

SYMPOSIUM

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A JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND INQUIRY

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Symposium

Great Books Curriculum of Wright College
A Journal of Research and Inquiry
Dedicated To the Best That Has Been Thought and Said

VOLUME 11

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INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

I am here to tell you what others will not: if you value the coherence of a limited worldview, *stay away from the great books*. If you, like Victor Frankenstein, presume that the happier man is he who “believes his native town to be the world” while shunning he who “aspires to be greater than his nature will allow,” well, then, *stay away*. If the rather top-heavy construction that is (perhaps) your own ego rests upon unstable grounds, do not laden it with Proust, Dostoevsky, Chaucer, Shelley, Browne, Yeats, Woolf, Homer, or anyone else whose language carries the weight and impact of human history; in other words, for your own safety, *stay away from the great books*.

Literature, if it is truly literature, should challenge us—not just intellectually, but existentially. It should seize our minds and make us taste, feel, hear, smell, but most of all, see. A great book should inhabit us like some hallucinatory parasite. Yet, our affinity for the written word is a parasite we grow to cherish—giving it a pet name, feeding it at night before bed, and tending to it in our thoughts with the vehement, nurturing protectiveness of maternity. It must live through us, and, if only for a brief time, we must give ourselves over to its sovereignty. Will you, reader, find your way back to yourself once the cover is clapped shut and the parasite rests?

No, I am not being facetious, clever, or histrionic. Perhaps your editor is coming across a little more pretentiously than he intends. It is only, dear reader, that I failed to heed my own warnings. I could not stay away from the great books, and thus, as Franz Kafka wrote in his diary in 1923, I feel—upon the publication of the eleventh volume of *Symposium*—that I am “nothing but literature and can and want to be nothing else.”

The question must be addressed: what do we intend when we invoke the “Great Books”? Between the covers of the journal you now hold, you will find a list of authors whose works have earned that distinction. From Chinua Achebe to Samuel Beckett, you will discover an array of fine writers. Yet, I detest prescriptions. As did the great Italo Calvino, I endorse no canon beyond personal necessity. Each reader, even you, dear reader, has the capacity to determine their own canon, to map their own constellation.

A word of guidance for those readers attempting to establish their own: you will know a great book by the grit it leaves behind in your teeth.

Twenty-six years in, the *Great Books Symposium Journal* owes the privilege of its continued existence to the support of students and staff in equal measure. First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Michael Petersen, without whom the publication of this journal would not be possible. The level of historical, literary,

philosophical, linguistic, and grammatical proficiency displayed in the student essays of *Symposium* is the direct result of Dr. Petersen's influence and tutelage. While many instructors have made a program out of reining in the creativity and curiosity of their students, Dr. Petersen allows the intellectual ambition of his students to be their guide. The result, one will find, is work that far surpasses the standard expectations for community college literary analysis.

In addition, I would like to express special gratitude for my assistant editors: Muhammad Saeed, Tristan Bruns, and Douglas McSheridan—each of whom is well-suited to direct the publication of this journal. Ultimately, our appointment of an editor-in-chief was a decision made not on the basis of competition but camaraderie and mutual respect.

Sincerely,

Sean Ogilvy

Spring 2026 editor-in-chief, *Great Books Symposium Journal*

The Illusion of Unity in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Muhammad Saeed

The period in England from 1603 to 1625, known as the Jacobean era, can be characterized by a significant shift in the understanding of the human self. Following arguably two of the most significant cultural transformations since the birth of Christ—the Renaissance (c. 1300-1600) and the English Reformation (beginning 1534)—the Jacobean period emerged under the cumulative influence of both. One of the most significant effects of this combined influence on Jacobean England was the societal abandonment of medieval ideas of man as either completely pure or wholly corrupt in favor of a composite view of the self as comprised of distinct and competing elements. William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c. 1606) dramatizes this new idea of the divided self through its titular protagonist, whose encounter with supernatural witches psychologically fractures him by putting his ambition and conscience in direct opposition. Convinced by Lady Macbeth that his manhood relies on his use of violence and that his ambition must come at the cost of his conscience, Macbeth, in an attempt to resolve his mental strife and restore his "single state of man" (1.3.142), begins a rampage of violence that ends with his own death. While his downfall is often attributed to unchecked ambition, Macbeth's pursuit of violence is rather a misguided attempt to restore an illusory unified self, an attempt which only erodes his humanity, allowing the play to suggest that true stability is only achievable through the acceptance and balance of one's disjunctive elements.

While the play appears to suggest that the prophecy of Macbeth's future kingship is a disruption to his formerly unified self, the play complicates this view by presenting his identity as something that was never truly unified, but merely untested. As a soldier in service to Scotland, Macbeth's ambition, duty, and conscience align in a rare harmony with his sense of manhood, since his occupation authorizes violence, which serves as the primary measure of manhood within his society. Violent action is celebrated throughout the play, as shown by the unnamed captain's description of Macbeth's execution of the traitor Macdonwald, where

...brave Macbeth [...],
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
[...] carved out his passage,
Till he faced the slave,
[and] unseamed him from the nave to th' chops,
And fixed his head upon [their] battlements. (1.2.16-23)

This celebration of violence, which goes beyond soldierly duty and borders on cruelty, is echoed by then King Duncan, who praises Macbeth as his "valiant cousin" and a "worthy gentleman" (1.2.24). Duncan's praise of Macbeth's capacity for violence is ironic because eventually this same bloody prowess allows Macbeth to commit

regicide. This irony is also noted by Carolyn Asp, who argues that Duncan's "sentimental joy over the bloody victory emphasizes the fundamental weakness of a warrior society" whose sanctioned violence "can turn against it" (154). A culture that legitimizes violence as a means of restoring order also encourages its heroes to use violence to restore order within themselves. Thus, Scotland's warrior culture provides Macbeth with a model of masculine coherence, but that wholeness is only temporary and rests on the alignment of violence and ambition within soldierly duty. When Macbeth encounters the Weird Sisters and hears their prophecy, his ambition is redirected from service to Duncan's crown toward personal fulfillment, collapsing that coherence.

Macbeth's encounter with the Weird Sisters disrupts the harmony connecting his ambition, conscience, and duty; he responds by suppressing his conscience and subordinating his duty to his ambition. The Weird Sisters first hail Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor, predict he will become king, and tell his friend and fellow soldier Banquo that his children will be kings (1.3.49-50, 67). When Ross, shortly after the Weird Sisters' prediction, confirms that Macbeth has now been named Thane of Cawdor, the fulfilled first prophecy gives credibility to the second one, that he will be king, shifting the object of Macbeth's ambition from service to Scotland toward the pursuit of the crown. The news of his fated kingship produces psychological strife within Macbeth, who asks, "If good, why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair[?]" He also admits that his "thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical, / Shakes so my single state of man / That function is smothered in surmise" (1.3.136-37; 141-43). By introducing the throne as a new object of Macbeth's ambition, the prophecy divides him between his desire for the crown and his duty as a soldier to protect it. Instead of abandoning duty, however, Macbeth redefines it in light of the prophecy so that his fated kingship becomes his new duty, which he is obligated to fulfill through regicide.

Richard Horwich also notes Macbeth's psychological strife, pointing out that from "the beginning, the mere fantasies of murder induce in Macbeth a psychic dissociation" (366). Horwich aptly recognizes that Macbeth's murderous imaginings produce not mere disturbance or hesitation, but a fracturing of his sense of self. However, psychic dissociation alone does not explain why Macbeth responds to his inner division by turning toward violence because Macbeth does not detach himself from violence so much as he imagines it as the means of restoring his lost coherence. The play's depiction of Macbeth's movement toward Duncan's murder suggests that this violence can serve as a cure for his psychological turmoil because he seems to draw on his former perceived unity—in which violence aligned with ambition, duty, and conscience—and to treat renewed violence as a restoration of that earlier harmony. Macbeth's reasoning is not intellectually sound, however, because he mistakes the origin of his former harmony, where violence was a matter of duty, with the idea that violence was what produced that harmony. In this way, that the play presents the murder of King Duncan as part of an imagined strategy of self-repair through which Macbeth seeks the resolution of his internal conflict.

Macbeth's strategy of self-repair takes the form of an internal restructuring in

which, to murder Duncan, he must separate conscience from action. This separation is shown when he calls on the stars to “hide [their] fires” and not let light see his “black and deep desires,” so that the “eye wink at the hand” and permit the deed even though it is something the eye “fears, when it is done, to see” (1.4.50-53). Here, Horwich helps clarify Macbeth's self-division by arguing that Macbeth attempts a kind of psychic division by “setting his hand and eye in conflict with each other,” with these organs representing the active, outward self and the ethical, inward self (368). However, this division is less a dissociation from violence than a means of making violence possible, since Macbeth separates action from moral awareness to elevate his ambition over his conscience. Yet this embrace of ambition does not restore his former psychological harmony and instead produces a temporary unity grounded in violence, which Macbeth reveals when he admits that he is “in blood / Stepped in so far, that should [he] wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o’er” (3.4.134-36). Although Macbeth can continue his violence, he still cannot endure the tension between his conscience and ambition, and each additional violent act only intensifies his psychological strife.

To bring himself to violence, however, Macbeth requires an external model of coherence to imitate. Lady Macbeth becomes that model for him by suppressing her conscience, which gives her the ruthless resolve needed to plan the murder of King Duncan and push her husband towards it. After reading Macbeth's letter that informs her of his prophesied kingship, she calls on spirits to “unsex [her] here, / And fill [her] from the crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty” (1.5.41-43). Lady Macbeth's “unsexing” allows her to suppress her conscience through the spirits' temporary removal of her moral restraint, which leaves her ambition as the sole guiding principle in her decisions. Yet her abandonment of moral restraint erodes her humanity. Lady Macbeth's shocking claim that, while nursing her child, she “would, while it was smiling in [her] face, / Have plucked [her] nipple from his boneless gums, / And dashed the brains out” rather than go back on a promise, highlights the extent of her dehumanization (1.56-58). Macbeth may see in Lady Macbeth's dehumanization the evidence of a will unrestrained by conscience, and ultimately this ruthless resolve may embolden him to commit regicide.

The model of coherence Lady Macbeth provides, however, is both artificially constructed and unstable. Asp notes that in “spite of her pragmatic and ruthless rhetoric...the gall in her breasts has not been sufficient to unsex Lady Macbeth” because of her additional reliance on “wine to make her bold and give her fire,” (161). Asp rightly points out the composite structure of Lady Macbeth's artificial coherence, but she conflates the function of the “sprits that tend on mortal thoughts” with those of the wine she drinks (1.5.40-41). The spirits do not give Lady Macbeth boldness, but rather the moral and psychological resolve needed to plan the murder, suppress her conscience, and pressure Macbeth into carrying it out, whereas the alcohol supplies the confidence needed to take part in its execution by planting the bloody daggers on Duncan's guards (2.2.53-58). Her need for alcohol, therefore, does not prove that the spirits have failed to unsex her; rather, it shows that while her unsexing grants her the masculine resolve required for planning and persuasion, it does not provide her with

the immediate courage required to participate in the murder plot directly. The distinction between the spirits and the alcohol shows that Lady Macbeth's apparent coherence is not natural but rather produced by the supernatural suppression of her conscience and chemical suppression of her fear. Lady Macbeth's manufactured coherence enables her to project an image of unwavering resolve, making her appear to Macbeth the embodiment of the violent certainty he may see as essential to manhood.

While the spirits do not reverse Lady Macbeth's gender, they allow her to project an appearance of absolute certainty that may lead Macbeth to see her as the embodiment of the manhood he lacks. Stephanie Chamberlain argues that Lady Macbeth's goal is not to become masculine and that her "unsex me here" speech "deconstruct[s] gender categories" by "unfixing the rigid cultural distinctions, as well as attributes which define male and female" (79). Chamberlain may be correct that Lady Macbeth's invocation of the spirits ultimately unsettles gender categories, but Lady Macbeth does not pursue that effect for its own sake. Her aim is not gender ambiguity, but rather the appearance of ruthless resolve that Macbeth may see as masculine.

Since Macbeth ostensibly interprets her commitment to regicide as evidence of her masculinity, Lady Macbeth can challenge the limited definition of manhood he adopts in his moment of hesitation, according to which a man should "dare do all that may become a man," while whoever "dares do more, is none" (1.7.46–47). Lady Macbeth counters by redefining masculinity as violent resolve, telling her husband that "when [he] durst do it, then [he] were a man; / And to be more than what [he was], [he] would / Be so much more the man" (1.7.49–51). Lady Macbeth's redefinition is self-serving because it advances her desire to see Macbeth become king by requiring him to prove his manhood through regicide, yet she may not recognize that the force of her attack depends on the masculine quality she perceives in him. Macbeth apparently views Lady Macbeth's commitment to violence as proof that she possesses the masculine coherence he lacks. Thus, by questioning Macbeth's masculinity, Lady Macbeth targets the symbolic core of the coherent identity he longs to recover and leads him to interpret his internal strife as the result of insufficiently decisive masculine action that only regicide can resolve.

As the play presents Lady Macbeth leading her husband to interpret his internal strife as a lack of decisive masculine action, Macbeth's regicide becomes an attempt to replicate the resolve she appears to embody, thereby imposing a unified masculine identity on himself. Macbeth does achieve a repression-driven certainty similar to Lady Macbeth's, and although this certainty does not resolve his internal strife, it enables him to commit further acts of violence without the restraint of his conscience. Having internalized the model of ruthless resolve Lady Macbeth once embodied for him, Macbeth begins to rule Scotland independently and no longer sees as necessary the woman he once called his "dearest partner of greatness" (1.5.11). Macbeth's newfound independence is perhaps most evident when, in response to Lady Macbeth's inquiry about the planned murder of Banquo and Fleance, he tells her to remain "innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck" (3.2.46). Asp also notes Macbeth's

shift in relying on his wife for moral courage to administering violence on his own and suggests that "Lady Macbeth's dream of being partner to his greatness is doomed by the very means she has used to ensure that greatness" (162). While serving as a model of masculine coherence allows Lady Macbeth to goad her husband into action successfully, once Macbeth internalizes her apparent unity, he does not require her influence to commit further acts of violence.

