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Bone of My Bone, Flesh of My Flesh: Love in *Crime and Punishment*

Crime and Punishment can be read as everything from a novel of ideas to an exploration of human psychology to a police procedural, but it can also be read as Dostoevsky's least depressing love story – featuring, in the successful courtship of Dunya and Razumikhin, the closest he would ever come to romantic comedy.

As its plot unfolds, the novel explores several kinds of love, all of which have Biblical resonances and only one of which is erotic. An examination of love in *Crime and Punishment* can profitably begin with the type that most closely touches upon the novel's philosophical core: love of one's neighbor.

Dostoevsky explicitly foregrounds the problem of one's responsibility toward one's neighbor by having perhaps his least loving character, Luzhin, polemicize with Christ himself. As he says upon meeting Raskolnikov, "If up to now, for example, I have been told to 'love my neighbor,' and I did love him, what came of it? [. . .] What came of it was that I tore my caftan in two, shared it with my neighbor, and we were both left half naked, in accordance with the Russian proverb which says: If you chase several hares at once, you won't overtake any one of them. But science says: Love yourself before all, because everything in the world is based on self-interest. If you love only yourself, you will set your affairs up properly, and your caftan will also remain in one piece" [116/148-9]¹

¹ In citations from *Crime and Punishment*, the first page number given in brackets refers to Volume 6 of Dostoevsky's *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30-I tomakh*. Leningrad: 1972-90, the second to *Crime and Punishment*, transl. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. Pevear and Volokhonsky here supply the words "my neighbor" and "him"; what Luzhin says in Russian is "*Esti mne,*

Luzhin's doctrine of self-love evokes what it inverts and perverts, the moment in Luke when a young man asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers the question with a question – "What is written in the law?" – and the young man duly responds, "You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27), a conflation of several Hebrew Bible quotations that Jesus endorses. However, the young man pushes the discussion further with another question: "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus' answer is the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which compatriots and co-religionists ignore a half-dead man by the side of the road, but a stranger from a despised group is moved to stop and care for him. Jesus defines who one's neighbor is by refusing to define it; no succinct scripture verse or commandment supplies a rule for telling neighbors from non-neighbors – because everyone is a potential neighbor, and being a neighbor to another is not a state of being but an action.

Dostoevsky uses the Good Samaritan as the structure of an incident with consequences as far-reaching as those of the murders – and indeed, even more far-reaching, for if the murders bring about Raskolnikov's spiritual death, the consequences of his neighborly action lead to his resurrection. In Part II, Section 7, Raskolnikov happens upon Marmeladov, whom he has met only once before, run over by a carriage and crushed, surrounded by an agitated, indecisive crowd. In a striking evocation of Luke's parable, Raskolnikov steps forward unprompted and sees to his care, his repeated insistence that he will "pay" a telling link to the Bible story, which also lingers on the good neighbor's willingness to assume financial responsibility. Dostoevsky places extreme emphasis on Raskolnikov's total investment in this act of charity: he "did his utmost to persuade" the police to take Marmeladov home, "as if it were a matter of his own father" [138/176].² Where this section of the novel most differs

naprimer, do sikh por govorili: 'vozliubi', i ya vozliublyal," giving no object for the verbs; this elision is itself a sign of his egotism. His use of the word "*blizhnego*" later in the quoted passage makes it clear that Luzhin is in fact referring to the Biblical injunction to "love thy neighbor"

² Joseph Frank points out the contrast in this scene between Raskolnikov's "altruism, unhindered by Utilitarian reconsiderations" and the "pious platitudes of the priest summoned to perform the rites for the dying"; in the parable, Christ contrasts the charity of the Good Samaritan with the indifference of a priest and a Levite who walk past the

from the parable is in the results of the love shown by the "neighbor": the parable doesn't describe what became of the man in the road, but Dostoevsky has Marmeladov die. The ultimate beneficiary of Raskolnikov's involvement in Marmeladov's accident is actually Raskolnikov himself, because he meets Sonya, the cause of his "resurrection," at Marmeladov's deathbed.

