Achilles in *Crime and Punishment*

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In part 6, chapter 6 of *Crime and Punishment*, Svidrigailov commits suicide in front of a horrified watchman¹. This watchman is a Jew dressed in a grey soldier's overcoat and "a copper Achilles helmet." To emphasize the importance of this second detail in this very short but crucial episode, the narrator calls the watchman "Achilles" four times. The purpose of my study is to explore the significance of this appearance of Homer's hero in the novel.

The *Iliad* does not describe Achilles's helmet in detail, but it does have a plume, comb, or metal crest on its top, and Achilles is depicted with a helmet like this from antiquity onward on vases and other images. So far as I have been able to discover, no one has seriously investigated the reason the watchman in *Crime and Punishment* wears an Achilles helmet, and it is easy to speculate why. For one thing, this detail is disguised as part of the realistic setting in which the suicide occurs.² Svidrigailov catches sight of a "tall watch tower" and decides to

1 F. M. Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* [PSS], 33 vols., ed. V. G. Bazanov et al. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–90), 6:394–95; hereafter cited as PSS by volume and page. I thank Arkadi Klioutchanski for his editing and comments on this chapter.

2 In the terms of Roman Jakobson's famous article on realism, it is an "unessential detail" (*nesushchestvennyi priznak*) characteristic of the mode; see Jakobson, "On Realism in Art," in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 19–27.

shoot himself near it so that there will be a witness to his suicide. He therefore turns onto Svezhinskaia Street, where he finds a man standing at the gates of “a large building with a watch tower” (and not on the tower itself). In mid-nineteenth-century Petersburg, towers called *kalanchi* were used for various purposes related to public safety, and especially for fires. They were part of large compounds containing stables, sheds, and barracks, and watchmen stood on them around the clock looking for suspicious smoke or flames. Though a soldier—note his military overcoat—the watchman is working in the fire department; therefore, he is wearing a brass helmet with a crest that was part of the uniform of firemen at that time.³

The watchman is a Jew with a heavy accent. This is plausible within realistic poetics because there were in fact many Jewish firemen in Petersburg at the time, and some Jewish soldiers were allowed to retire there.⁴ Nonetheless, the watchman’s Jewishness stands out because neither Dostoevsky nor his readers would associate Jews with the manly men who become soldiers or firefighters. Dostoevsky’s Jewish watchman is a coward, a warrior in costume only: his eyes widen with fear when he realizes that Svidrigailov is about to shoot himself, and he does nothing to stop him.⁵ On the face of it, the reference to Achilles therefore seems either merely coincidental, as might befit realist prose, or ironic, or even absurd. My investigation suggests that it is intended to be ironic, but also that it should be understood within a larger and self-conscious engagement by Dostoevsky with the *Iliad*.

3 See Rivosh N. Ya, “Odezhdha obshchestvennogo i chastnogo obsluzhivaiushchego personala v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii,” in *Vremya i veshchi*, accessed November 15, 2014, <http://lib.vkarp.com/2013/09/15/ривош-н-я-одежда-общественного-и-частн/>. See also <http://www.cleper.ru/articles/description.php?n=310>, accessed November 16, 2014. L. V. Karasev, in “O simvolakh Dostoevskogo,” *Voprosy filosofii* 10 (1994): 102, accessed February 14, 2016, <http://www.durov.com/study/file-602.htm>, identifies the helmet as belonging to a fireman, but he focuses on its composition from brass rather than the Achilles connection.

4 See Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted into Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 71, 86n72; or Petrovskii-Shtern, *Evrei v russkoi armii, 1827–1914* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie), 88–90.

5 For other speculations about the Jewish symbolism here, see David I. Goldstein, *Dostoyevsky and the Jews* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 51–54; and Elena M. Katz, *Neither with Them, nor without Them: The Russian Writer and the Jew in the Age of Realism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 162–67. Katz also touches upon the possible role of Achilles in the scene (163–64).