No longer needed by her husband, Lady Macbeth begins to fade into the background of the play until her abrupt death. Lady Macbeth's death itself stems from the return of her conscience that she had earlier suppressed, triggering a psychological collapse that is too unbearable for her to endure. The suppression of her conscience is only possible through Lady Macbeth's appeal to supernatural spirits, and this invocation, along with her rejection of traditional femininity, has led many critics to view her as a kind of fourth Weird Sister. Joanna Levin, for example, argues that although "Lady Macbeth never obtains the epithet of witch during the play, she would have been considered a witch according to the Witchcraft Statute of 1604" since the "very act of summoning demonic powers transforms her into the witch of the 1604 Statute" (39). The historical context Levin provides clarifies the Jacobean framework within which Lady Macbeth's appeal to demonic powers would be understood as a witch-like transgression, but the witch-like state it produces is temporary. If the invocation of spirits is an act of witchcraft, then the resulting suppression of conscience is the witch-like condition, but because Lady Macbeth's conscience eventually returns, her resemblance to the Weird Sisters is only partial and temporary.

The temporary nature of Lady Macbeth's witch-like state becomes explicit when the return of her suppressed guilt triggers a psychological collapse. The extent of her psychological distress is perhaps most visible when she is found sleepwalking by her gentlewoman doctor, crying, "Out, damned spot: out, I say...Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" (5.1.35-40). Although Lady Macbeth initially assumes that guilt can be washed away as easily as blood from her hands (2.2.68), the illusory reappearance of her bloodstained hands in her sleepwalking state reveals that her guilt over Duncan's murder was never erased but only repressed until the return of her conscience brought it back violently to the surface. The return of her guilt in this uncontrollable form overwhelms Lady Macbeth with an inward torment she believed she had silenced, and this torment ultimately drives her toward death. While Seyton tells Macbeth only that she has died, not how (5.5.16), the severity of Lady Macbeth's psychological state suggests she likely committed suicide. James Greene also views Lady Macbeth's death as suicide, arguing that Macbeth's "sexually released mate...is, ironically, shunned by her husband, remains childless, goes insane, and in all probability, commits suicide" (168). Although Greene aptly points out that the fading effects of the spirits restore Lady Macbeth's sexuality, that restoration is not liberating because it occurs alongside the unbearable return of her conscience and guilt. The return of Lady Macbeth's sexuality thus brings not liberation but psychic enclosure, forcing her back into the guilt and vulnerability from which she can find escape only in death.

If Lady Macbeth's death exposes the destructive consequences of suppressing

one's conscience, then Lady Macduff embodies a contrasting model of womanhood grounded in fidelity to conscience. When Lady Macduff is introduced, she reacts to her husband's abrupt departure from Scotland with a clear sense of abandonment, comparing herself to the "poor wren / The most diminutive of birds," who will fight "against the owl" so long as her "young ones" are "in her nest," even if doing so "runs against all reason" (4.2.9-14). Her imagery of maternal defense, which presents protecting her child as an instinctive duty even in the face of overwhelming danger, already sets her apart from Lady Macbeth, who renounces her maternity by turning her milk into gall (1.5.49). William Liston's analysis of Lady Macduff's maternal metaphor sharpens the distinction between her and Lady Macbeth, suggesting that the procreant bird analogy "alludes to the barren and unnatural Lady Macbeth whose castle...harbors no humanity" (238). Viewed alongside the spirits' suppression of her conscience, Liston's characterization of Lady Macbeth as barren and unnatural suggests that a distinction between her and Lady Macduff lies in their opposing responses to the restraints of their consciences. While both their consciences impose maternal and moral obligations on them, Lady Macbeth rejects these obligations by suppressing her conscience, while Lady Macduff remains bound by them, continuing to honor them despite the danger in doing so.

Lady Macduff's decision to remain in Scotland rather than flee not only shows the strength of her moral commitments but also exposes the fatal consequences of remaining bound to them. Her decision to stay at Fife stems from her morally sound assumption that one who has done no wrong should have no reason to flee, yet almost immediately she acknowledges that such reasoning fails under a corrupted moral order, admitting "I am in this earthly world, where to do harm / Is often laudable, to do good sometimes / Accounted dangerous folly" (4.2.77-79). Lady Macduff's admission that doing what is right no longer ensures one's safety indicates her recognition that Macbeth's tyrannical rule has inverted the moral order, so that mere adherence to moral principle itself has become dangerous. Lady Macduff's awareness of the danger involved in living by her moral principles, however, makes her decision to stay all the more virtuous. Her refusal to leave is thus not an act of ignorance but one of moral courage, and although Lady Macduff does ultimately meet her end at the hands of the murderers hired by Macbeth, she dies honorably without compromising her integrity. By preserving her moral integrity in her final moments, Lady Macduff serves as a foil to Lady Macbeth, whose attempt to suppress her conscience leaves her psychologically disintegrated. By preserving the moral integrity Lady Macbeth abandons, Lady Macduff shows that the stability Macbeth mistakes for unity cannot come from silencing conscience through violence, but only from fidelity to its obligations.

If Lady Macduff's role as a foil to Lady Macbeth reveals that stability depends on obedience to conscience, then Banquo's role as a foil to Macbeth reveals that such stability rests not in a mythical unity but in sustaining a balance among ambition, duty, and conscience. As a man-at-arms, Banquo does not misrecognize the former harmony between his ambition, duty, and conscience as a stable condition of his character. Unlike Macbeth, he recognizes that this alignment arises from the moral

legitimacy of warfare in royal service and that this harmony persists only so long as his ambition remains confined to his soldierly role. Banquo's awareness of the limits of his soldierly identity allows him to withstand the clash between ambition and duty that the encounter with the Weird Sisters produces. Banquo's refusal to force his fate through violence should not be mistaken for a lack of ambition, as his reflections after Macbeth's coronation indicate otherwise. To himself, Banquo acknowledges that since the Weird Sisters fulfilled their promise to Macbeth, they could also "set [him] up in hope," revealing that he recognizes and briefly indulges the possibility of dynastic advancement through his son (3.1.10).

It is Banquo's commitment to duty that allows him to restrain his ambition and thus prevent the prophecy from producing a harmful internal strife in him. Banquo's reply to Macbeth's veiled promise of reward makes his commitment to duty and moral priorities explicit, saying he will only comply if he "lose none / In seeking to augment it, but still keep / [his] bosom franchised and allegiance clear" (2.1.27-29). Banquo's ability to keep ambition and duty in balance not only preserves his psychological stability but also intensifies Macbeth's insecurity, which he expresses in a soliloquy before meeting with the murderers he has hired to kill Banquo and Fleance, admitting that his "fears in Banquo stick deep," since Banquo's "royalty of nature" and guiding "wisdom" render him uniquely dangerous, so much so that Macbeth feels his own "genius is rebuked, as it is said / Mark Antony's was by Caesar" (3.1.48-56).

Gene Fendt suggests that the wisdom Macbeth speaks of "is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which is conjoined with the fear of the Lord (wisdom's beginning) and the valor guided by them" (392). While Fendt may overstate the explicitly Christian nature of Banquo's wisdom, the idea that his superiority stems from spiritual wisdom explains Banquo's ability to balance ambition, conscience, and duty. By submitting to a higher power, Banquo's ambition is judged by an authority that places moral limits on its fulfillment, thereby allowing it to remain one aspect of his inner being alongside duty and conscience rather than becoming the force that reshapes them. This inner balance becomes the source of Macbeth's fear, since he recognizes in Banquo the internal harmony he cannot achieve himself and resolves to kill him for embodying what he cannot internally reconcile. The murderers fail to kill Fleance, and while they can successfully kill Banquo, they cannot eliminate Banquo's continuing presence as a threat to Macbeth's fragile sense of stability.

Banquo's appearance as a ghost at Macbeth's coronation banquet allows him, even in death, to expose the illusion of unity Macbeth believes he has restored. Although Macbeth has, by this point, committed enough violence so that guilt no longer restrains him, the repression of his conscience cannot restore the alignment he mistakes for unity. Banquo's ghost thus becomes the psychological manifestation of Macbeth's guilt that persists despite suppression. Macbeth responds to the ghost with masculine bravado, challenging it to "[a]pproach thou like the rugged Russian bear," and claiming that only its supernatural form makes his "firm nerves...tremble" (3.4.98-101). This defensive posture may help in confronting physical threats, but bravado cannot silence Macbeth's suppressed guilt.

Marina Favila offers a psychologically charged reading of Banquo's ghost.

Favila views the ghost as “represent[ing] the two faces of Freud's double” because Banquo's murder is meant to be “the first step toward Macbeth's securing of the throne for his own future descendants,” but at the same time the ghost also “represent[s] the end of Macbeth's line” when he “sits in Macbeth's chair at the royal feast, mocking ... Macbeth's more imminent future (16). Favila's idea that the ghost embodies both Macbeth's desire for permanent power—and the death inseparable from that desire—becomes most precise alongside a reading of the ghost as the return of Macbeth's suppressed conscience. Under this framework, Banquo's ghost represents the futility of Macbeth's attempt to secure lasting stability for both himself and his line through violence, since the murder meant to secure both instead restores his inner division and confirms that the royal future belongs to Banquo's descendants. The return of Macbeth's inner division thus reveals the limits of repression, for although suppressing conscience and embracing violence makes him nearly beast-like, unlike a beast, Macbeth cannot escape the inner strife his actions continue to generate. Banquo's ghost thus exposes the fragile and self-defeating nature of Macbeth's violent attempt to restore his perceived former inner harmony and allows Banquo, who in life proved that balance was possible, to in death prove that repression can never secure the unity Macbeth seeks.

Macduff can be seen as another foil to Macbeth through his ability to balance the disparate elements within himself. Horwich characterizes Macduff as “a man of many parts...both a father and a soldier” who can “weep and revenge”; he is “a man not of woman born, and yet the most human character of all” (372). Horwich's reading of Macduff challenges the popular unsympathetic view of the Thane of Fife as a man who abandoned his familial duties for soldierly ones and is therefore responsible for the deaths of Lady Macduff and his son. This view is even supported by Malcolm, who responds to Macduff's political hopelessness by questioning his judgment, asking why “in that rawness” he “left [his] wife and child— / Those precious motives, those strong knots of love— / Without leave-taking” (4.3.26–28). Macduff responds not to Malcolm's impugning of his character, but to what he believes is the loss of Scotland's last hope, crying, “Bleed, bleed, poor country ... / For goodness dare not check thee” (4.3.32–34).

Carmine Di Biase suggests that Macduff “takes refuge in this expression of patriotic feeling because, like Macbeth, he is better armed at this point for the conventional battlefield and lacks the courage, or the wherewithal, to question his humanity and seek out the names of his virtues and his vices” (28). Di Biase's characterization of Macduff allows for a more sympathetic view of him because it suggests that he does not take refuge in emotionally charged language out of indifference, but because, as a soldier, he is better prepared to confront an external threat than an inward one: the possibility that self-examination will force him to face what is noble, cowardly, or sinful in himself. The parallel Di Biase draws between Macduff and Macbeth is also significant, since both soldiers are initially more practiced in violent action than in self-knowledge, but the news of his family's slaughter forces Macduff to confront both the external threat posed by Macbeth and the internal burden of grief, rage, and vengeance. The fact that Macduff's

introspection is prompted by something as horrific as his family's murder does not undermine his role as a protagonist, because it clarifies his status as a figure of inner balance. Balance, the only means to achieve stability, requires not flawlessness but only the eventual capacity to acknowledge and sustain competing obligations without denying either. Viewed through this lens, Macduff emerges not only as defensible but also as an essential figure of lived tension who stands against Macbeth's illusion of a unified self.

After hearing of his family's murder, Macduff can achieve balance only if personal grief and public duty remain distinct yet equally binding. His response to Malcolm's command to "Dispute it like a man," that he "must also feel it as a man," demonstrates his ability to sustain that tension, since although the moment demands soldierly action from him, it does not forbid him from expressing paternal grief (4.3.23; 25). In light of Macduff's response, Horwich further characterizes him as someone who, though "composed of disparate elements ... synthesizes them, accepting weakness along with strength, error with truth" (327). Horwich treats Macduff's acceptance of his disparate elements as a synthesis, but Macduff's insistence that he "must also feel it as a man" suggests that his grief and duty are held in a deliberate balance rather than fused into a single motive for revenge (4.3.25). If Horwich's reading were correct, Macduff's private grief would be absorbed into his public duty, turning the restoration of Scotland into little more than an act of personal revenge. Macduff's prior commitment to overthrow the tyrant Macbeth shows that while revenge may intensify his desire to retake Scotland, it does not replace his true purpose. Furthermore, the play itself advances a model of balance rather than synthesis at its conclusion through its division of royal and moral legitimacy between Malcolm and Macduff. As Horwich observes, "It is Malcolm who represents royal legitimacy in Scotland, but it is Macduff who defends it by confronting and killing the tyrant" (365). By separating royal legitimacy in Malcolm from moral enforcement in Macduff, the play models balance rather than synthesis and suggests that stability—in both the self and the state—depends not on merging distinct elements such as rightful rule and moral authority, but on accepting and sustaining the tension between them.

The intellectual aftermath of the Renaissance and the English Reformation fostered in Jacobean England a conception of the self as psychologically complex and internally divided rather than morally uniform. Under this framework, moral failure arose not from the simple triumph of vice over virtue but from an inability to manage competing inner demands. Macbeth's descent into violence, which culminates in his own destruction, is the consequence of his rejection of the divided self. He mistakes the contextual alignment of his ambition, duty, and conscience as proof of unity and treats violence as the means of restoring that imagined wholeness. Each act of violence deepens the repression of his conscience, further exacerbating his internal strife and exposing his coerced coherence as unstable. The play's critique of the unified self continues in Lady Macbeth, who calls upon the supernatural to help refashion her psyche so that ambition becomes her only guiding principle. When the supernatural influence fades, her manufactured resolve collapses, and the return of her repressed conscience produces guilt so overwhelming that only suicide ends it. Lady

Macduff's fidelity to conscience also proves fatal, but it reveals that moral integrity can lead to a noble end. Banquo allows ambition, duty, and conscience to coexist without forcing their resolution through violence, and Macduff sustains a productive tension between grief and soldierly responsibility rather than collapsing one into the other. Even at the political level, the division of royal legitimacy and moral authority between Macduff and Malcolm reinforces the principle of stability through violence. Ultimately, unity is revealed as the illusion that gives rise to tyranny and stability, one that, whether in oneself or the state, lies not in silencing competing tensions but in sustaining them through balance.