The division in Raskolnikov between calculated indifference and impulsive charity has been widely noted,³ and his charity here both fits the pattern the novel has established and, upon examination, actually intensifies the contrast between Raskolnikov's two sides. For the rational calculus by which he determines that Alyona Ivanovna is expendable – indeed, that the world would be better off without her – would tell him that Marmeladov is an even worse parasite and bloodsucker. As Katerina Ivanovna retorts to the priest at his deathbed who suggests she try to get compensation for the loss of Marmeladov's income, "There wasn't any income from him, there was only torment. The drunkard drank up everything. He stole from us, and took it to the pot-house; he wasted their lives and mine in the pot-house! Thank God he's dying! We'll have fewer losses!" [144/184]

It seems obvious that, reckoned according to a Utilitarian calculus, Marmeladov's continued existence would cause more harm than the pawnbroker's ever did. Why not let him die untended? This passive action would surely be less blameworthy than the active murder of two of Raskolnikov's other "neighbors," Alyona Ivanovna and Lizaveta. Here as elsewhere, Raskolnikov's compassionate response is an unthinking impulse; in the moment, he is simply *unable* to "love only [him]self" as Luzhin preaches; in the moment, he never takes time to calculate, as we see with the drunk young girl before the murder, with the Marmeladov family on multiple occasions, and in the stories told about him at his trial; he's the kind of person who will run into a burning house to save a child.

However, even in his most generous actions, Raskolnikov differs from the Good Samaritan in an important respect: impulsive charity is invariably followed by regrets and cynicism as the other side of his divided nature reasserts himself; again and again, he gives, but he always counts his change.

wounded man (Joseph Frank: *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*. Princeton University Press, 2010: 497).

³ For an especially lucid depiction of the two sides of Raskolnikov, see Robert L. Belknap's forthcoming *Literary Plots*.

II. Am I My Brother's Keeper?

Though *Crime and Punishment* takes place in the atomized urban environment of Petersburg, often a destination for individuals who have left family members behind in the provinces, the novel does depict several families: the Raskolnikovs, the Marmeladovs, the half-sisters Alyona Ivanovna and Lizaveta and Sonya's neighbors/landlords the Kaper-naumovs. Perhaps even more importantly, as we've already seen with Raskolnikov's care for Marmeladov "as if it were a matter of his own father," Dostoevsky deploys the *language* of blood ties and familial love to comment on connections (or the lack thereof) between unrelated people. For example, he writes of Raskolnikov in the police station that "had [the police officers] been *his own brothers and sisters*, and not police lieutenants, there would still have been no point in his addressing them, in whatever circumstances of life. Never until this minute had he experienced such a strange and terrible sensation" [82/103, emphasis mine]⁴. These lines put forth the love between brothers and sisters as the most intimate bond Raskolnikov can think of, and the nullification of that love as the ultimate alienation.

Raskolnikov's bond with his real sister Dunya is intimate and genuine. It's all the more intriguing, then, that despite their abundant brotherly and sisterly love, neither is really able to help the other. On the one hand, Raskolnikov can't protect Dunya from Svidrigailov. On the other, and more importantly, it's clear that that Dunya's intended self-sacrifice of marrying Luzhin to help her brother's interrupted studies and potential legal career would be totally misguided even if he hadn't already committed two murders; Raskolnikov is completely correct when he says that it would not help him and would only degrade her.

Dunya's attempt to sell herself on the marriage market of course parallels another example of sisterly love: Sonya's sale of her virginity and

⁴ Earlier in the same paragraph, the narrator uses slightly different terms: "On the contrary, if the room were now suddenly filled not with policemen but with his foremost *friends [perveishimi druz'yami]*, even then, he thought, he would be unable to find a single human word for them, so empty had his heart suddenly become" [81/103, emphasis mine]. Note the progression from "foremost friends" to "his own brothers and sisters" as the narrator, in free indirect discourse, expresses Raskolnikov's growing sense of alienation.

subsequent career as a prostitute.⁵ As with his own sister, Raskolnikov denigrates the value of her sacrifice to benefit her family, taunting her cruelly that she has degraded herself "*in vain*" [247/322] and "it's bound to be the same with Polechka" [246/321], though even he admits that she is keeping the family from immediate homelessness and starvation. Dostoevsky greatly emphasizes the *sisterly* element in Sonya's love here by using the ruin of Polechka as the ultimate horror, to avert which any sacrifice seems justified. As Raskolnikov points out, like Dunya's, Sonya's sisterly self-sacrifice seems morally beautiful but only fitfully and partially efficacious. Eventually, however, Raskolnikov sees that Sonya's sacrifice has intangible benefits: sustaining her family sustains *Sonya*. When he suggests that it would be "a thousand times more just and reasonable" for Sonya to "jump headfirst into the water and end it all at once," Sonya replies with the air of one to whom this is not a new idea, "And what would become of them?" [247/322]. "No," thinks Raskolnikov, "what has so far kept her from the canal is the thought of sin, and of *them, those ones*. . . ." [248/323].