Dostoevsky's earliest surviving comment about Homer is in a letter to his brother Mikhail, dated January 1, 1840:

Homer (a legendary figure, perhaps, as Christ was, incarnated by God and sent to us) could be parallel only to Christ, and not to Goethe. Get into him, brother, understand the *Iliad*, read it well (you haven't read him? Admit it). In the *Iliad* Homer gave the entire ancient world the structure of both its spiritual and earthly life, and did it with the same power as Christ did for the new world. Now do you understand me? Victor Hugo as a lyric poet has a purely angelic character, a Christian, childlike direction in his poetry and no one is his equal in this ... Only Homer, with the very same unshakeable belief in his calling, with a childlike faith in the god of poetry, whom he serves, is like Victor Hugo in the direction of the source of his poetry, but only in his direction, not in his [Homer's] thought, which was given to him by nature, and which he expressed; I'm not talking about this last.⁶

Although Dostoevsky does not mention which translation of the *Iliad* he has read, it is certainly the one by N. I. Gnedich, originally published in 1829, but reissued and reviewed, by, among others, V. G. Belinsky, in 1839.⁷ Dostoevsky's comments in the letter just cited seem to echo Gnedich's interpretation of Homer in his introduction to the translation, also republished in the 1839 edition:

They [the poems of Homer] are like the books of the Bible, they are the seal and mirror of the age. And whoever loves to go back to the youth of mankind so as to view the bare charm of nature or to take nourishment from the lessons of bygone eras, before that person a whole world, earth and heaven, unwinds into a marvelous picture, bubbling with life and movement, the finest and most grand that the genius of man has ever created. ... From these beginnings there flow the grandest beauties of Homeric poetry, not including anything local, they are as universal and eternal as the nature and heart of man. Homer and nature are one and the same.⁸

6 PSS, 28(1):69–70. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Russian are mine.

7 For the Belinsky review, see V. G. Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1953–1959), 3:163, 307–9, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.vgbelinsky.ru/texts/books/13-3/articles-and-reviews/1839/>. For polemics in the 1840s around the new translation, see A. N. Egunov, *Gomer v russkikh perevodakh XVIII–XIX vekov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), 345–53.

8 See http://az.lib.ru/g/gnedich_n_i/text_0080.shtml.

Like Gnedich in this passage, Dostoevsky perceives Homer as the primary “organizer” (in Dostoevsky’s terms) of the Greek world and as the spokesman for nature. Like Gnedich, Dostoevsky takes a historical approach to the *Iliad* but also regards it as an expression of universal truths. Both Gnedich and Dostoevsky were Christians, and as part of their argument for the universal importance of Homer, both of them connect him to Christianity as an earlier but legitimate stage of religious consciousness.⁹ Dostoevsky, in his letter to Mikhail, goes so far as to compare Homer to Christ, but Gnedich, in the eloquent introduction to his translation, equates Homeric to Old Testament times and Zeus to Jehovah:

This simplicity of narrative, life, mores, expressed in the *Iliad*, and many special qualities of the poetry disclosed in it remind us forcefully of the deep antiquity of the East, and the poems of Homer are close, in a literary sense, to the writings of the Bible. ... Zeus himself, usually seated on Mount Ida amidst thunder and lightning, dispensing good to mankind in general in the ancient generation of the Dardans (Trojans), but often aiding one against the other, the tribe of Anchises against the successors of Priam, is the very same God of a family as was Jehovah in the history of the forefathers.¹⁰

Dostoevsky’s reception of Homer in the letter to his brother, probably influenced by this passage by Gnedich, already provides clues about how to interpret the scene in *Crime and Punishment*. The combination of Greek and Jewish elements in the watchman could be a reference to the old, pre-Christian world.¹¹ The term *kalancha*, which is of Turkish origin and originally referred to Ottoman defensive towers, provides a third such reference that is pre-Christian in spirit if not in historical time. The hotel in which Svidrigailov spends his last night is the Adrianople, a reference to the Battle of Adrianople (or Hadrianopolis), and therefore a reference to the late Roman Empire and

9 On Gnedich’s Christianized Homer, see Mariia Maiofis “‘Ruka vremën,’ ‘Bozhestvennyi Platon’ i gomerovskaya rifma v russkoi literature pervoi poloviny XIX veka: Kommentarii k neprochitannoi poeme N. I. Gnedicha,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 60 (2003): 145–70.