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I, Raskolnikov: Homo Ex Machina in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment

Tristan Bruns

I tend to think of human beings as huge, rubbery test tubes, too, with chemical reactions seething inside. When I was a boy, I saw a lot of people with goiters. [...] Those unhappy Earthlings had such swollen thyroid glands that they seemed to have zucchini squash growing from their throats. All they had to do in order to have ordinary lives, it turned out, was to consume less than one-millionth of an ounce of iodine every day.

Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*, 1975

Human beings create things in their own image and that reflects their tastes; machines, physical or conceptual, designed by humans are no exception. In literature, human-machine hybrid characters have driven the stock plots of fiction for generations. It is not difficult to envision an education in humanity taught by machine-men, from graphic fiction, like *Iron Man* and *Transformers*, to works rooted in teleological investigation, like Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* and Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot*.

The character Raskolnikov in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) is a fabrication of a machine-man, a metaphor to communicate the author's observations regarding human morality. As a machine-man, i.e., an individual whose behavior is dictated by the maintenance of their corporal parts and systems, Raskolnikov's failure to maintain his bodily components causes a malfunction in his brain that leads to a severe mood disorder called major depressive disorder (MDD) (Nikulina, Spatz Widom and Czaja 309). Dostoevsky systematically proves this to be the case through moments of clarity that occur whenever the character eats, sleeps, and engages in exercise, indicating that a proper assessment of Raskolnikov must necessarily include the consideration of the character's mental condition as being caused by a cycle of self-neglect, depression, and low self-esteem.

Many scholars ignore Raskolnikov's biomechanical motivations in favor of a metaphysical or spiritual impetus. Peter Marchant implies matricide as the motivation for Raskolnikov's murder of the pawnbroker, that the pawnbroker, an old woman, is a stand-in for his mother, and that his "mother's death releases the pair of them of their loads" (12). Louise Dauner applies Jungian philosophy by arguing that he is seeking a unified self, that "Raskolnikov's psychic problem, then, is that of individuation; of uniting his two polar functions, Thinking and Feeling, or merging the contents of the conscious and the unconscious" (203). David Matual states the fundamental theme of the book as "the metamorphosis of Raskolnikov and his reconciliation with God as symbolized by the story of Lazarus" (54), and George Gibian presents the novel as an

attack on rationalism, that Dostoevsky “set himself the task of exposing the evils of rationalism by presenting a laboratory case of an individual who followed its precepts and pushed them to their logical conclusion” (979)—the logical conclusion being to reject rationalism and accept God and the will-to-suffer.

Scholars who decipher Raskolnikov’s ends through religious and metaphysical means inspire refreshed readings of the work but detract from Dostoevsky’s pedestrian motivations. Raskolnikov obeys the rules of a human machine, a *homo ex machina*, and his salvation lies not in the judgement of God or Carl Jung but in the proper self-maintenance of his fleshly parts and systems. One must agree with Paul the Apostle, who says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that “your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit [...]. You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.”¹ In other words, the spirit is tied to the body—whether the former conceived of the latter or vice versa makes no difference. If Raskolnikov is to be analyzed through a religious and spiritual lens, and the consideration of the body is a contractual obligation, then any spiritual analysis of the character is incomplete without the consideration of the state of his body.

Dostoevsky leaves numerous clues that the deterioration of Raskolnikov’s body has a direct effect on his actions and attitude. Raskolnikov shows signs of having a severe eating disorder. Non-Suicidal Self-Injury and eating disorders often occur simultaneously in a person’s life (Ernhout, Babington, and Childs 1). Raskolnikov shows that he is “non-suicidal” in two instances: He contemplates and rejects suicide after witnessing a young woman’s attempt to take their own life in Part II; he rejects suicide again in his decision to turn himself in to the authorities at the end of Part VI. Furthermore, Raskolnikov can be read as contradistinctive to the character Svidrigailov, the Nietzschean *Übermensch* who musters the will-to-power to take his own life. Raskolnikov is “self-injuring” (e.g., in his rejection of food even when he is hungry and has the financial means to procure it). Self-injurers show elevated levels of dissociation (i.e., a mental process of detaching from reality, thoughts, feelings, memories, or sense of self) among individuals with eating disorders (Smith, Kouros, and Meuret 44). At the beginning of Part I, we are introduced to Raskolnikov as he slips into a “complete blankness of mind” and the narrator reveals that, “At these moments he would become conscious that his ideas were sometimes in a tangle and that he was very weak; for two days he had scarcely tasted food” (2). While sitting in a tavern before his meeting with Marmaladov, he is physically and emotionally weak, and he knows the cause—“He longed for a drink of cold beer, and attributed his sudden weakness to the want of food” (8). In short, Raskolnikov’s aloofness and torpor are not the result of spiritual or metaphysical degradation but the result of a lack of adequate nutrition.

That this is the case is evident in comparison between an ill-fed Raskolnikov and one whose physical needs are sated. In Part VI, Chapter 1, the landlady’s servant,

¹ This biblical quote is from the New International Version (NIV), Bible Gateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible/>

Nastasya, brings him food; “he ate and drank with appetite, almost with greediness. His head was fresher, and he was calmer than he had been for the last three days.” He even finds relief from his mental anguish, as the narrator says, “He even felt a passing wonder at his previous attacks of panic” (408). In Part II, Chapter 3, during a checkup with the doctor, Zossimov, Raskolnikov’s faithful friend, Razumikin, feeds him several spoonfuls of soup, causing this reaction in Raskolnikov: “He moved back to his chair, pulled the soup and meat in front of him, and began eating as though he had not touched food for three days” (115). After Razumikin and Zossimov leave, Raskolnikov “leapt out of bed” and finds his mind clear (120). He drinks a half glass of beer and, perhaps due to his malnutrition and low body weight, immediately “sank into a deep, sound, *refreshing* sleep” (121, emphasis mine). Raskolnikov sleeps often but never feels refreshed unless his rest is preceded by nourishment and hydration, the resources necessary for bodily self-repair.

Raskolnikov’s eating disorder impairs him physically, mentally and socially, and consequently leads to his poor quality of life. One study found that self-esteem “contributed most to [quality of life]” among patients with eating disorders (de la Rie, Noordenbos and van Furth 1511). The study also found that social “impairment of [eating disorder] patients includes occupational and educational impairment, disrupted family life, interpersonal problems and difficulties in social adjustment” (1511-12). Raskolnikov exhibits these symptoms: he drops out of college, experiences relationship anxiety, avoids his family and friends, and is reclusive. Thus, his behavior correlates with the symptoms of low self-esteem caused by malnutrition brought about by a severe eating disorder.

Raskolnikov’s inability to maintain his biological systems is exacerbated by his subjection to severe poverty and trauma. His diet is not only meager, but his apartment is a dilapidated tenement, and his clothes are in rags. Even his hat, which is worn out, rusty, torn, bespattered, brimless and bent, draws attention as he walks down the street, as when a drunken passerby, “bawling at the top of his voice and pointing,” refers to him mockingly as a “German hatter” (3). Raskolnikov has been impoverished his entire life, growing up fatherless and poor in the countryside with his mother, Pulcheria Alexandrovna, and his sister, Dunya. A study found that childhood family poverty is a precursor to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, crime, MDD and impaired academic achievement (Nikulina, Spatz Widom and Czaja 309). Trauma also shows a large and significant direct effect on high-risk behaviors (O’Hare and Sherrer 217), and when people are oppressed, they tend to internalize inferiority (Husum and Edvardson 221). In short, the combination of food deprivation and low self-esteem due to poverty causes Raskolnikov to experience sudden swings of mood and energy, from pusillanimous to pernicious, whipped back and forth like a flag flapping in a turbulent, shifting wind.

It is hard to imagine that Dostoevsky would include these physiological details arbitrarily. Symptoms for MDD match Raskolnikov’s demeanor completely: poor concentration, feelings of excessive guilt or low self-worth, hopelessness about the future, thoughts about dying or suicide, disrupted sleep, changes in appetite or weight and feeling very tired or low in energy (Monroe and Reed 69). A one-to-one

comparison to these symptoms sufficiently describes Raskolnikov's mental state. His thoughts are often described as straying "aimlessly" (48), "swarming in his brain" (83), and "sick and incoherent" (121). He feels guilt over his inability to take care of his mother, who calls him in her letter "our one hope, our one consolation" (38). He shrinks from his grand reemergence into society by immediately hiding the money he stole from the murdered pawnbroker under a rock in a deserted courtyard with no plans to return. He considers suicide. He wakes from a "broken sleep" (25) after his first encounter with the equally depressed (and consumptive) Katerina Ivanovna. He is emaciated by malnourishment. He spends a third of the book in a pathetic, feverish state and sleeps for days. Dostoevsky's inclusion of these details at strategic points in the narrative supports the machine-man metaphor, as Raskolnikov's physical state acts as a direct corollary for his actions and their consequences.

Since manic depression was not clinically diagnosed until the twentieth-century, Dostoevsky would not have had access to this list; with no such resource, he therefore drew from experience. Raskolnikov can be viewed as a mimetic representation of his creator, as is explained in detail by W. D. Snodgrass in the article "Crime for Punishment: The Tenor of Part One":

In August of 1866, when he began work on *Crime and Punishment*, [Dostoevsky's] circumstances were remarkably like those of his hero [...]. He had pawned his wardrobe and valuables, then had been cheated on an object he especially loved by a woman pawnbroker. When he could not keep up room rent, he was abused by the hotel manager and the waiters who (like the landlady and the maid in the novel) would not deliver any food except tea, 'because he didn't deserve it.' The servant who watched him at night reported that he had 'murder on his mind.' Thus, his own Wiesbaden situation, though translated into the terms of his earlier life in St. Petersburg, is carried directly into the novel as the situation of the student, Raskolnikov. There, it is offered as one of the factors leading him to murder. (203-4)

One may also consider how Dostoevsky's experience in prison is mirrored in Raskolnikov's character. In *The House of the Dead* (1862), Dostoevsky recalls his time in Siberia "working under escort in the barracks together with two hundred 'companions,'" but that he was "obliged to get accustomed to it" (16). Among them were murderers who were "so gay and so free from care, that one might have made a bet that their conscience never made them the least reproach" (18), i.e., the kind of murderer that Raskolnikov wished to be, as articulated in his published article, "On Crime" (240). *The House of the Dead* saw Dostoevsky get to know his fellow prisoners intimately, many fitting a description of Raskolnikov. Snodgrass explains why the author would be so cryptic about his protagonist's motives:

There, [Dostoevsky's life] is offered as one of the factors leading him to murder. Yet, it is not misfortune or poverty which are decisive; they occur to most of us with no such drastic result. The crux lies in the protagonist's reaction to those difficulties. It is hardly surprising, then, that Dostoevsky hesitates to offer, abstractly, a motive which might be so damaging to his readers' (or his own) opinion of himself (204).

Dostoevsky's decision to hide the visceral humanity in the novel behind a shaky "Napoleon Complex," a love story, and a tale of Christian suffering conceals an empathetic intention, that the author belies the harsh reality of poverty with religiosity and metaphysical abstractions. But Dostoevsky betrays this intention by writing Raskolnikov as all too human, that is, predictably mechanical, a physical body that suffers an ontological conundrum predicated on humiliation and hunger.

There is one final point that leads to the conclusion that Raskolnikov's salvation lies not in philosophical and religious suffering and revelation but in the maintenance of his bodily parts. In the Epilogue, where he finds himself serving eight years in Siberia for the murder of the pawnbroker and her sister, he suffers what he calls the "horrors of prison life" (498): he performs hard labor, eats bad food (including thin cabbage soup with beetles floating in it), and wears patched clothes. Rather than being ashamed of these "fetters," he soon grows to appreciate them. Hard work physically exhausts him and allows him a few hours of quiet sleep. Of the thin soup, he recalls that in "the past as a student he had often not had even that." In *The House of the Dead*, Dostoevsky remarks that imprisonment in Siberia is to be surrounded by companionship through the mere proximity to others, a "compulsory life in common" (24), but again this is more than Raskolnikov had before, like the patched clothes Raskolnikov has been given, which "were warm and suited to his manner of life" (498). Thus, he adequately receives everything necessary that he lacked before going to prison—food, clothes, sleep, socialization and exercise—and it is no wonder that he begins to feel like a more stable human being.

The return of Raskolnikov's melancholy following the ablation of his physical debilitations seems to refute the machine-man theory—his needs are met, but he nonetheless slips into the same mental routine. "It was wounded pride that made him ill," says the narrator in an attempt by Dostoevsky to show Raskolnikov's spirit being corrupted both in times of physical debilitation and flourishing—but this could be a misdirection (498). Raskolnikov is an unreliable protagonist, who lies consistently about his ideology and motives, as he does to Sonia during his confession and to himself about being a criminal mastermind with a heart of stone. However, this reversion to old habits and inability to break out of old programming seems to indicate that the spirit is dominant over the body.

The novel's conclusion resolves this incongruity by asserting that the mind is a component of the body, one that requires the maintenance of its subordinate parts to function properly. Raskolnikov, after spending years in prison, can envision the end of his sentence, a marriage to Sonia (an industrious worker), and a life free from self-neglect, depression, and low self-esteem resulting from poverty. With his physical and emotional needs met, his symptoms of depression wane, and he "mechanically" picks up the Bible, the most convenient moral framework available, knowing that a set of acceptable values, any values, are necessary to cooperate with others (505). For Raskolnikov, Siberia was not a punishment but rehabilitation, and his acceptance of Christianity a heuristic stepping-stone to becoming a practicable member of society. Thus, the metaphysical analysis can now be completed through the reveal that Raskolnikov's change of attitude and spiritual revelation are only possible through the

upkeep of all his corporal parts.

