил он потом до самой своей комнаты» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 70]).

I’ve listed all moments on the evening of the murder where someone might have seen Raskolnikov. With the exception of Nastasya and the two murder victims, though, he passes by unnoticed. His ability to escape all notice strains belief. One way to interpret this is to suggest that Raskolnikov’s own ontology is shaky. He passes through the streets like a phan-

tom, himself a manifestation of fantastic realism. Is Raskolnikov himself real? Or might we heed the many shouts from the crowd throughout the novel identifying him as *the devil*? The reason this question feels so improbable to readers is that we are, of course, inside his head. But from outside it is really quite strange that no one saw him, and it makes sense that one might assume the devil committed the murder.

The devil is repeatedly invoked as the murderer, including at the moment of Raskolnikov's confession to Sonya — when both of them blame the devil directly, by name:

“Oh, be quiet, be quiet!” cried Sonya, throwing up her arms. “You walked away from God and God struck you and gave you away to the devil!” “By the way, Sonya — when I was lying in the dark and all this was dawning on me, was that the devil playing with my mind? Eh? <...> Hush, Sonya, I'm not laughing at all. I know myself that it was the devil dragging me along” [Dostoevsky 2014: 393].

– О, молчите, молчите! — вскрикнула Соня, всплеснув руками. — От Бога вы отошли, и вас Бог поразил, дьяволу предал!..

– Кстати, Соня, это когда я в темноте-то лежал и мне всё представлялось, это ведь дьявол смущал меня? а? <...> Молчи, Соня, я совсем не смеюсь, я ведь и сам знаю, что меня черт тащил [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 321].

And then, famously:

“And the hag was killed by the devil, not me” [Dostoevsky 2014: 393-394].

– А старушонку эту черт убил, а не я [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 322].

From our vantage place from within our protagonist's mind, it is quite plausible, so long as we remain in the domain of the fantastic, that indeed *the murderer was the devil*. And we saw everything from inside the devil's head.

We are reminded of Dostoevsky's depiction of another murder at the center of another great novel, but with a profound difference in point of view. How could Smerdyakov, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, have managed, in the

split seconds between Grigory's shout, "Parricide!" to rise from his sickbed, rush out, cross the yard, past the stricken Grigory, into Fyodor Pavlovich's house, commit the murder, and return to bed unnoticed, unbloodied, before people came running to Grigory's shout? Though readers, with our faith in Dmitry, fully accept that Smerdyakov — who does in fact confess, though to the demon-infested Ivan — is the murderer, the laws of nature do not allow it. Only the *devil* could have managed it, someone not subject to the usual laws of ontology. Or else, Dmitry is the murderer [Apollonio 2009: 161-162]. There, Dostoevsky inverts the elements: mountains of material evidence implicate Dmitry in the murder, but the reader and key characters (Alyosha and Grushenka) refuse to believe it. There we see everything from outside. In *Crime and Punishment*, no evidence or witnesses lead to the criminal, and yet there is no doubt as to Raskolnikov's guilt. We see it from inside. In spite of the differences between them, the two murders pose similar questions about facts and the truth, with the same hints of demonic involvement, and the same dependence on the artistic manipulation of point of view.

## VI. On Doubles

Now what is the exact center of the novel? Going by page numbers in the Academy edition lands us in Raskolnikov's dream of beating the pawnbroker in her apartment; going by book parts, it is the end of Part III, the moment when Svidrigailov introduces himself; going by word count (and depending on such trivialities as whether you count the book title in your word count), it is the moment Svidrigailov steps across the threshold of Raskolnikov's room (that is the sentence containing word number 88,150 or the novel's total 176,300). Of all the examples in the novel amenable to this line of analysis, the moment of Svidrigailov's appearance onstage may be the most important.

How fully does Svidrigailov exist? The ways of answering this question are infinite. For example, we can take note of the fact that he appears quite late in Dostoevsky's process of planning the novel. His function as Raskolnikov's most disturbing double surely affects the extent to which he is real. The timing of his appearance is extraordinarily important, for the first half of the novel leads Raskolnikov into the darkness, ever deeper into his troubled mind; the second half leads him out. Raskolnikov's dream has taken him further and further into isolation, into his subconscious mind, where he confronts his act of murder: the old woman is in there, still alive, tormenting his conscience. Svidrigailov appears precisely at this, Raskolnikov's dark-

est moment. Their conversation mentions the death by stroke (or beating) of Marfa Petrovna — which Raskolnikov is quick to blame Svidrigailov for — externalizing the self-blame of his dream. For his dream was precisely about beating an older woman on the head. And they talk of phantoms. Does Svidrigailov indeed emerge from inside Raskolnikov's mind? Why must we insist that he is *real*?