10 See http://az.lib.ru/g/gnedich_n_i/text_0080.shtml.

11 My interpretation of the scene as philosophical-historical rather than merely realistic is bolstered by the fact, noted by Katz (*Neither with Them*, 164), that, contrary to his usual practice, in this scene Dostoevsky uses the term *evrei* for the Jewish fireman soldier rather than *zhid*. Furthermore, the watchman’s sorrowful expression (*vekovechnaya briuzglivaya skorb*; pt. 6, ch. 6; PSS, 6:394) connects him to the archetype of the Wandering Jew.

its decline.¹² In this episode, the pre-Christian world is presented as degraded and even negative. As in Gogol's "Overcoat," the watchman does not protect or attempt to save a man in trouble: he first tells Svidrigailov to move on, and then is paralyzed at the sight of his gun.

This parodic and negative version of the old world is not Dostoevsky's final word on it in *Crime and Punishment* or elsewhere, however. To follow the thread further, we turn to the article that Dostoevsky published in 1861 entitled "Mr. –bov and the Question of Art," in which he discusses the rejection by positivist writers, like N. A. Dobroliubov (the "–bov" of the title), of the great classics of past civilizations as irrelevant in the present day.¹³ The *Iliad* is his example of such a text. Dostoevsky makes fun of the application of materialist standards to determine its value:

And for that reason, how, for instance, would you define, measure, and weigh what use the *Iliad* has been to all humanity? Where, when, and in which circumstances was it useful, in what way, finally, precisely what influence has it had on which nations, in which moment of their development, and precisely how much was there of this influence (let's say in pounds, pouds, arshins, kilometres, degrees, and so on and so on)?¹⁴

Dostoevsky insists in this article that "beauty is always useful,"¹⁵ but he defends the *Iliad* on more specific grounds. He claims that it is "useful"—the most important criterion for the utilitarian critics—precisely in addressing the most pressing issues of the day:

Even now the *Iliad* sends a shiver through the soul. This is an epic of such powerful, full life, of such an elevated moment in the life of a nation, and, we note also, the life of such a great tribe, that in our time—a time of strivings, of struggles, of waverings and of faith (because our time is a time of faith), in a word, in our time of heightened life, the eternal harmony that is incarnated in the *Iliad* can act on the soul too decisively. Our spirit is now at its most receptive, the influence of beauty, harmony, and force can grandly and beneficially act on it, act *usefully*, infuse with energy, support our strengths. That

12 PSS, 6:388. The battle was part of the Gothic War (376–82) and "is often considered the start of the final collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century"; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Adrianople.

13 PSS, 18:269; "G-n –bov i vopros ob iskusstve."

14 PSS, 18:95.

15 PSS, 18:95.

which is powerful loves power; whoever believes, that one is strong, and we believe, and most importantly, we want to believe.¹⁶

In another article from the same year, Dostoevsky identifies Achilles as a Greek type and the *Iliad* in its entirety as “the national epic of ancient Greece.”¹⁷ As he sees it, Homeric times and the Russia of 1861 are both peak moments in the national lives of their respective peoples. As during the Trojan War, Russia in 1861 is characterized by striving, battle, fluctuations, and religious faith. The *Iliad* is powerful and alive, on the one hand, and characterized by “eternal harmony” on the other: “That which is powerful loves power.” Because of the combined crisis and opportunity in Russian society brought about by the impending emancipation of the serfs, the Russian reader in 1861 is maximally open both to the power of Homer’s epic and to what Dostoevsky calls its beauty and harmony. The “thrill” that the *Iliad* causes in the soul of the Russian reader is the effect of the release of energy directly from Homer into that reader. Hence, Dostoevsky says, Homeric energy can “support our forces” in a way that is “useful.”

This dynamic is not present in the scene with Svidrigailov and the watchman, where all reeks of death and decay. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that although Svidrigailov is not “useful” for Russian society, he is a representative of its potential power. He is related to Stavrogin from *The Demons* in this respect, though Svidrigailov, unlike Stavrogin, does good *and* evil.

The scene of Svidrigailov’s suicide needs to be compared to the scene in Siberia in the epilogue, in which Raskolnikov, now a convict, gazes across a “wide and empty river” at a pastoral landscape:

Raskolnikov went out of the shed up to the bank, sat down on logs piled up near the shed, and started to gaze at the wide and empty river. From the high bank a broad landscape opened up. From the other bank, far away, came a faint sound of singing. There, in the immensity of the steppe, flooded with sunlight, the black yurts of the nomads were barely visible dots. Freedom was there, and other people lived there who were not at all those on this side of the river; there it was as though time had stopped, and the age of Abraham and his flocks had not yet passed. Raskolnikov sat on and he gazed motionlessly and