As machines, humans function perfectly. Good designs prosper and bad designs fail. Failure to maintain one's apparatus results in destruction. Raskolnikov is a metaphor for the importance of steady maintenance of the human body, where (to paraphrase Vonnegut) a decision that can affect one's entire life depends on whatever micronutrients one ingested, or failed to ingest, for breakfast (4). As Leo Tolstoy said in his review of *Crime and Punishment*:

When he was killing the first old woman and still more her sister, he was not living his real life: rather, he was acting like a machine [...]. [It] is then that one glass of beer, one smoked cigarette can impair the solution to the problem, hinder its solution, deafen the voice of the conscience, and cause the question to be decided in favor of one's lower animal nature, as it was with Raskolnikov. (399, emphasis mine).

Dostoevsky's true objective in *Crime and Punishment* is to suggest the will-to-not-suffer, that even the most diminished person has a chance at a social life if their basic needs are met. By treating the character as a malfunctioning machine that receives repair, Dostoevsky brings out his humanity, making Raskolnikov a superb addition to the literary canon of *homo ex machina*, the machines that teach us what it is like to be human.

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Not Your Typical Wife! Euripides' Medea and William Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth

Gretta Komperda

The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites *agency* as the “ability or capacity to act or exert power.”¹ Contemporary audiences and feminist scholars are drawn to powerful literary female characters. Figures such as Euripides’ Medea from *Medea* (431 B.C.E) and William Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth (Lady) from *Macbeth* (c. 1606) are seen as agentive through their ability to perform outside of perceived societal expectations for women of their time periods. However, the scope of female agency is limited. Martha Howell suggests that the capacity of women’s agency “is in fact produced by a feature of the patriarchal structure itself” (22). Defining feminine expectations in both Ancient Greece and the early modern period in England will demonstrate how each society informs a woman’s role and how agency manifests. Euripides’ audience would be familiar with ideas expressed in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* (c. 360 B.C.E.), such as “the[ir] god directly prepared the woman’s nature for indoor works and indoor concerns” (32). Similarly, an early modern audience would recognize Alexandra Shepard’s assertion that male “duties are characterized as active and acquisitive [...]. Men’s business is outside the household, in the world of exchange, while women are firmly located within doors” (75-76). In Ancient Greece and the early modern period, social expectations remained relatively static regarding women’s autonomy and in the societal expectations of a woman’s role.

While it was certainly possible for women to possess agency in Ancient Greece and early modern England, a woman’s supposed power and agency were often relegated to stereotypes; women were sexually domineering and only capable of possessing power over men by capitalizing on men’s sexual desires. Elyse Kelly Douma contextualizes such a characterization of female roles by asserting that for many women, sexual and reproductive capacity was frequently their sole purpose and source of power. She then asserts that outside of sexual prowess, a woman’s role culminated in her effectiveness as wife and ability to drive the success of her husband and family (2). What, then, enables our formidable female characters to act against the social expectations of femininity perpetuated from Ancient Greece to the early modern period? Though some contemporary scholars believe Medea and Lady become agentive as a reaction to their husbands’ actions, their true agency lies in an untraditional embodiment of masculine traits.² Also, correlating untraditional

¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary*, “agency” II.4.

² Instances of reaction to male action include Macbeth’s unbridled desire for power (sparked by the weird sisters’ prophetic vision), which, in turn, incites Lady’s own desire for power and Jason’s decision to leave Medea for Glauce.

femininity to reactive agency rather than the embodiment of masculinity would minimize the depth of Lady and Medea's influence on the men and the societies around them, defining them as only being loving or hating wives instead of autonomous bodies with power. Despite the drastic difference between Lady's seemingly loving relationship with Macbeth and Medea's (eventually) volatile one with Jason, both share masculine traits that inform their personalities and drive their actions.

Medea becomes agentive because she exacts revenge on Jason after he falls in love with Glauce, the princess of Corinth. In the wake of Jason's betrayal of Medea, she laments to her Corinthian chorus of women, "If we work hard at all these things, / and our husbands don't chafe at the yoke, / that's an enviable life. If not, we're better off dead" (ll. 241-3). Medea has entrusted Jason with her love for him within a marriage that demanded great sacrifice in the way of total ostracization from her family. Leonard Moss cites Medea's state of mind as irrational following the collapse of her marriage, causing her to doggedly focus on obtaining revenge. Further, Moss notes that Medea acts in accordance with female stereotypes at the time, resulting in her behaving overly emotionally and playing into expected feminine roles (517). He specifies that it is Jason who sends Medea into a rage where she must avenge her misplaced love and compassion. Conversely, Moss's assertion fails to acknowledge Medea's foreign identity as Corinthian, which enables her to conduct herself beyond the confines of the household. Helene Foley acknowledges the state of the typical Greek woman, that she "had no accessible model of full social and ethical autonomy available to herself" (*Female* 5). However, Foley makes a distinction with Medea because for her to carry out her revenge, she must "imitate a heroic brand of masculinity," only turning to this male model because heroic femininity means self-sacrifice ("Medea's" 79). She highlights the atypical reality of Medea's female condition, one of a foreign and therefore, barbaric, identity and a divine lineage, both of which work to strengthen the untraditional nature of her masculine qualities. Medea warns herself against Jason, "Do you see what is being done to you? / Do not be mocked this Sisyphean wedding; / You spring from a noble father and Helios the sun" (ll. 404-6). Medea's detachment from her suffocating marriage illustrates the strength of her identity—she simply possesses the ability to liberate herself from her mortal, emotional, marriage bonds by utilizing her "heroic, masculine side" (Foley, *Female* 257). This borrowing furthers the distance between Medea and typical female expectations, cementing her agency as a product of her masculinity and heroic lineage.

Comparably, Lady may also be viewed as becoming agentive to aid Macbeth's fated ascent to the throne. Mary Balestracci discusses devotion in relation to early modern expectations, that it was an admirable "trait in wives and mothers [that was] the driving force behind Lady Macbeth's actions" (168). Her concern for her husband and his success is shown through Lady's fear of his malleable identity. She laments,

Yet do I fear thy nature,
It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness

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To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it (1.5.16-20).

Lady considers that Macbeth may not possess the vile nature necessary to usurp King Duncan's throne.

While critics like Balestracci read Lady's devotion to Macbeth sympathetically, that she works to put her husband's latent ambitions into action (succession to the throne), Balestracci neglects that Lady's true motivations originate from her own masculine sense of ambition. Velma Bourgeois Richmond discusses Lady's misplaced guidance of Macbeth by noting that losing her womanly qualities to further his success is "not helpful to her husband but destructive of what is ultimately necessary both to his kingship and to their own self-realization as man and woman" (22). If Lady aligns with stereotypical feminine expectations, why does she not leave Macbeth with the most valuable asset, a son? Not only does she destroy what might have been kingship but complicates his future role as a noble or king. No doubt she would agree with Macbeth, when he says to "Bring forth men-children only; / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males." (1.7.72-74) Richmond further argues that Lady "has betrayed her own sexuality by renouncing offspring, yet her husband credits her with the potential productivity not only of children but also of the strong male heirs so crucial to the continuity of kingship" (21). Accordingly, Lady takes on masculine roles that work against being merely a supportive wife.

Medea and Lady are established as agents through their masculinity and not through the actions of their husbands. Each is ambitious to complete their personal conquests of reigning power over a country or their estranged lover. In reference to Medea's assertion of imminent victory over her enemies, P. E. Easterling informs that those "are all words that belong to the traditional code, in which the laughter of enemies is the ultimate disgrace and harming enemies and helping friends is the duty of a hero" (62). Medea's heroism belongs to a different expectation, one that elicits a much more violent perception of heroes than one may expect. For example, Ariadne Konstantinou notes that Achilles was renowned for his brutal fighting abilities during the Trojan war (128). And though Lady does not physically kill, but she does so through infecting Macbeth's inner thoughts, each of these thoughts ventriloquizing Lady's desires. Irving Ribner describes the function of Lady's rhetoric, which is "to mitigate against those forces within [Macbeth] which are in opposition to evil [...]. [T]he imagery of her speeches draws upon the corruptions of nature and reversal of normal life impulses" (153). Lady and Medea, like the heroes before them, have a clear goal in mind: to usurp the throne or to exact revenge by any means necessary. Both similarly embody this bloodier form of heroism in their masculinity, as they stop at nothing to acquire their individual goals. Though gruesome, these classic heroic ideals are perpetuated despite their departure from Ancient Greek and early modern period standards of morality.

In their expertise of the historically masculine skill, rhetoric, Lady and Medea prove their capacity to engage in a more active, male-dominated society. Lady

strategically uses language to pinpoint the insecurities of Macbeth, convincing him to commit regicide. “When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place / Did then adhere, and yet you would make both” (1.7.49-52). She targets Macbeth’s inner turmoil about murdering Duncan, his beloved king, and frames that turmoil as effeminacy. Manhood is defined through the capacity to commit heinous deeds, something she knows Macbeth is not capable of without her intervention (Richmond 20). Therefore, Lady’s perception of manliness requires forgoing any obstacles in the way of kingship, and she uses this knowledge to think agentively and implement her ideas effectively, akin to Medea. Medea’s mastery of rhetoric is attributed to her cleverness, a more masculine quality in Ancient Greek culture. With plans to exact her revenge on Jason, Medea plays along with Jason’s expectation of her obeying her “reasonable husband.” While Medea poses as being at the whims of men and their sensibility, Medea exploits these cultural cliches as “she pretends to accept and conform to his notions of what woman is like and what she should be” (Foley, “Medea’s” 78). Medea and Lady utilize rhetoric dissimilarly but ultimately arrive at the same goal, convincing an unaware husband to buy into the woman’s ploy. Skillful rhetoric allows these women to further their agency by allowing them to participate on the same plane as their male peers, even while having an advantage unbeknownst to them.

Albeit dissimilar from masculinity, both women acquire newfound agency through their rejection of the female role, which allows them to break free from the social confines of womanhood and motherhood. Lady’s famous pleas to apparitions and demons demonstrate a ruthlessness engendered by her sexual transformation. She pleads, “Come you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, / unsex me here; [...] / Make thick my blood, / Stop up th’ access and passage to remorse” (1.5.40-44). While Lady had possessed masculine qualities, her transformation becomes complete with spiritual intervention—effectively transmuting her from woman to man, becoming a vessel capable of such cruelty. She yearns to cleave the heart’s vasculature, for she must desecrate any trace of biological, feminine, inhibition.

Lady is often cited by scholars as being most similar to Seneca’s Medea due to their witch-like transformations and hysteric qualities. Lady becomes transgressive through her pleas to demons to forgo her rationality so she can go forth with plotting Duncan’s demise. Nadia Fusini notes that this “Medea invokes Hecate, the goddess of night, of Hell, she calls upon the chaos of eternal night, the spirits of evil, the Furies, Pluto, Proserpine—to help her achieve revenge against Jason” (52). Many scholars view Seneca’s Medea as foundational to the construction of Lady because each character invokes a demonic spirit to aid them in their conquest for power or revenge. It is important to note that their collation suggests a visceral femininity is present. As Medea becomes hysterical in her witch-like state, it is assumed that Lady would do the same. Conversely, Euripides’ Medea creates a more compelling comparison because her feminine and masculine qualities have been ever present in her being. Medea desperately laments to her female Corinthian peers, where she appears fully

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defined by the role of an unloved mother and wife. Despite her grief and seeming alignment with the sphere of womanhood, she possesses the ability to transgress such domains through her violent behavior. After all, a Greek woman's value lies in her status as feminine, which Medea overcomes without difficulty (Foley, "Medea's" 70). While Lady may share similarities with Seneca's Medea, to only compare the two would strip Lady of the nuance that Euripides' Medea holds for her complex relationship with motherhood and place in a male-dominant society. Euripides' Medea resembles Lady in the rejection of female identity and entrapment in womanly and maternal roles. By renouncing femininity, Medea and Lady acquire their long-awaited power.

Medea's filicide and Lady's imagined infanticide are the ultimate shedding of female identity, as these acts sever them from the sole purpose of womanhood in an Ancient Greek and early modern society. In such societies, women's essence was reproductive because maternity came with god giving "her a greater affection for the newborn infants than he gave to the man (Xenophon 33). Medea and Lady feel entrapped in their feminine identity, so much so that they must steel themselves against their maternal and feminine inclinations to proceed with their vile actions. They are depicted as two mothers grappling with their loving, maternal instinct against their irrevocable murderousness, culminating in a real and imagined motherhood that is lethal to the self. Medea must clot the blood beating from her motherly heart; she permits no "weakening, no thoughts of the boys— / how sweet they are, how you gave them birth. / Forget your children for this one day; / grieve afterwards" (ll. 1246-49). Comparably, Lady must purge herself of her maternal memories of breastfeeding to replace them with her newfound atrocity. She exclaims, "I would, [...] / Have plucked the nipple from his boneless gums, / And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn / As you have done to this" (1.7.56-59). By making the very traditionally female act of breastfeeding monstrous, Lady encapsulates her masculine ambition for power as she would go so far as to murder her own child. She no longer cares to play the role of wife, as she lusts for complete dominion over Macbeth and Scotland. Medea is also ruthless; she murders her own children in her masculine pursuit of justice. By violently killing her children, she not only eradicates her status as a mother, but she effectively destroys her household, erasing her status as wife. They both shed the confines of femininity by unshackling themselves from the most brutal reality of womanhood, the expectation to bear and nurture children. Lady and Medea both understand murder, imagined and real, as cultivating their futures, the former by elevating the status of her family, whereas the latter would protect her children from harm by being the only justified perpetrator in their deaths.

But why does Lady die while Medea does not? Lady's sorrowful wanderings during her final scenes mimic those of Medea in the beginning of Euripides' work. Her last lines are, "What's done / cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed" (5.1.67-8). The guilt of her actions culminated in her taking her own life because her grief was more than a mere human could manage. Her guilt and shame outweigh that of her "unsexed" (1.5.41) strengths, stripping her masculine identity away and revealing a

feminine underbelly. Joanna Levin examines the still-possessed aspect of Lady, that “the demonic woman and the hysteric are metonymically linked” (39). While her femininity was thought to be obscured or removed, the hysterics of her female identity remain. Lady’s tale ends here, but for Medea, it is her beginning. The first time Medea speaks she says, “It’s too much, too much to bear! / I can’t take it anymore” (ll. 96-97). Here we see Medea at her most feminine and emotional, described as “a suicidal, a helpless, feminine victim of her husband’s desertion” (Foley, “Medea’s” 73). As stated earlier, Medea already possesses embodied masculine traits when she exacts her revenge. She receives no punishment but is rewarded. Unlike Lady, Medea does not succumb to a femininely heroic fate, a death of self-sacrifice that emerged from the guilt of her actions.