With the exception of her father, the people for whom Sonya sacrifices herself are mother, brother and sisters *in name only*; there is no blood tie. By making the children not even half-siblings of Sonya's, Dostoevsky highlights the voluntary nature of Sonya's sisterhood; she is a sister in the same way that the Good Samaritan is a neighbor: not out of a recognized bond whose obligations have been defined for her, but because of a free choice.

Another character who defines himself as a sibling in the absence of blood ties is Razumikhin, to whom Dostoevsky pointedly gives the speech habit of addressing Raskolnikov as *brat*, "brother." His most salient characteristic is his ability to become close to people in short order, making connections with such ease that he's able to have a party attended mostly by new friends from the neighborhood *one day* after moving to be closer to Raskolnikov. He quickly acquires friends at the local police station and even takes up the cause of the painter Mikolka who has been accused of the pawnbroker's murder.

Razumikhin never exhibits the impulsive generosity that characterizes Raskolnikov's Good Samaritan-like love of neighbor; rather, he specializes in the kind of good advice, practical help and sustained concern typical of

⁵ W.D. Snodgrass clearly delineates the parallels between Sonya's and Dunya's sacrifices (W.D. Snodgrass, "Crime for Punishment: The Tenor of Part I," *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2 [Summer, 1960]: 202-253).

brotherly or familial love; indeed, the narrator says of his rapidly assumed and heartfelt involvement with the Raskolnikov women as they try to cope both with Rodya's strange behavior and Luzhin's abandonment, "In short from that evening on Razumikhin became their son and brother" [240/3 14]. Interestingly, his "brotherhood" toward Dunya doesn't prevent, but actually seems to facilitate, his becoming her husband. He and Dunya are the only characters in a major Dostoevsky novel whose love story ends happily in marriage.

In the brotherly love he shows toward Raskolnikov, however, Razumikhin is no more successful in providing real help than Dunya would have been had she married Luzhin. His offers of work, purchase of new/old clothes, procurement of medical treatment and financial advice do nothing to move Raskolnikov closer to the "resurrection" in Siberia – in fact, his efforts to remove suspicion from Raskolnikov can be seen as actually working against his true best interests. His efforts to present his friend in a favorable light at the trial to procure the lightest possible sentence do actually work, but don't bear fruit within the confines of the novel itself. Razumikhin's brotherly behavior seems undeniably admirable, but curiously unhelpful.

III. Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh

So far we have explored two varieties of love that prompt behavior in line with Christian ethics which nevertheless seems to benefit the doer more than the recipient. Treat all men and women as your neighbors, brothers and sisters and *you* may inherit eternal life – it's unclear what will become of "them." Dostoevsky uses a third kind of love, erotic love, in a very different way in this novel: it seems to benefit the beloved more than the lover.

Svidrigailov's relationship to love, marriage and desire is peculiar and very useful for examining what becomes of Raskolnikov – indeed, serving essentially as the "control" in Dostoevsky's novelistic experiment with his protagonist. Strikingly, the account of Svidrigailov's encounter with Dunya, his troubled last night and suicide takes the place of the (omitted) description of Raskolnikov's last night of freedom, in which, he reports, he considered killing himself. Though most of Svidrigailov's erotic relationships with women and girls are characterized by a will to dominate even more naked than Luzhin's dreams of dominating Dunya in marriage, his relationship with Dunya is different: given the opportunity to rape her, he

instead gently puts his arm around her waist and asks, "So you don't love me?" [382/497]. Her statement (after attempting to shoot him at point-blank range!) that she doesn't and can't ever love him is the catalyst of his suicide. Unlike in the examples of Sonya's sisterly love that gives her the will to go on, or Raskolnikov's neighborly love that brings him into contact with the woman who will "resurrect" him, *loving* Dunya doesn't transform or save Svidrigailov, but the novel suggests that *being* loved *might* have. This idea is borne out in Raskolnikov's case.