16 PSS, 18:95–96; emphasis in original.

17 PSS, 19:9. See “A Series of Articles on Russian Literature, No. IV. Book-learning and Literacy, Article Two” [“Riad statei o russkoi literature. IV. Knizhnost’ i gramotnost’. Stat’ia vtoraiia”].

without interruption; his mind had wandered into day-dreams; he thought of nothing, but an anguished longing disturbed and tormented him.¹⁸

The shed with the kiln from which Raskolnikov emerges is associated with hard labor and imprisonment. The river represents historical time flowing between Raskolnikov and the seemingly timeless but distant biblical setting. Raskolnikov is literally mesmerized in this scene: thought turns into vision and yearning. He is in that state of pure receptivity described in “Mr. –bov and the Question of Art,” but he also feels utterly separate from what he sees: the people there are “not at all those on this side of the river.”

In Svidrigailov’s suicide, “Achilles” is first indifferent to Svidrigailov, and then tells him repeatedly that he is in the wrong place. When Sonya Marmeladova appears on the river bank and touches Raskolnikov, he falls before her and embraces her knees. Sonya reaches out to Raskolnikov to draw him back to life. In the first case, the symbols of antiquity jangle falsely and inappropriately. In the second one, the seemingly ancient scene pours energy into Raskolnikov’s soul that expresses itself by “yearning” (*toska*) that Sonya’s appearance and touch then catalyze into Christian resurrection.

The character in *Crime and Punishment* who marshals his energy for one grand deed is Raskolnikov. As is well understood and accepted, Svidrigailov is intended as one double of Raskolnikov—Svidrigailov is attracted to Raskolnikov and visits him while he is wrestling with the consequences of his deed. We recall Dostoevsky’s caution in the passage from “Mr. –bov and the Question of Art” that the *Iliad* can “too decisively act on the soul.”¹⁹ Raskolnikov, in fact, is an example of a great-souled man, an Achilles who has been affected by a mixture of offended honor, moral indignation, and eternal standards of justice that can lead to terrible crimes.²⁰ I’m not suggesting that Raskolnikov has been reading

18 Epilogue, ch. 2; PSS, 6:421. Translations of *Crime and Punishment* are versions of the Jessie Coulson translation—*Crime and Punishment*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. George Gibian (New York: W. W. Norton, 1964)—which I have modified in a few places for clarity.

19 See PSS, 18:96, quoted above.

20 V. G. Belinsky reviewed Gnedich’s translation in 1839, and Egunov, in *Gomer v russkikh perevodakh*, 295, points out that he interprets Achilles’s weeping by the sea in book 1 as motivated by love of justice (*spravedlivost’*—a word that does not appear in the scene) rather than at his loss of Briseis. Dostoevsky may have read Belinsky’s unsigned review, which appeared in *Notes of the Fatherland* in 1839 (vol. 6, no. 11, pt. 7, 146–48). For Belinsky’s review, see Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 3:307–9.

Homer, but I do believe that he conceives of himself, and he is intended by Dostoevsky, as a hero in the mold of an Achilles or Ajax. His first name and patronymic are meant to indicate this. “Rodion” is the Russian version of the name “Herodion,” which is related to the Greek word for “hero,” and the name “Roman” refers to a Roman citizen. In his reaction to the crisis of his times, Raskolnikov is caught between the standards and moral organization of Homer or Christ, between the rage and offended honor of an Achilles and the humility of a Sonya. His rage leads to murders that Dostoevsky describes with the surgical efficiency, brevity, and mention of body parts and motion characteristic of the depictions of death in battle in the *Iliad*.²¹

21 Here are the two murders as described in pt. 1, ch. 7 (PSS, 6:63, 65):

Удар пришелся в самое темя, чему способствовал ее малый рост. Она вскрикнула, но очень слабо, и вдруг вся осела к полу, хотя и успела еще поднять обе руки к голове. В одной руке еще продолжала держать ‘заклад.’ Тут он изо всей силы ударил раз и другой, всё обухом и всё по темени. Кровь хлынула, как из опрокинутого стакана, и тело повалилось навзничь.

Because she was so short the axe struck her full on the crown of the head. She cried out, but very feebly, and sank in a heap to the floor, still with enough strength left to raise both hands to her head. One of them still held the “pledge.” Then he struck her again and yet again, with all his strength, always with the blunt side of the axe, and always on the crown of the head. Blood poured out as if from an overturned glass and the body toppled over on its back.