After Lady ends her life, we are left with the eerie words of Macbeth’s soliloquy:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, [...]
 Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
 Signifying nothing (5.5.19; 23-27).

To be left with only Macbeth’s words imparts an irrevocable sense of doubt and the consumptive capacities of power. Lady succumbs to power’s consumption and “leaves the play in an hystericized trance, still commanding but entirely absent to herself” (Levin 45). However, our masculine Medea emerges triumphantly on a chariot, where she ascends into the sky with the corpses of her sons. Edith Hall describes her as “not exactly a goddess, but neither is she susceptible to most of the constraints of mortality—she can physically escape what, for a mortal woman, would now be certain death at the hands of Jason” (90). Hall also emphasizes Medea’s transcendent nature and perseverance by noting that in each iteration of *Medea*, there is “no known ancient tradition, in any Greek or Roman author, that she ever died” (90). Was Medea able to embody the idea that the patriarchy offers no limitations to her or the sheer force of her will? Easterling suggests that “these passages draw attention to the ambivalence of human intelligence and creativity, which is potentially a source of beauty and harmony, but liable too, to break out in destructive violence under the influence of passion” (67). While these ideas relate to Medea’s tragedy, they apply universally to each great tragedy. Medea has differentiated herself and has proven her ability to successfully unravel herself of feminine confines, in every rendition of her story. Both Medea and Lady exhibit untraditional masculinities that grant them agency to act outside their perceived feminine societal roles.

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The Importance of Adaptability in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*

Anneliese Bucher

“God is change” is a founding principle of Earthseed, the belief system developed by Lauren Olamina in Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993). Lauren creates a new philosophy that claims that in order to survive, people must adapt to change. Her society is on the brink of total collapse, and it is within this environment that Lauren develops her Earthseed philosophy: Change is the only constant, and therefore adaptability—not resistance to change—is the only way to survive. Adaptability, often confused with perseverance, requires taking in new information, experiences, and circumstances so that individuals can evolve their thinking and create solutions best suited for each particular situation. To persevere is to endure; to adapt is to grow. By portraying Earthseed as constantly evolving, community as continually rebuilding, and empathy as the catalyst for change, Butler challenges her audience to consider whether humanity can embrace difference before the real world mirrors the dystopia of *Parable of the Sower*.

Earthseed: A Philosophy Built on Change

We do not worship God.
We perceive and attend God.
We learn from God.
With forethought and work,
We shape God.
In the end, we yield to God.
We adapt and endure,
For we are Earthseed
And God is Change. (Butler, *Sower* 17)

Lauren acknowledges that change is the only constant force, and that adaptability is necessary for the survival of humankind. In a post-apocalyptic world set in 2024, there is societal, political, environmental, and moral collapse against which Lauren must fight to find her place in this world. Violence is rampant, and Lauren must learn to survive on her own while those she loves die throughout the novel.

From the beginning of the book, Lauren builds her own religious philosophy to organize her mind and her moral beliefs and inspire hope for both herself and others. Her upbringing in the Baptist faith inspires her to create Earthseed due to her rejection of the God her preacher father believes will save them. This rejection of her Baptist upbringing becomes the seed of Earthseed's founding principle: that humanity must

shape its own destiny by adapting to an ever-changing God.

Earthseed differs from other religions in that adaptability is fundamental to its creation and continuation. Lauren acknowledges that God will not save her, but adapting to change as it comes her way might. As the world changes for the worse and Lauren gains new experiences, it is crucial that her philosophy's followers adapt for survival while maintaining a moral and ethical code. Lucía Ramírez García highlights the similarities between Earthseed and kinetic utopianism, noting that kinetic utopianism "promotes constant change and multiplicity," and, because problems always come forth, "it offers potential solutions" (160; 163). This framework helps show why Earthseed is not a fixed doctrine but a living, breathing philosophy that grows alongside its followers.

Religion has always been used by humans to inspire hope and to set a moral compass for its followers. Earthseed, unlike other religions, is not made to be worshipped. Ramírez describes how Earthseed, in contrast, "criticises the aspects of religion that need improving" (165). Lauren believes that while religion has provided a foundation for peaceful civilizations, it also fosters subservience, inactivity, and the oppression of certain groups. Rather than asking followers to pray for their salvation, Earthseed asks them to become the agents of their own survival. While prayer allows people to ask for help during tumultuous times, Earthseed does not believe in worship. Lauren realizes that to survive humans must be strong enough to adapt to difficult circumstances and work to resolve issues. Help does not come easily in the world of *Parable of the Sower*, and, while praying may give hope, nothing will happen unless those individuals understand that their choices alone will save them.

The Collective Power of Adaptability

"Civilization is to groups what intelligence is to individuals. It is a means of combining the intelligence of many to achieve ongoing group adaptation" (Butler, *Sower* 101).

The foundation of Butler's argument about community holds that survival is not an individual achievement but a collective one. A single mind can only process so much; a single person can only adapt so far. It is through combining multiple diverse experiences, skills, and perspectives that a group becomes truly resilient to change. Butler highlights the importance of community as she places new characters in Lauren's path to creating a community for Earthseed. After the fiery destruction of Robledo, Lauren journeys north and meets thirteen survivors who eventually join her in establishing Acorn. Each of the survivors she gathers on the road brings a different skill to the group, and it is only because of these differences that the group can meet the demands of survival that no single person could face alone.

Many group members have escaped the cruelty of debt slavery, demonstrating that, especially in the ruins of civilization, economic and racial inequality create systems that own individuals. Each member has had to fight against dangers such as enslavement, starvation, rape, assault, murder, and the death of loved ones and

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friends. Rather than breaking these individuals, these experiences have sharpened them. Bruce J. Ellis, et al, observe that “children who grow up in more harsh and unpredictable environments appear to develop enhanced attention and memory [...]; greater attunement to other people and social information/relationships; heightened creativity; enhanced cognition for extracting resources from harsh or unpredictable environments [...]; and enhanced ability for [flexibility]” (108). These findings suggest that the trauma-induced traits present within the Earthseed community, while unfortunate, ultimately strengthen the community’s collective ability to adapt.

The Earthseed community is diverse, from infants to middle-aged adults, those of different cultures and races, and those with different privileges and hardships. Each member’s experiences benefits the group in some way, and an individual’s strengths and differences combine to make a more resilient community. This strength is most clearly shown in the way Lauren organizes the group’s responsibilities as they head north—assigning certain duties, rationing supplies, making collective decisions based on each member’s knowledge and capability. Everyone having a role and working for the good of the community inspires trust and cohesion among members, even if they do not think exactly alike.

In fact, it is important that all members have an open mind and feel comfortable exploring opinions and ideas. Groupthink leads to poor decision-making, resulting in an inability to think critically and to arrive at an appropriate solution. Lauren herself models this openness as she consistently invites discussion rather than demanding compliance, understanding that a philosophy built on change cannot afford to be rigid in its practice. Earthseed is built to thrive on change. Skill and a diversity of experience ensure there are multiple roads to a solution, where individuals refuse to fail and instead learn from losses and grow stronger with each change they encounter.

Hyperempathy and the Adaptability of Self

Self is.

Self is body and bodily

perception. Self is thought, memory,

belief. Self Creates. Self destroys.

Self learns, discovers, becomes.

Self shapes. Self adapts. Self

invents its own reasons for being.

To shape God, shape Self. (Butler, *Talents* 213).

Here, Lauren reframes the concept of self as fluid and ever-evolving rather than fixed—a concept that becomes literal through Lauren’s hyperempathy. Most individuals in the story experience the world in their own bodies, but Lauren’s sense of self extends outward, making her receptive to everyone around her. Hyperempathy is described in *Parable of the Sower* as a genetic disability that makes individuals suffer the pain or pleasure that they perceive others to be experiencing (12). Hyperempathy is caused by exposure to Paracetco in the womb—a smart drug taken

to increase productivity. In a world full of violence, hyperempathy is debilitating and makes survival all the more difficult for Lauren. In one of the novel's most distressing moments, Lauren is nearly incapacitated during a violent attack, physically collapsing from the shared pain of those around her (188-95). This scene is a stark illustration of just how dangerous hyperempathy can be in an already dangerous world. Yet it is precisely this vulnerability that becomes her greatest strength.

Lauren's hyperempathy strengthens her leadership skills by making her share her followers' suffering, which in turn creates trust among them. This trust is most evident in Lauren's relationship with Zahra, who was initially skeptical of Lauren and her Earthseed philosophy. It is only after witnessing Lauren's genuine physical suffering during a violent encounter that Zahra begins to trust her and commit to the group. Lauren is also much more attuned to others' emotions, allowing her to sense deception easily and resolve conflicts faster. When tensions rise between group members over resource sharing early in their journey, Lauren's hyperempathy allows her to sense and address conflict before it could create fractures in the community.

While her sensitivity may seem to be a great burden, Lauren adapts and shapes her hyperempathy into a strength. Lauren's pain is evidence that she personifies the Earthseed philosophy. What she preaches—trust, empathy, compassion, growth—is proven true not by words, but by her actions. As Sladja Blazan observes about hyperempathy, “The focus on distribution or sharing emphasizes the aspect of participation. Yet, it is care that initiates action” (46). Lauren participates in all that happens around her, and Butler ingeniously creates the concept of hyperempathy through a sincere character who is a perfect candidate to be a leader and creator of a new philosophy.

Most importantly, Lauren's hyperempathy forces her into a constant state of adaptability. Her body reads, responds, and reshapes every interaction instantaneously, making her not just a survivor to change, but the living blueprint for adaptability. In this way, hyperempathy is Butler's most ingenious narrative device - by creating a protagonist whose biology demands constant adaptation, she creates a character who does not just preach Earthseed's philosophy but who embodies it in every moment.

Butler's Reckoning: A Call to Adapt

Your teachers
Are all around you.
All that you perceive,
All that you experience,
All that is given to you
or taken from you [...].
Learn or die” (Butler, *Sower* 279).

This final verse from *Earthseed* does not read like poetry—it reads like a warning for us all. Through her creation of *Earthseed*, her community building, and her hyperempathy, Lauren proves that the future of humankind belongs to those who

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adapt in the face of change. Earthseed teaches that change is inevitable. Lauren's community demonstrates that diversity of experience is a survival tool; hyperempathy proves that real leadership is not born just from strength, but from the willingness to feel, suffer alongside others, and grow from that suffering. These three elements form Butler's complete argument, that adaptability is not just one skill but a way of being, one that must be practiced as an individual, within a community, and in spirit.

In writing *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler plants the seeds for new beginnings. Every day is a new story in which individuals can plan today to change tomorrow. Ahead of her time, Octavia Butler creates a world that mirrors the trajectory of our own, forcing readers to understand that adaptability is not Lauren Olamina's burden alone - it is humanity's responsibility. This novel is a call to action, for the future Butler writes about may not be far off given the direction of current affairs. She fast forwards to a future where collapse has already happened and challenges Lauren and us to do something about it. The only difference between the *Parable of the Sower* and our world today is that we still have time to adapt, learn, and sow a future for a better world.

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William Shakespeare's Hamlet and Fyodor Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov: The Isolation of Former Students

Sergio Romero

William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (c. 1599) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866) are two works that have been widely acclaimed for their complexity and depth. Despite having been written more than two hundred years apart, they have several similarities that make their analysis an interesting prospect. An area in which both works resemble each other is their protagonists, Prince Hamlet and Rodion Raskolnikov. These two characters share three key traits. First, both characters possess a tendency towards reflection, often hesitating to act decisively. Second, both protagonists are shown to be "not themselves" to a certain degree. This uncharacteristic behavior is exemplified by Hamlet's staged "madness" and Raskolnikov's erratic nature, so foreign to his family and his long-time friend Razumikhin. Finally, both protagonists admire those individuals who, unlike themselves, are capable of decisive action and are not delayed by thoughtful reflection. For Hamlet, this individual is Fortinbras, while for Raskolnikov, it is Napoleon (1769-1821).

These three key traits appear in Hamlet and Raskolnikov even though the characters greatly differ in social status and wealth. Despite their socioeconomic differences, both characters share an important attribute: they are former university students. This shared characteristic is significant because the protagonists have been isolated from ordinary society and their families while studying far away from home. The present essay argues that the isolation resulting from their studies is the primary cause of the three traits previously outlined. Their education has fostered excessive introspection, leading both characters to hesitate when decisive action is needed. It has separated them from ordinary life and their families, contributing to the psychological instability that manifests throughout the stories. Ultimately, their isolation leads them to admire those individuals who are not burdened by excessive reflection and are instead capable of decisive action.

To begin, it is necessary to contextualize these characters' academic backgrounds. Scene two, Act one establishes Hamlet as a student at the University of Wittenberg. Lines such as "For your intent / In going back to school in Wittenberg / It is most retrograde to our desire" (1.2.112-114) indicate that Hamlet has had to interrupt his studies to attend his father's funeral. Similarly, Raskolnikov is established early in the novel as a former law student who stopped his studies due to financial difficulties. Porfiry Petrovich recognizes Raskolnikov as intelligent despite his madness and a gentleman despite his poverty (Dostoyevsky 284, 379).

In addition to their shared status as students, Hamlet and Raskolnikov are similar because their education isolates the protagonists in two main ways, physically and intellectually. First, both characters have been physically separated from their homes and places of origin. In Hamlet's case, his studies in Wittenberg situated him far away from the royal court in Denmark. Raskolnikov studied in St. Petersburg, well removed from the province in which his mother Pulcheria and his sister Dunya lived. Second, their shared academic background isolates them intellectually from most other characters in their stories, many of whom lack any kind of formal education. In this regard, their intellectual aptitude hinders the protagonists' ability to relate to their social environments. For Hamlet, this intellectual disconnect is one of the reasons he is unable to participate naturally in court life. In Raskolnikov's case, intellectual isolation often leads him to withdraw from social interaction, preferring to wander alone or remain trapped in his room with his thoughts.