From the beginning of the novel, even before the murders, the love of his mother, sister and friend has been somewhat sustaining to him, but also deeply burdensome. Raskolnikov himself says, after he parts with Dunya, "Oh, if only I were alone and no one loved me, and I myself had never loved anyone! *None of this would be!*" [401/520] – that is, he would have chosen suicide rather than confession. Over the course of the book, he has become deeply involved with Sonya, cutting his other ties and rejecting the love of others, to the point that he tells her, "I left my family today, [. . .] my mother and sister. I won't go to them now. I've broken with everything there"; "I have only you now" and "I need you, and so I've come to you" [252/328-9]. Sonya's loving connection to him is the only one he doesn't sever.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to put a name to what he feels for her, before the Epilogue. After he goes to get a cross from her on his way to confess, he puzzles over his motivation: "What was the need! Is it that I love her? I don't, do I?" [404/524]. He concludes that in fact "No – I wanted her tears, I wanted to see her frightened, to look at her heartache and torment!" [404/524]. He clearly depends on her, but hates the fact that he depends on anyone,⁶ and almost to the last page of the novel, he does his best to push her away. Nevertheless, Dostoevsky clearly presents her as the sole crucial figure in his regeneration. Having confessed to her and tried to explain the confused and inconsistent reasoning behind his crime, he doesn't succeed in convincing her to live by his theories or even to understand them (her short, fragmented and ineloquent answers to his long speeches are telling, especially given the meaning of her name, Sophia: "wisdom") – rather, she is able to induce *him* to *literally* take up a wooden cross and proceed to the police station, and when he wavers, it's the sight of her silent figure that

⁶ W.D. Snodgrass's article cited above sees in the figure of Alyona Ivanovna a scapegoat on whom Raskolnikov can take out his anger, shame and resentment at his literal and figurative indebtedness to a series of women, including his mother, sister and landlady (as well as the pawnbroker herself); Sonya becomes another in this series of sustaining, resented women.

forces him to go back and try again. Dunya's inability to return Svidrigailov's love left him with no resources outside himself, and the result was self-destruction; Sonya's love for Raskolnikov, unwelcome as it sometimes feels to him, drives him to take the other alternative – confession – even before he fully returns it.

However, she is not able to drive Raskolnikov to the action we might expect: repentance. Though in the first section of the Epilogue we read that Raskolnikov's sentence is relatively light because he says he felt "sincere repentance" [411/536], we learn in the second part that in fact "his hardened conscience did not find any especially terrible guilt in his past, except perhaps a simple *blunder*" [417/543]. "If only fate had sent him repentance – burning repentance, that breaks the heart, that drives sleep away, such repentance as torments one into dreaming of the noose or the watery deeps! Oh he would have been glad of it! Torments and tears – that too, was life. But he did not repent of his crime" [417/544].⁷ He regrets confessing; he regrets not killing himself, but never repents murdering two women, or even tormenting Sonya, even on the last page of the Epilogue. Just as he never experiences sincere feelings of repentance, so likewise he is never intellectually convinced that what he did was wrong or even particularly "stupid." The novel is not, in other words, a story of a man who learns a lesson, who comes to *understand* something. It is emphatically not a story about a man who converts to Christianity like Paul on the road to Damascus.⁸

Is the "resurrection" scene a conversion at all? It's useful to contrast it with one of the most famous conversion scenes in European literature, St. Augustine's conversion in the garden in Milan, depicted in Book 8 of his *Confessions*. For some time, Augustine has been held back from embracing Catholicism by what he thinks of as the "chain" of physical desire, which he calls "lust," binding him to "flesh and blood." To become a Catholic, he feels he must renounce it, but keeps telling himself, "Not yet"; he feels that as a frail human being, he will not be able to remain chaste. In the Milan garden, upon reading a text from Romans, he has a vision of Lady Continence and finally makes the leap, accepting that his own weak powers

⁷ As Frank notes, "The reader knows that Raskolnikov's so-called 'heartfelt repentance' is really a crushing sense of defeat" (506).

⁸ Curiously, readers often supply Raskolnikov with both a religious conversion and repentance, though neither is actually depicted in the novel.

will be bolstered by the power of God. Augustine's conversion is specifically a conversion *away from eros*.

The "resurrection" scene of *Crime and Punishment* is this conversion's polar opposite: a conversion *to eros*.⁹ In this moment of transformation, what Raskolnikov embraces is not the love of God or life or humanity but a particular woman, someone who, it's implied, will be his partner in the future. Of course, Sonya is herself a Christlike figure, who has read Raskolnikov the story of the raising of Lazarus, put a cross on his neck, given him a copy of the Gospels (which he does NOT, however, "take up and read" as Augustine does); of course she is in some sense a figure of Divine Wisdom – but it is as a woman that she actually has power to resurrect him by recalling him not to some rarified, heavenly existence but to human life as nothing more than a male human being. In other words, a man who aspired to be godlike, above other human beings, is redeemed by turning away from godlike power and embracing human frailty.