And,

Она только чуть-чуть приподняла свою свободную левую руку, далеко не до лица, и медленно протянула ее к нему вперед, как бы отстраняя его. Удар пришелся прямо по черепу, острием, и сразу прорубил всю верхнюю часть лба, почти до темени. Она так и рухнулась.”

She only raised her free left hand a little and slowly stretched it out towards him as though she were trying to push him away. The blow fell on her skull, splitting it open from the top of the forehead almost to the crown of the head, and felling her instantly.

Compare these killings to two of the dozens of such deaths from Gnedich’s translation. For the English, I use the Lattimore translation: *The Iliad of Homer*, ed. and trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

(Antiloches kills the Trojan charioteer Mydon; *Iliad* 5.584–86)

Прянул молодой Антилох и мечом в висок его грянул;
Он, тяжело вздохнувший, на прах с колесницы прекрасной
Рухнулся вниз головой и, упавший на темя и плечи.

Antilochos charging drove the sword into his temple,
So that gasping he dropped from the carefully wrought chariot
Headlong, driven deep in the dust his neck and shoulders;

In his conversation in book 6 with Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov characterizes him over and over again as an “idealist” in the Schillerian mold. In the same idealist vein, he calls him “a citizen and human being”:

I understand (but don't trouble yourself: don't say much if you don't want to).
I understand what thoughts are on your mind: moral ones, are they? Questions of a citizen and a human being? But you should put them aside; what are they to you now? He-he! Is it that you are still a citizen and a human being?²²

Raskolnikov's sister, Dunya, is of the same ilk. Had she been born in the early Christian era, according to Svidrigailov she could have been a Christian martyr or desert ascetic saint.²³ It is this Dunya whom Svidrigailov considers godlike²⁴ and whose assurance that she does not and cannot love him finally prompts him to choose suicide. Unlike Raskolnikov and his sister, Svidrigailov has no goal in life upon which to focus his enormous energy. He explains this in his conversation with Raskolnikov:

Believe me, if only I were something—a landowner, say, or a father, an officer in the Lancers, a photographer, a journalist ... but I'm nothing. I have no profession. Sometimes it is almost boring.²⁵

Hence Svidrigailov squanders his energy on sensual pleasure and depravity; hence the broadness of his nature that Dunya ascribes to him as he lurches from evil to good and back.²⁶ Because he is nonetheless himself human, he yearns for an ideal, and wants to possess the godlike Dunya.

(Hector kills Ajax's friend Lycophron; *Iliad* 15.433–35)

Гектор его, близ Аякса стоящего, в череп над ухом
Дротом ударил убийственным: в прах он, с кормы корабельной
Рухнувшись, навзничь пал, и его сокрушилася крепость.

Hektor struck him in the head above the ear with the sharp bronze
As he stood next to Aias, so that Lykophron sprawling
Dropped from the ship's stern to the ground, and his strength was broken.

22 Pt. 6, ch. 5; PSS, 6:373.

23 Pt. 6, ch. 4; PSS, 6:365.

24 Pt. 6, ch. 5; PSS, 6:377.

25 Pt. 6, ch. 3; PSS, 6:359.

26 Pt. 6, ch. 5; PSS, 6:378: “The minds of the Russian people in general are broad, Avdotya Romanovna, like their country, and extraordinarily inclined to the fantastic and the chaotic [...] You were always reproaching me with that breadth of mind.”

If, as Edward Wasiolek asserts, Svidrigailov is a “bronze man,”²⁷ the Napoleon beyond good and evil whom Raskolnikov aspires to be, this Russian Napoleon indebted to literary predecessors, like Pushkin’s Hermann (*The Queen of Spades*) and Lermontov’s Pechorin (*Hero of Our Time*), has already moved beyond the dynamics of power that motivated Napoleon the historical actor.²⁸ Svidrigailov blames this condition on a lack of sacred traditions in Russia that would properly anchor the Russian soul:

In our educated Russian society, Avdotya Romanovna, there are no sacred traditions: at most someone may possibly construct some for himself out of books . . . or deduce something from old chronicles. But such people are the more learned sort, and, you know, all more or less simpletons, so that a man of the world would think their procedures quite unbecoming to himself. However, you know my general opinions; I make it a rule to condemn absolutely nobody, since I myself am a do-nothing and I intend to remain one.²⁹