Hamlet and Raskolnikov throughout their stories often hesitate to act, being frequently shown as absorbed in introspective thought. Neil Rhodes identifies Hamlet's student status as one of the reasons he is unable to act more decisively throughout the play, recognizing in his "To be or not to be" soliloquy a recipe for inertia with a clear academic origin (124). Rhodes further emphasizes that, as a well-educated humanist, Hamlet rejects the revenge ethic, favoring thoughtful reflection instead of violence. Hamlet's education in Wittenberg has isolated him from the aristocratic expectations of revenge, which would typically demand an immediate and violent response to his father's murder. Furthermore, Elizabeth Hanson indicates that Shakespeare's play delivers a distinctly feudal and aristocratic plot adorned by academic elements of the early modern university, such as rhetoric or intellectual preoccupations (226-227). Despite his aristocratic background, Hamlet embodies these academic elements through his tendency towards reflection rather than immediate action. Hamlet thus becomes isolated from others in the play; he is an early modern scholar among a court of feudal characters.

Raskolnikov, despite committing his heinous act much sooner than Hamlet, still shows an intense degree of deliberation before and after the deed. Before the murder he is shown walking aimlessly, pondering his radical ideas, and formulating plans for reconstructing St. Petersburg. After the murder, Raskolnikov continues wandering and remorsefully reflecting, incapable of taking purposeful action. This level of introspection demonstrates that he remains shaped by the isolating habits of his student life. As a former student, his daily life revolved around study, contemplation and theoretical analysis instead of physical labor. Even after interrupting his studies Raskolnikov continues to cling on to these habits, considering "thinking" to be his only "work" (24). Raskolnikov's reticence to find work beyond occasional teaching indicates the extent to which his identity as an intellectual has isolated him from ordinary labor. Raskolnikov's educational background has led him toward excessive reflection and separated him from broader society. Just like Hamlet, he is isolated from most other characters in the story; he becomes an intellectual bourgeois among the urban proletariat.

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The isolation that Hamlet and Raskolnikov have experienced during their education is also a contributing factor to the psychological instability they display throughout their stories. Their mental distress manifests through a lack of empathy and apparent madness demonstrated in erratic behavior, particularly apparent during their conversations with other characters. Both protagonists' strange conduct is noted by several other characters. Hamlet is widely perceived at court as mad, with many believing grief and heartbreak to be the cause. Also, Hamlet's scornful comments towards Ophelia are especially indicative of his emotional volatility and lack of empathy. Similarly, Raskolnikov's family and his friend Razumikhin recognize that something is different about him, ascribing his erratic behavior to sickness. Additionally, Raskolnikov's desire to shed blood without remorse exemplifies his unempathetic attitude. His madness is equally manifested in his physical appearance and the "dreadful closet" where he lives (Movsesian). Multiple factors contribute to these abnormal behaviors in the protagonists. For Hamlet, grief over his father's death plays a significant role, while Raskolnikov's extreme poverty puts a strain on his mental state. These pressures are intensified by the characters' physical and intellectual isolation. Thus, because their isolation cuts the characters off from those who might provide support, it becomes a central factor in the development of their psychological instability.

This psychological instability is further manifested through the characters' erratic nature and the intermittent return of their sanity throughout the story. In Hamlet's case, certain scenes with Horatio, as well as his conversation with the Players, show him capable of acting in a rational manner. Additionally, his grief after Ophelia's death indicates he still retains a degree of empathy beneath his apparent madness. Raskolnikov also oscillates between rationality and psychological breakdown. For example, while his theory is flawed, it is grounded in logic and reason (Movsesian). Moreover, his capacity to empathize is revealed in his compassion toward Sonia and his sister, Dunya, as well as during his dream of the beaten horse (46-50).

One significant aspect of Hamlet's psychological instability that needs to be addressed is the question of its authenticity. Whether Hamlet's madness is feigned or not, it is directly linked to his educational background and the isolation he experiences. In Act 1, Scene 2, we see a greatly distressed and even suicidal Hamlet, yet it is commonly accepted that only after his interaction with his father's ghost in Act 1, Scene 5, does he truly display signs of madness. In this latter scene, he proclaims, "As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on" (1.5.169-70). Hamlet's madness has been a subject of much scholarly debate, with many discussions about its veracity. Tenney L. Davis approaches this debate by arguing the following:

If Hamlet [is] really mad, his psychosis [is] that of an intellectual, a hypertrophy of that inner eye whose function it is to perceive meanings, relations and implications; while if he [is] only feigning his insanity, then he [does] it by taking things too strictly, too literally, by a general social

perverseness manifested in a desire to quibble and split hairs. His madness, whether real or feigned, [is] an excess of sanity. (630)

Davis's present approach is particularly apt; he avoids a definite position that cannot be confirmed while accurately recognizing the intellectual nature of Hamlet's madness. If his madness is genuine, naturally it manifests primarily in his thoughts because the isolation resulting from his educational experiences has led him to favor inward reflection over impulsive acts and outward displays of emotion. If his madness is feigned, his academic background and capacity for thoughtful reflections allows Hamlet to utilize this mad role to pursue his revenge. Characters like Laertes and Fortinbras, who perhaps lack a comparable educational formation, do not conduct their revenge in such strategic fashion, opting instead for direct acts of violence. Hamlet's intellectualism allows him to use his feigned madness as a unique tool for his revenge, while his isolation intensifies the psychological pressures that could make him genuinely mad.

Raskolnikov's madness, like Hamlet's, can be linked to his educational background and the isolation it produces. Raskolnikov status as a student and an intellectual has allowed him more access to Western philosophical ideas than his uneducated contemporaries, leading him to learn about nihilism and to formulate his "great man" theory. Intellectual isolation plays a role in his embrace of the "great man" theory since it removed him from the ordinary morality of society, allowing him to rationalize the acts of men like Napoleon. These ideas also conflicted with his natural values, destroying his faith and creating a breach in his personality. Raskolnikov's altered mental state is the result of this schism, a divide between his genuine self and the cold-blooded despot he wants to become. Nikolay Strakhov recognizes Raskolnikov's schism as a fight between his life and his theory. He contends that the murder is not only an act against the pawnbroker's life, but also one against Raskolnikov's own life (485-486). This schism (Russian = *raskol*), present even in the character's name, is the key to his madness and the result of his isolation.

In trying to become a "great man," Raskolnikov acts against his own compassionate nature. This internal rupture explains the moments where Raskolnikov shows hints of lucidity and empathy throughout novel and demonstrates his old self prevailing over his cruel theory. Alfred L. Bem describes compassion as the most important sign that spiritual resurrection and equilibrium are still possible (612). The intermittent reappearance of Raskolnikov's empathy is crucial evidence that he can still be saved. His internal duel is solved in the epilogue, in part through his rejection of Western philosophical ideas and the reacceptance of Eastern Orthodox Christianity into his life. More importantly, Raskolnikov's rehabilitation comes as a result of Sonya's love: "Love had raised them from the dead, and the heart of each held endless springs of life for the heart of the other" (463). Sonya's love represents the end of the isolation that had driven him to madness and crime; it demonstrates the return of genuine human connection to Raskolnikov's life.

One final trait that connects Hamlet and Raskolnikov is their admiration for those individuals capable of decisive action, such as Fortinbras and Napoleon.

Hamlet's admiration for Fortinbras is shown most explicitly through his soliloquy in Act 4, Scene 4. In this soliloquy, Hamlet admires how the "delicate and tender prince" Fortinbras can lead thousands of men to their death over a worthless piece of land: "The imminent death of twenty thousand men / That for a fantasy and trick of fame / Go to their graves like beds" (4.4 47; 59-61). In this same soliloquy Hamlet feels shame for not conducting his revenge more directly despite possessing a just cause to act. In this scene, Hamlet's plans for revenge seem to have been thwarted by Claudius' schemes. Hamlet knows that if he had possessed Fortinbras' resolve, he would have already carried out his revenge.

Hamlet's admiration for Fortinbras mainly stems from this shame over his own inaction. His predisposition for reflection intensifies his sense of inadequacy, emphasizing the divide between his contemplative nature and the decisiveness he envies. Furthermore, Fortinbras is not a classical hero or a warrior king like Old Hamlet; in Fortinbras, Hamlet sees someone akin to himself, but one who is unburdened by his own thoughts and doubts. The difference between both characters lies in how they approach their revenge. Fortinbras, not shaped by intellectual isolation, conducts his revenge in a decisive manner, while Hamlet's scholarly background fosters extensive reflection, preventing him from definitively enacting his revenge.

Raskolnikov's admiration for Napoleon and other "great men" originates from and is intensified by the isolation he experienced as a student. Raskolnikov's academic background exposed him to nihilism. For Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76), who coined the term, *nihilism* meant suppressing emotion to guarantee the triumph of the revolution and the advancement of humanity (Palmieri). Such suppression further alienates Raskolnikov from the people around him, cutting him off from ordinary human connections and empathy. Nihilism and his intellectual isolation led him to entertain the "great man" theory, whereby the exceptional individual must suppress their empathy to achieve their goals. In adopting these ideas, Raskolnikov replaced Christian morals and social values with the ideology of the "great man" figure.

Chief among these "great men" is Napoleon. To Raskolnikov, Napoleon is the epitome of what he desires to become, a despot with the will to sacrifice thousands of lives to achieve his own ideas. Like Hamlet's admiration for Fortinbras, Raskolnikov's admiration for Napoleon is likely enhanced by the parallels he perceives between them. They are both students from a lower-class background, striving for acknowledgment at a young age. Napoleon's recognition began at the siege of Toulon in 1793 when he was twenty-four years old (Chandler 28). Raskolnikov is twenty-three years old, which may lead him to believe that he, too, can become a "great man." However, unlike Napoleon, he is not a military man: "[Raskolnikov] understands that the traditional path of great men – political and military leadership – is not open to him" (Rosenshield 84). Thus, Raskolnikov decides to achieve "great man" status through intellectual rather than militaristic means, by uttering a "new word" (2). Ultimately, his admiration of Napoleon highlights the

contrast between his isolated intellectualism and the decisiveness in action he envies in others.

Hamlet and Raskolnikov are united by three key traits: excessive reflection, psychological instability, and admiration for men who can act decisively. These shared traits are primarily caused by the isolation they experienced during their studies. Their separation from society conditioned them to deliberate excessively, hindering their ability to take decisive action. Isolation further worsened the emotional and mental pressures exerted by their circumstances, leading to strange behaviors, a lack of empathy, and internal conflict. Finally, excessive reflection made them aware of their inability to emulate men of decisive action like Fortinbras and Napoleon. The troubled states of the protagonists highlight the danger of social isolation, while Raskolnikov's rehabilitation at the end of the novel demonstrates that human connection and compassion can restore the balance to one's life.

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Hamlet's Scholarly Revenge in William Shakespeare's Hamlet

Alannie Cervantes

Some have argued that Hamlet lacks a desire for revenge in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c. 1599). However, his contemplative manner, stemming from his scholarly background, fosters a more vengeful disposition and enables a more meticulously calculated strategy for avenging his father than it initially appears. James Hirsch, for example, characterizes Hamlet as hesitant and uncertain, whereas Phoebe Spinrad attributes these behaviors to his complex self-consciousness. However, building on this scholarly conversation, Hamlet's intellectual background provides him with the tools to analyze the ethical and moral implications of his situation and, ultimately, his actions.

Hamlet's scholarly background has refined an introspective, self-aware and reflective nature that allows him to use psychological manipulation effectively. Instead of acting solely on impulse, he devises strategic plans to manipulate others, utilizing his feigned madness to validate his suspicions and maintain control over the situation. These aspects of Hamlet's character arise as consequences of his social class, including the privilege to be a student, as well as a vengeful nature that allows him to adopt a thoughtful plan for revenge.

Hamlet's aristocratic background provides him with the opportunity to obtain an education at Wittenberg, allowing him to practice analysis and critical thinking (1.2.113). Elizabeth Hanson suggests that Hamlet's position as a student was highly significant in Denmark during the late Middle Ages, as education, increasingly prioritized by the noble class, became a sign of wealth. Hanson is aware of the importance of this educational revolution and its effect on Hamlet, stating, "In this respect, the play and its title character are synecdoches for the gentrification of learning that transformed the European aristocracy from a martial class to a highly literate, governing one in the early modern period" (207). Hamlet utilizes this education in every step of his journey to avenge his father. Academic settings allow students to learn skills such as careful examination, analytical thinking, and the ability to develop well-constructed plans. Hamlet's education aids in his understanding of the political dilemmas occurring in the wake of his father's death, and Hamlet keeps these issues in mind while enacting his revenge.

In contrast to many of the other characters, Hamlet's education allows him to think and act like a student rather than a soldier or leader. Hamlet, responding like an educated person, utilizes the skills of restraint and reflection even in stressful situations, allowing him to remain calm and not act on his impulses. In contrast, the roles of a soldier or a leader involve acting with courage and decisiveness to achieve a goal no matter what. These characteristics are displayed in Laertes and Fortinbras, who serve as foils to Hamlet due to their desire to achieve a more immediate and

intentional revenge.

While Laertes and Fortinbras are more active and forward with their desires for justice, Hamlet embodies the common values of a student: introspection, calculation, and self-awareness. Laertes reacts to the death of his father by stating, “Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged / Most thoroughly for my father” (4.5.134-35). These lines reveal Laertes’s willingness to face any obstacles that may occur in his pursuit of revenge. Laertes’s need to uphold the characteristics of leader and soldier, a commitment that pushes him to seek vengeance, provides contrast to Hamlet’s lack of immediate impulse for revenge. In contrast, Fortinbras exemplifies a more strategic plan based on impulsivity and a desire for revenge. He is willing to risk his own life and the lives of others to avenge his father, as the Captain explains to Hamlet, “We go to gain a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name” (4.4.17-18). Although Fortinbras uses his military knowledge to avenge his father, he does so in a way that is, given the impulsivity of his actions, dangerous and places others in harm. While Fortinbras, Laertes, and Hamlet ultimately create plans for revenge, Hamlet’s intellectual skills support him to be more thoughtful than impetuous.