Many readers and critics are troubled by the Epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* and seek various ways either to minimize its importance or to explain it as a real departure from the main body of the novel,¹⁰ but in fact, the Raskolnikov-Sonya love story that culminates in the second chapter of the Epilogue serves as a major unifying thread connecting the beginning to the end. Though Raskolnikov doesn't meet Sonya until Part II, Section 7

⁹ In the body of the novel, Raskolnikov is portrayed as pointedly ascetic, with respect to sex no less than to food, drink and clothing (unlike his foil Razumikhin, party-thrower and provider of presentable threads, who in Part II Chapter 3 mentions visiting Laviza Ivanovna's "establishment" twice with Zametov). Raskolnikov's earlier engagement with a woman who "kept dreaming of a convent" and attracted him "because she was always sick" [177/231] does little to counteract this abstemious image. Quick to condemn Svidrigailov's womanizing as "depravity," he is oblivious to the connection between the specifically sexual misdeeds of others and his own violent crimes against women. Svidrigailov's objection that "in this depravity there's at least something permanent, even based on nature, and not subject to fantasy" [359/470], unlike Raskolnikov's fantastical murders, has a point.

¹⁰ Frank says flatly that "the epilogue, if not a failure as a whole, invariably leaves readers with a sense of dissatisfaction (508). Edward Wasiolek feels Raskolnikov's confession at the end of Part VI, "at once a sign of his self-will and his acceptance of God," would have made a better ending (Edward Wasiolek, *Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1964: 83). Michael Holquist, in defending the Epilogue, argues that it conforms to the conventions of an entirely different genre than the novel proper (Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 75-103.

[143/183], she is actually introduced in Marmeladov's "confession" in the bar all the way back in Part I, Section II, and Raskolnikov tells her he singled her out to hear his confession when he first heard of her. Sonya has been a part of his consciousness since before the letter from Pulkheria Ivanovna detailing Dunya's engagement to Luzhin, and part of the reader's since well before the nature of the crime Raskolnikov is planning is finally spelled out in Part I, Section V. The story of the courtship and eventual marriage of Dunya, which also spans nearly the entire novel and gives it, surprisingly, the structure of a traditional "marriage plot," begins as a kind of echo of Sonya's story, and therefore perhaps we can see in the marriage of Razumikhin and Dunya a foretaste of what awaits Sonya and Raskolnikov.¹¹

Sonya shares some of the features of Dante's Beatrice, in that she's a beloved woman whose wisdom dispenses blessings on the man whom she comforts, protects and loves. She also has much in common with Goethe's Gretchen, also a woman judged by the community and both tarnished by sexual sin and curiously untouched by it, who can be both redeemed herself and the redeemer of the man who loves her. Friendship, a mother's and sister's love, the good advice of wise figures like Porfiry Petrovich, the bad example of Svidrigailov – all have been to some degree useful to Raskolnikov, but it is erotic love that resurrects his dead heart. Augustine would be scandalized!

But Dante might not, and Plato would not. In the end, *Crime and Punishment* shows in action the way eros can lead a man "up," away from death and toward beauty and life. Raskolnikov's final turn toward love even transforms the meaning of his "speaking" name. In the body of the novel, Raskolnikov functions as schizophrenic – an internally divided man – and as schismatic – a man who is cut off from others – and both of these meanings have profoundly negative connotations. But perhaps he's also "cloven asunder" in the manner of the mythical hemispheres in Aristophanes' speech about the origin of Love in Plato's *Symposium*. Even if he never comes to recognize that his former ideas were wrong or his past

¹¹ Gary Rosenshield comments on the asexual nature of the relationship between Raskolnikov and Sonya, noting that "Dunya's relationship with Razumikhin, by contrast, is presented as a physical as well as a spiritual ideal," "perhaps even a goal toward which Raskol'nikov and Sonia are to strive after they marry" (Gary Rosenshield, "Dunya Raskol'nikov – The Aesthetic Consequences of Virtue in 'Crime and Punishment,'" in *F.M. Dostoevskii i natsional'naia kul'tura*, Vypusk 2, Cheliabinsk, 1996: 289-305).

deeds need to be atoned for, Raskolnikov *does* finally gain a sense of what it is to be whole when he recognizes and accepts Sonya as his "other half." Or, to return to the source of the other paradigms of love in this novel, the Bible, maybe in this final scene Raskolnikov more closely resembles post-surgery Adam, joyful when he sees the spouse who was once part of him, "bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh," the reason a man now leaves his family and cleaves to a woman, his wife.¹² Indeed, God's words about pre-division Adam would make an excellent subtitle for the novel: *Crime and Punishment, or It is Not Good for Man to be Alone.*

¹² Given that Dostoevsky explicitly calls the "conversion" scene in the second part of the Epilogue a "resurrection," it is intriguing to note that Orthodox icons of Christ's resurrection and harrowing of Hell (the Anastasis) commonly show him extending his hands to Adam and Eve, drawing them forth from their graves.