Though he seeks goals or possessions that can galvanize his restless energy, Svidrigailov is too worldly to cook up new traditions out of old ones: hence his egotistical sensualism, hedonism, and moral relativism. In Dostoevsky’s discussion in 1861 in “Mr. –bov and the Question of Art” about the criticism by utilitarian thinkers of practitioners of “pure art” who merely imitate ancient traditions, he goes on to agree that such imitators are “foul” (*gnusno*):

Really, what is foul in the engagement with the *Iliad* and its imitation in art according to the opponents of pure art? It’s that we, like dead men, like those who have lived ourselves out, or like cowards, who are afraid of our future life, finally—like indifferent traitors of those of us in whom there is still life force and who are surging ahead, like those who are enervated to the point of torpor, to not being able to understand that there is life among us—we throw ourselves into the epoch of the *Iliad* and in this way create for ourselves an artificial reality, life that we have not created and we have not lived, a dream, empty and tempting. And like base people, we borrow, we steal our lives from times long past and we turn sour in the enjoyment of art like useless imitators! You will agree yourself that the direction of utilitarians

27 Edward Wasiolek, *The Notebooks for “Crime and Punishment” by Fyodor Dostoevsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 8.

28 See pt. 3, ch. 5 (PSS, 6:204) for the reference to Russian Napoleons by Porfiry, and the suggestion by Zametov that an aspiring Napoleon killed the pawnbroker.

29 Pt. 6, ch. 5; PSS, 6:378.

from the point of view of such reproaches is to the highest degree noble and elevated. It's for this reason that we so sympathize with them; and for this reason we wish also to respect them.³⁰

The aesthetes whom Dostoevsky describes here turn to the past in order to avoid the chaos of the present and the future. The “simpletons” whom Svidrigailov disdains do the same thing, and hence he calls them “dead men.” Strangely enough, however, Svidrigailov seems like a dead man or walking corpse himself: his face is a mask, and his gaze, especially, is “too heavy [massive] and motionless.”³¹

Crime and Punishment illustrates Dostoevsky's position as declared in his “Mr. –bov and the Question of Art”: “That which is powerful loves power; whoever believes, that one is strong, and we believe, and most importantly, we want to believe.” Strength to commit great deeds (rather than merely brutal self-serving ones) requires faith. In Dostoevsky's reading, a conventional nineteenth-century one in this respect, Homer's Greeks were like today's Christians in their unshakable religiosity. The harmony and life-loving strength of their culture come from their belief in the gods and their obedience to them. Therefore only Christian believers can truly access that strength today. Since neither Svidrigailov nor Raskolnikov in the lead-up to and aftermath of each man's grand deed possesses faith, neither can be a Greek hero. Svidrigailov, like his successor Stavrogin, cannot overcome his deep cynicism, and his final descendant in Dostoevsky's prose is therefore Ivan Karamazov's devil, who also mocks powerful cultural symbols, and who sneers at Ivan for thinking like a citizen and a human being, when his idea could and perhaps should liberate him from such quaint idealistic notions. In the case of Raskolnikov—who like his descendant Ivan remains on the fence between good and evil, and whose future, like Ivan's, is uncertain—before he can access his hidden power, he must discover the link between power and love, the Greeks and Christianity, as he does in the scene in Siberia.

As for Svidrigailov, like those aesthetes who imitate Homer without imbibing Homeric energy needed to accomplish today's tasks, in his self-indulgent hedonism he has opted out of the turmoil of present-day Russia. He is an ironic bystander who snickers at its complexity and contradictions. He is a gentry parasite, a “do-nothing” who no longer plays any role in the shaping of

30 PSS, 18:96.

31 Pt. 6, ch. 3; PSS, 6:357.

society—and does not want to do so. His cynical outlook empties the most powerful symbols of the past—whether Greek, Old Testament, Ottoman, or Roman—of meaning. He associates one of the most beautiful cultural icons in Dostoevsky's pantheon—Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*—with the young girl to whom he is supposedly engaged and whom he might have raped and ruined had he not killed himself.³² Icons of strength related to Homer and the Old Testament are linked with the only grand deed of which Svidrigailov is capable, his own suicide, but they appear in debased, ironic form.

32 Pt. 6, ch. 4; PSS, 6:369.