Hamlet’s education leads to an increased self-control that allows him to not act on instinct and explore alternate methods towards vengeance. Neil Rhodes explains that Hamlet’s hesitance to avenge his father is due to him being “a character who regards the whole process of revenge as a primitive and barbaric ritual that is offensive to his more refined sensibilities” (124). As a result of his education, Hamlet’s initial reaction to avenging his father may be derived from his knowledge and perception of those who commit themselves to revenge. Initially, Hamlet does not want to succumb to this process, but through contemplating his circumstances, he views that adopting a vengeful nature is the optimal course of action to achieve his desires. Instead of following the order of his father’s ghost (1.5.25), Hamlet contemplates the different paths that he can take. While revenge often arises from extreme emotions such as sadness and anger, Hamlet’s approach involves rational thinking, setting him apart from those around him. Hamlet expresses that “The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.539-40). By staging *The Murder of Gonzago*, Hamlet creates an environment where he can confirm Claudius’s guilt without asking him directly or harming himself. In addition to his skills of self-control, Hamlet also utilizes his knowledge of theater as a tool in his calculated plan of revenge to ensure he is working from a place of certainty rather than pure emotion (2.2.353 ff.).

Furthermore, throughout the play, Hamlet reflects on the role his religion plays in altering his response to his situation. Hamlet’s Christian views affect his responses, especially to the death of his father and the betrayal of his mother and her new husband. In Hamlet’s first soliloquy, he states, “Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon ’gainst self-slaughter! O God, God” (1.2.131-32). According to Spinrad, Hamlet’s Christian beliefs lead him to follow many laws of this religion, such as suicide and seeking vengeance being violations of religious law (454). Like many Christians, Hamlet relies on his religion to guide him while grieving for his father.

Rather than blindly accepting these Christian beliefs, however, Hamlet views these concepts through a scholarly lens, evaluating their implications before making a decision. Hamlet's exclamation, "I do not set my life at a pin's fee, / And for my soul—what can it do to that, / Being a thing immortal as itself?," uses rhetorical questions to reflect his uncertainty concerning revenge at this point in the play (1.4.65-67). While Hamlet's desires and opinions regarding avenging his father shift throughout the play, there is an agreed-upon opinion that Hamlet ultimately seeks revenge (Spinrad 453). He continually reverts to Christianity for his moral compass, and while Hamlet does seek revenge in his own way, it is strongly influenced by a critical evaluation coupled with his religious values.

To maintain clarity in the observational senses shaped by his education, Hamlet regulates his emotions through self-expression to control himself rather than falter to recklessness. Expressing his thoughts of himself and others is crucial in Hamlet's journey of making sense of his emotions, actions, and goals. In his soliloquy, Hamlet expresses, "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" (2.2.485), critically evaluating his frustration towards his inaction as compared to the emotions portrayed by an actor. Joe Keener discusses the element of drama that Hamlet emphasizes in his speech and actions when speaking to himself and others. Keener argues, "The title character uses this art form to escape his world; at the same time, he employs drama to understand how to live in his world—how to determine if family members are villainous, the nature of revenge, relationships both familial and nonfamilial" (154). The dramatic and thoughtful nature central to Hamlet's character serves as an outlet to channel his emotions of grief and betrayal. Ultimately, Hamlet's introspection concerning his own and others' behavior, as well as the theatrical performance, is guided by the skills of analytical thinking that are cultivated from his scholarly background, including observations that support a better plan for revenge.

Hamlet's reflective nature, which is a product of his education, enhances his ability to manipulate those around him. As Hamlet contemplates "To be, or not to be—that is the question" (3.1.55), he analyzes the consequences of living, dying, and action, demonstrating the stream of consciousness that occurs prior to making a decision. He then carefully analyzes the intentions and motivations of other characters, particularly expressing his anger toward his mother and revealing his thoughts about her betrayal. Later, Hamlet observes his mother's and Claudius's reactions following *The Murder of Gonzago* in order to analyze their guilt (3.2.263-87). Hamlet intentionally uses this play to serve two purposes: to confirm Claudius's guilt and also to provoke a possible response from his mother suggesting her or Claudius' culpability. Additionally, he reveals to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he is aware of their true intentions, as well as his mother's role in their spying on him. This awareness allows Hamlet to continue strategizing his actions by using his insights into others' behavior to create elaborate plans towards revenge.

These other forms of manipulation, acting and scheming, are essential tools used by Hamlet to ensure his feigned madness is as convincing as possible. While it may at times be difficult for both Hamlet and the audience to distinguish between his feigned and genuine madness, Hamlet initially adopts a performance of insanity to

help him complete his quest. Bennet Simon states that “Hamlet’s feigned madness is a symptom of the ‘feigning’ and deceit around him” (715). Hamlet discovers that his only option for uncovering the truth among those who are lying and scheming is discreetly to use their own tactics against them. Due to his educated background, Hamlet draws on his knowledge of language, rhetoric, and theater, as well as his observational skills to imitate various behaviors convincingly. This scheming is part of a deliberate strategy to expose the truth of those who view Hamlet as mentally unstable and therefore incapable of seeking revenge. This deception invites the people around him to lower their guard, and they unintentionally reveal themselves, unaware that Hamlet plans to use this information in his favor. The other characters consistently underestimate Hamlet’s capabilities, allowing him to gain intelligence regarding their conspiracies and to further his own goals.

Hamlet possesses a heightened awareness of the effects of revenge, including the lack of mental clarity and excess of emotional turmoil that results from seeking revenge. George Lunt, a nineteenth-century memoirist who, in *Behind the Bars* (1871), focused on mental health, the treatment of mentally ill individuals, and the “reform of asylum practices,” states that “Hamlet was neither witless nor mad; for it is apparent in his case, that the opinions with regard to his insanity have been drawn rather from the attempted perversions of his mood by other characters in the drama, than from his own conduct, however erratic” (Qtd. in Reiss 790). Lunt emphasizes Hamlet’s unpredictable actions while noting that his behavior is a reaction to the conspiring attitudes of those around him. Hamlet’s mental state must be viewed with the reminder that education is an aid in his journey but does not exempt him from basic human processes of grief and the desire for vengeance. James Hirsh strengthens these claims by stating, “following the ‘To be or not to be’ scene Hamlet exuberantly pursues his plan to catch the conscience of the King without expressing relief that he has overcome ‘our’ incapacity for action” (39). By focusing on “our” incapacity for action, Hamlet means that humans have an innate reaction to overthink our decisions from an emotional point of view. He is aware that this incapacity affects him, as well, and perhaps on a deeper level due to his experience in academia. This heightened emotional situation creates a mixture in Hamlet of both feigned and actual madness, even as he is aware of what is happening around him. While stress and grief affect all humans, Hamlet’s skills of enhanced awareness and reasoning allow him to remain mindful of his morality and goals.

As the play progresses, Hamlet increasingly questions his understanding of justice and morality, observing his environment and reflecting on his methods for seeking revenge. Aware of the corruption within the court and within family members and closest friends, Hamlet cannot help but wonder if his actions align with his moral compass. In the “To be or not to be” soliloquy, he questions, “Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles” (3.1.56-58). The concept of virtue is a recurring theme in the play, and, in several soliloquies, Hamlet contemplates the moral value of action or inaction. Hamlet is acutely concerned with the feelings behind his decisions, revealing that he filters his grief over his father’s death and his desire for revenge through an

intellectual and contemplative lens. Hamlet's desire to take the most noble path is indicative of the influence of his scholarly background on his everyday life.

In this way, after deliberate observation and manipulation, Hamlet concludes that the only suitable response to his father's death is to kill his murderer, his uncle Claudius. While Hamlet chooses this typical route of revenge, this decision does not come easily, as his educated consciousness makes it very difficult to decide. Ultimately, Hamlet uses his observations and critical thinking, while being aware of the heightened emotions that he and those around him experience, to create a plan to manipulate his father's murderer and kill him. Hamlet's education plays a vital role in his tragic journey, aiding in his strategic decision-making while burdening him with a perceptive understanding of the weight of his choices.

Although many view Hamlet as lacking an impulse for revenge, his reflective nature, rooted in his scholarly background, deepens his intent to avenge his father by providing him with a wide range of strategic techniques from which he can draw, both in his contemplation regarding his action and in the deed itself. Hamlet consistently considers the morality of his actions and of those around him. Rather than giving in to impulsivity, Hamlet relies on his reflective nature to maintain emotional clarity while feigning madness to manipulate those around him. Hamlet's actions display that an educated background does not erase the desire for revenge but rather makes the plan to achieve it more complex, reflective, and meticulous.

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Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*: The Dialogical Self and (un)Faith

Sean Ogilvy

The struggle between faith and the consequences of its absence lies at the center of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866). From the novel's outset, any reader possessing the slightest familiarity with the author can see the groundwork being carefully arranged for Raskolnikov's eventual spiritual enlightenment. But as Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, the profundity of Dostoevsky's unique polyphonic fiction reveals itself in each character's voice as it develops its own directly signifying discourse. In other words, his characters are not rough-and-ready compositions; they operate as autonomous consciousnesses, fully valid carriers of their own individual words (Bakhtin 5). As just such a character, Raskolnikov must—if Bakhtin's theories are to be accepted—wander misguidedly toward either salvation or damnation on his own, without Dostoevsky's ideological input overtly dictating the trajectory of his inner life.

The problem of Raskolnikov's spiritual regeneration in the epilogue is perhaps the most controversial subject in Dostoevsky scholarship. Bakhtin, ever the opponent of finalization, contends that Raskolnikov's posthaste redemption represents a monologic contamination of Dostoevsky's personal ideology in an otherwise supremely dialogical narrative. Along the same lines, Konstantin Mochulsky critiques the epilogue as a "pious lie," stating that the hero's conversion is both unearned and improbable given what the reader understands about his psychology (312). More approvingly, Janet Tucker notes the stark difference in narrative time between the two sections, claiming that the anarchic pacing of the core novel gives way in the epilogue to a "great pause," or that Raskolnikov enters into "Orthodox time" (453). The disjunction, then, is not merely the result of an ideological imposition; rather, it is suffused throughout the structure of *Crime and Punishment*. While other analyses have questioned the diegetic compatibility of the epilogue with the main body of the novel, fewer have taken Dostoevsky's rationale for the epilogue's inclusion seriously. This essay will argue that Bakhtin's account of Dostoevsky's polyphony overlooks the theological and biographical tensions shaping the epilogue, which does not resolve Raskolnikov's development but renders his redemption inconclusive, maintaining the author's characteristic polyphonic style.

Born in 1821 to devoutly Orthodox parents, Dostoevsky learned to read and write under the tutelage of his mother, who used the New and Old Testaments as lesson material for her children. Between his mother's instruction and his father's insistence upon the family visiting Moscow's various temples and historical sites, Christianity made a profound impression on the young writer (Dirscherl 43). Dostoevsky's faith, though hard-won and always subject to self-scrutiny, remained with him for the rest of his life, evident throughout his collected letters and later

works. At the time of his artistic ascendance, Russia's intellectual milieu was fragmented into, on one side, the Slavophiles and, on the other, the Westernizers. While the former promoted the isolationist upholding of traditional Russian Orthodox beliefs, the latter urged the integration of Western cultural and political practices, including rationalism and liberalism.¹ It was with the latter, too, that the young Dostoevsky fell in, particularly through the influence of the radical Vissarion Belinsky. Much like Christianity had enraptured him as a child, so too did revolutionary political thought in his early twenties. According to his later recollections, Belinsky's nascent socialism "captured our hearts and minds in the name of something very noble" (*A Writer's Diary* 286). Belinsky, Dostoevsky recalls, teased the young writer endlessly for his love of Christ: "believe me, you naïve fellow, believe me, that your Christ, were he born in our time, would be the most undistinguished and ordinary of men; he would be utterly eclipsed by today's science and by those forces that now advance humanity" (*A Writer's Diary* 129).

However near to its destruction Dostoevsky's faith came during his flirtation with radicalism, it reemerged with vigor after his narrow escape from execution at a Siberian labor camp, where he had been imprisoned for his involvement in the Petrashevsky Circle (Dirscherl 48). In an 1854 letter to Mme. N. D. Fonvizina, Dostoevsky finalizes his position regarding Russia's schismatic intellectual scene: "If someone proved to me that Christ is outside the truth, and it really were that the truth lay outside Christ, then I should prefer to remain with Christ rather than with the truth" (*Selected Letters* 68). That Dostoevsky here—perhaps rhetorically, though no less sacrilegiously—alludes to a "truth" outside of Christ is reflective of his often-unorthodox mode of Christianity, wherein belief and doubt are two sides of the same coin (Harrison 388). As John Givens remarks, "In an age of growing secularism, Dostoevsky believed self-consciously and polemically, well aware of his own doubts and the wrathful critique of religion the new materialism of the 1860s brought to bear." This unresolved tension between belief and disbelief reappears as a structural crux in the epilogue, where redemption is promised without result. It is through such inner discordance, at once believing and disbelieving, that the characteristic polyphony of Dostoevsky's writing emerges, finding form in characters like Rodion Raskolnikov.

The surname Raskolnikov is derived from the Russian *raskol*, meaning "schism" or "split." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *raskol* in its church-historical sense as the "schism in the Russian Orthodox Church which followed the excommunication in 1667 of those who refused to accept the liturgical reforms of Patriarch Nikon (1605-81)."² Not only is Raskolnikov's name a signifier of a parallel

¹ For broader discussions of these movements and Dostoevsky's involvement in Russia's mid-nineteenth-century intellectual milieu, see Denis Dirscherl, *Dostoevsky and the Catholic Church*; Janet Tucker, "Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment: Stopping History's Clock"; and Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*.

² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "raskol" 2.

time in Russian history, but it also symbolizes a personal split between faith and its corruption, central to Raskolnikov's struggle. Unsurprisingly, Bakhtin eschews mention of the etymological and historical weight of this name, a silence that is consistent with his methodological resistance to symbolic or allegorical readings of Dostoevsky. However, such symbolism, it will be shown, clarifies the ideological terrain of *Crime and Punishment* without creating a sense of contradictory finalization.