It is the way of doubles that they cannot coexist without losing their ontological grounding. Indeed, Raskolnikov cannot come into his real self while his double lives. At the end of the novel, both of them wander the rainy streets of St. Petersburg pondering suicide until one of them — just one — commits the act, liberating the other, and sending him out into a reality inaccessible to fiction.

## VII. Conclusions

Dostoevsky's novel offers an ontological drama. We are fully real when we are integrated into community. Selfishness, egoism, and pride (presented in Raskolnikov's article as the properties of an elite few) lead to a profound state of isolation that dislodges a character from community, renders him unreal, and destroys his sense of right and wrong. By depicting events primarily from his protagonist's distorted point of view, Dostoevsky's narrator tempts his readers into accepting as "real" events and characters whose ontological grounding is dubious at best. The isolated character can never be sure whether what he sees is real or a "phantom". In key scenes, what he sees can be shown to emerge from his own fantasies. What he hears represents the emergence into language of previously unspoken, possibly tabooed, ideas — from the idea of the crime itself to the novel's many mentions of the devil. And we find ourselves within the mind of this devil. The protagonist connects to other human beings — whether by murdering them or by being saved by them — through touch. It is through these moments that the novel's moral drama plays out. Through them Raskolnikov can hope for a pathway out of isolation and the world of fantasy and unreality — a resurrection into a "a new, as yet unknown reality" [Dostoevsky 2014: 518] («доселе совершенно неведомую действительностью» [Достоевский 1972–1990: VI, 421]) though not within the boundaries of *this* novel.

To readers who linger in the realm of the fantastic, who refrain from demanding that Dostoevsky's characters follow the rules of our own fallen, material world, the text will reveal its treasure.

## References

Apollonio 2009 — Apollonio C. *Dostoevsky's Secrets: Reading Against the Grain*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2009. 223 p.

Достоевский 1972–1990 — Dostoevskii F.M. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30-i tomakh* [Complete Works in 30 vols.], ed. V.G. Bazanov et al. Leningrad, Nauka Publ., 1972-1990. (In Russ.)

Dostoyevsky 2014 — Dostoyevsky F. *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Oliver Ready. New York, Penguin Classics, 2014. 608 p.

Hornsby — Hornsby R. *What Heidegger Means by Being-in-the-World*. [Electronic resource]. — Available at: <http://royby.com/philosophy/pages/dasein.html> (accessed: 2 December 2018)

Kasatkina 2005 — Kasatkina T. *Voskreshenie Lazaria: Opyt ekzegeticheskogo prochtenia romana F. M. Dostoevskogo "Prestuplenie i nakazanie"* [Lazar's Resurrection: Experience of Exegetical Reading of F.M. Dostoevsky's Novel *Crime and Punishment*]. Dostoevskii. Dopolneniia k kommentariu [Dostoevsky. Annexes to the Commentary], ed. T.A. Kasatkina. Moskva, Nauka Publ., 2005. Pp. 203-35. (In Russ.)

Ontology — *Ontology*. [Electronic resource]. — Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontology> (accessed: 2 December 2018)

Rosenshield 1972 — Rosenshield G. *The Narrator in "Crime and Punishment"*. Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1972. 782 p.

Scanlan 2002 — Scanlan J. P. *Dostoevsky the Thinker*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2002. 251 p.

Shklovsky 1990 — Shklovsky V. *Art as Device. Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher. Dalkey Archive Press, 1990. 240 p.

Simons — Simons P.M. *Ontology. Metaphysics. Encyclopedia Britannica*. [Electronic resource]. — Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ontology-metaphysics> (accessed: 2 December 2018)

Todorov 1975 — Todorov T. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca, Cornell Paperbacks, 1975. 180 p.

Vetlovskaia 2008 — Vetlovskaia V.E. *Literaturnye i real'nye prototipy geroev Dostoevskogo ("Meshchanin v khalate" v "Prestuplenii i nakazanii")*. Russkaia literature [Russian Literature]. No 1. 2008. Pp. 194-205. (In Russ.) Trans. by Carol Apollonio, as "Literary and Real-Life Prototypes of Dostoevsky's Heroes: The 'Tradesman in the Robe' in *Crime and Punishment*". The New Russian Dostoevsky, ed. Carol Apollonio, trans. Carol Apollonio et. al. Bloomington, Slavica, 2010. Pp. 123-37.