Raskolnikov's schism is representative of Russia's larger split in the mid-1860s. Russian society was becoming increasingly unstable, torn between an uncompromising and anxious regime and its zealous opponents (Tucker 444). Dostoevsky observed in a letter to his publisher, *The Russian Messenger*, that there seemed to be in the younger generation of Russians—even among the highly educated and well inclined—a growing and extreme “inconstancy of our principles” (*Selected Letters* 222). The nihilism depicted in *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky thought, represented the most pernicious threat faced by Russian youth. Its mass appropriation told of the moral and spiritual disorientation of their time. Thus, Raskolnikov, in order to expose the inherent dangers of nihilism, must experience the consequences of this worldview to the furthest possible extent.

In his treatise “On Crime,” Raskolnikov argues that humanity is divided into two conflicting groups, ordinary and extraordinary men. Recalling the contents of his article to Porfiry, he explicates that “those who are even marginally capable of uttering some new word, must, by their nature, necessarily be criminals” (181). He adds that the extraordinary man can justify any action, even one that ends in wading “through blood,” if only it brings about some new idea. His Napoleonic daydream falls almost immediately flat, however, when his initially theoretical concept of self is put to the test. As Michael Stoeber writes, “Raskolnikov willed beyond his powers and never assimilated the fact that justice *is* will” (36, emphasis Stoeber's). His failure is made clear by his own admission: Raskolnikov “didn't kill a person, [he] killed a principle” (191). What collapses, then, is not will-*qua*-will, but Raskolnikov's psychological capacity to sustain the identity that such willing demands. The difficulty is that he is unable to relinquish his self-conception as an extraordinary man despite failing to appropriate that role for himself. The murder creates, in Bakhtin's terms, a new intensity in Raskolnikov's inner dialogism. At once, the dusty old moralism of his pious upbringing—evident in his familiarity with Scripture and his mother's fervent religiosity—comes to loggerheads with his failed proto-Nietzschean *coup de volonté*. The tension among Raskolnikov's conflicting “I-positions” generates the central suspense of Dostoevsky's narrative, which has less to do with whether Raskolnikov will evade Porfiry's persecution and more to do with the oscillations between self-doubt and self-deception that define his fractured consciousness. Thus, subject to a new onslaught of opposed dialogical positions, Raskolnikov admits to Sonya that he is “the same kind of louse as everyone else,” incapable of “stepping over” (291). It is important to note that in *Crime and Punishment*, there exists no archetypal overman, free from, as Nietzsche puts it, the sickness of guilt. There is only, in Raskolnikov's words, the louse.

Michael Stoeber argues that Dostoevsky leaves it to the reader to decide whether primacy lies with the will or with God, though Dostoevsky makes clear through the character of Svidrigailov where the selfish path of egoic willing will lead. What Raskolnikov cannot at the behest of his conscience become, Svidrigailov has carried out to its logical conclusion. Up until he faces Dunya's conclusive rejection, his appetites have been largely fulfilled by duplicitous and empty willing. Devoid of existential meaning, he muses that an afterlife, if it exists, must surely resemble "a little room, something like a country bathhouse, sooty, with spiders in all the corners, and that's the whole of eternity" (201). Tortured by his dreams in the Adrianople Hotel and without hope for redemption—the belief in which would contradict his materialistic world-view—he is left without recourse. The reader is reminded of Marmeladov's famous question, one cogent for Raskolnikov as much as Svidrigailov: "[D]o you really understand, dear sir, what it means when a person has nowhere else to go?" (33). Dostoevsky analogizes suicide with going to America (355), a country whose influence represents the breakdown of Russian Orthodox values in favor of secular utilitarianism. Contrary to the analyses of both Bakhtin and Stoeber, Dostoevsky strongly suggests an evaluation of secular utilitarianism and nihilism: that is, divorced from the possibility of redemption (which separates Raskolnikov from Svidrigailov), we confront the consequences of a will unmoored from moral and spiritual guidance. It must be noted, however, that this anti-nihilistic position is one which Dostoevsky fails to concretize in the open-ended epilogue.

Despite implicitly closing the question of nihilism for now, Dostoevsky is still unable to affirm wholesale the validity of religious redemption, the novel's main proponent of which is Sonya Marmeladova. In the author's notebook, he sketches his characters thus: "Svidrigailov is despair, the most cynical. Sonya is hope, the most unrealizable. Raskolnikov himself must say that. He attached himself passionately to both of them" (Dostoevsky, *From... "Notebooks"* 389). While Svidrigailov's aim is to pull Raskolnikov more deeply into his nihilistic void, Sonya seeks to bring him toward a redemptive acceptance of his suffering. The influence of the two establishes itself in Raskolnikov's consciousness, wresting his conscience now one way, now the next. Randall Havas shows the ways in which Porfiry ultimately fails, through his quasi-Socratic approach, to coax Raskolnikov into a soul-saving confession. Concluding his analysis, he writes of Porfiry that "he's a lawyer, not a saint," and that "Raskolnikov needs a saint" (168). Indeed, Sonya would be just such a saint. However, not even holy Sonya is able to bring Raskolnikov to a true, self-sacrificing repentance—at least not within the confines of *Crime and Punishment*.

Michael Katz contends that Sonya, as a woman in Dostoevsky's fictive universe, is unable to single-handedly bear an idea or be more than an instrument of redemption ("Nihilism" 446). However, Katz's reading of Sonya is limited. Sonya functions as a conduit for Dostoevsky's prescription of divine truth: that suffering may bring us closer to God. The fact that she serves an ideological purpose is accepted by Bakhtin, who views Sonya as a monologic consciousness grounded in self-sacrifice, one who does not participate in ideological conflict (84). Sonya, despite her hope for Raskolnikov, lets him come to her much in his own way. She is

committed to him whether he repents or not—which, of course, he never formally does. As Amanda Jiang points out, “[Sonya] is defined by her empathy [and] provides comfort for the suffering; her presence forges a bridge between sinners and God’s love” (24). She comes across as static because she represents the idea of spiritual salvation and complete, transferable faith. She is indeed less of a dialogic consciousness than she is a symbol. The bridge that she builds for Raskolnikov is one on which he must choose to walk, and yet, that bridge may be crossed and recrossed.

In a letter to Mme. N.D. Fonvizina, Dostoevsky writes, “I am a child of this century, a child of doubt and disbelief, I have been and shall ever be (that I know), until they close the lid of my coffin. What a terrible torment this thirst to believe has cost me and is still costing me, and the stronger it becomes in my soul, the stronger are the arguments against it” (*Selected* 68). This sense of himself as a spiritual child—yearning and uncertain—helps to illuminate Sonya’s role. Twice in the letter, Dostoevsky refers to himself as a child, returning to a time before the death of his pious mother, who provided his faith a much-needed maternal anchor. In the novel, the prisoners call Sonya “little mother,” and they turn to her, like children, to cure their unspecified, perhaps spiritual, ailments (377). Thus, Sonya becomes not only the hope that Raskolnikov needs, but the manifest spiritual grounding that Dostoevsky himself needs to transcend an unrelenting disbelief. Within the narrative, Sonya renders redemption possible but does not actualize it in any concrete way.

Bakhtin asserts that the ending of *Crime and Punishment* is overly conventional in its monologic finalization. Unsurprisingly enough, his assertion is not confined to the aforementioned novel, but to the whole of Dostoevsky’s oeuvre, excepting *The Brothers Karamazov* for the somewhat comical reason that it remains incomplete, as Dostoevsky died before he could complete the project in its entirety. It would seem, then, that any ending short of one that is entirely incomplete should fall into Bakhtin’s disfavor. As stated previously, his approach to Dostoevsky’s work, correct in its appreciation of the psychological complexity of a typical Dostoevsky character, causes him to eschew potentially enlightening analyses of any one of the author’s given works. Therefore, it must be shown that the epilogue transforms the novel’s dialogic conflict into a state of reduced intensity but does not resolve it.

Counter to Bakhtin’s prescriptive judgement, this section will take seriously the commonly noted aspects of the epilogue that lead to its intractability. It has already been noted that the anarchic prose style of the body narrative shifts in the epilogue to a more straightforward, measured prose. Excepting one important section, Raskolnikov no longer indulges in his characteristic dialogic monologues; instead, his thoughts appear more collected and move through two distinct orientations. The first of these stages is perpetuation. During the course of his despondent legal confession, Raskolnikov remains an enigma to the investigators and judges. They attribute the cause of his crime to poverty and temporary insanity—reasonably so, since this is what he leads them to believe (370). Raskolnikov’s behavior during the perpetuation stage is just what we have come to expect of him. He remains hopeless and alienated from his fellow man. As of yet, he is unbroken.

The second stage, which follows the death of Pulkheriya Aleksandrovna,

provides the groundwork for Raskolnikov's tentative resurrection. This stage is traversal. The death of his mother, though attended to briefly, also represents the death of Raskolnikov's ideological self, thus making way for his spiritual regeneration through personal suffering. After he learns of her death, Raskolnikov entertains his final relapse into a nihilistic ideology:

"My conscience is clear. Of course, it was legally a crime; of course, the letter of the law was broken and blood was shed [...]. Of course, in that case, many benefactors of humanity [...] should have been punished when they took their very first steps. But these people managed to carry out those steps, and therefore they were right; but I wasn't able to, and therefore I didn't have the right to allow myself to take that step."

That was the only way he acknowledged his crime: only that he had failed to see it through and had turned himself in. (375-376)

Again, we see the dialogic consequence of Svidrigailov's nihilistic influence. But, now more explicitly than ever before, it is countered by the influence of Sonya. His biological mother gone, Raskolnikov more fully accepts the guidance of Sonya, the "little mother." He immediately, almost unconsciously, follows his thought with the deepest possible admission of regret: why hadn't he killed himself? The answer, of course, can only be that he needs to see—in much the same way that he needed to test his will to power—if he can now cross over an altogether new threshold, that of resurrection: from spiritual death to sanctified life. This is affirmed by his remembrance of standing atop the bridge over the Neva, analogizing his divided consciousness. Clearly, the dialogism of *Crime and Punishment* does not disappear in the epilogue; rather, the tension between viewpoints slows down as Raskolnikov at least ostensibly comes to an understanding of himself. The potential for his spiritual redemption is left unfinalized and vulnerable to a Dostoevskian reversal.

That the possibility of faith opens to Raskolnikov during his imprisonment—and after realizing the error of falling into European rationalist-utilitarian moral reasoning—draws an obvious throughline to Dostoevsky's own biography. It would be foolish, however, to argue that there is a one-to-one relational quality between the novelist and his character. To argue that Dostoevsky completely eschews moralization and didacticism would be equally haphazard. Dostoevsky began each of his narratives with an idea that he wished to communicate. *The Idiot*, for example, was written "to portray a perfectly good man," (*Selected* 262) one who is, moreover, a modern Christ-like figure. Readers of Dostoevsky will know how well Myshkin fares. *Crime and Punishment*, as Dostoevsky presented it in a letter to M.N. Katkov (of *The Russian Messenger*), was meant to portray the eventual reintegration into society of a young student who has lost his way and killed an old woman: "The truth of God and the law of the earth take their toll, and in the end he is forced to denounce himself, forced, even if he should perish in jail, to rejoin people" (Dostoevsky, *From... "Letters"* 390). Under his pen, however, the narrative begs something different from him. What we receive instead is a story wherein the hero's divided consciousness remains unfixed on either spiritual salvation or intellectual justification. As Givens remarks, here and throughout the entirety of the author's oeuvre, the "faith narrative that Dostoevsky

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seemed determined to write all of his life seems to fail.” The promise of the hero’s regeneration is inconclusive, and his promise of faith is merely tentative.

Bakhtin, then, was wrong to deem the novel’s epilogue a monologic failure. Certainly, the disruption he senses is real, palpable in the tempo and rhythm of Dostoevsky’s prose and in the forcefulness of his rhetoric. Yet the epilogue reads less like an imposition of inordinate authorial control and more like an ellipsis. That inconclusiveness is not a defect; it is a faithful representation of the dialogical struggle for faith in the author’s own life. The political pressures of mid-1860s Russia—the radicalism of the Petrashevsky Circle and the holiness of Orthodox Russia—combined with the biographical aspects of Dostoevsky’s personal faith journey create the possibility of a dialogism between belief and unbelief in the author’s prose. The epilogue does not impose faith upon Raskolnikov but suspends him within it. “Could her [Sonya’s] convictions really become my convictions?” (380): Raskolnikov’s final words carry little conviction of their own. As such, the epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* leaves the reader with an ellipsis that preserves the tension between doubt and redemption rather than resolving it. As Bakhtin himself states: “nothing conclusive has yet taken place [...] everything is still in the future and will always be in the future” (166). Yet, in the epilogue, he seems to have misrecognized his own principle. Read in this light, the epilogue is truly a fulfilment of the novel’s dedication to polyphony.

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Alannie Cervantes: Alannie Cervantes is a Wright College 2024 graduate and is currently studying social work at Northeastern Illinois University. She has a background in early childhood education and intends to use her knowledge to service immigrant and marginalized communities in the clinical social work field. In her free time she enjoys trying new cuisines around Chicago, and watching new films.

Muhammad Saeed: Muhammad Saeed is a 2026 graduate of Wilbur Wright College

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who plans to transfer to Tulane University in the fall to pursue a major in English literature. As president of the Great Books Student Society, he is grateful for the opportunities for growth and discussion the club and its members have given him. He looks forward to what the future holds and hopes to find a career that allows him to grow intellectually and continue reading widely. In his free time, he enjoys playing tennis, golf, and getting lost in great books.

Tristan Bruns: Tristan Bruns is a professional tap dancer, theater and dance critic, and amateur philosopher with a BA in Music (Instrumental Performance) from Columbia College Chicago.

Sean Ogilvy: Sean Ogilvy is a 2026 graduate of Wilbur Wright College. After years of independent writing and reading, he returned to education to formally study and pursue literary scholarship. Eternally grateful to the faculty who make the publication of this journal possible, Sean hopes that future students will keep the journal alive and that this truly special project will be recognized for what it is: an affirmation of the intelligence and capabilities of community college students. He is currently studying literature at Amherst College.

