

# FROM DOSTOYEVSKY TO BRENNER

By

Yael Sagiv Feldman

*Columbia University*

## I. Brenner and Dostoyevsky

Y. H. BRENNER (1881–1921) has long been associated with the great Russian writers of the nineteenth century. His early letters express fascination with Russian novelists, poets, and critics (Brenner, 1967, pp. 218–226), and the figures of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky appear many times in both his fiction and non-fiction writing.

Brenner's admiration for the depth of Dostoyevsky's psychological portrayals made him probably the first to translate *Crime and Punishment* into Hebrew,<sup>1</sup> a fact which itself points to a certain affinity between the two. This affinity was first noticed by Brenner's close friend, U. N. Gnessin, who detected "Dostoyevskian traces" in Brenner's style and themes (Gnessin, 1946, p. 112). Later on, this became a standard commentary, and one of the

1. It is interesting to follow Brenner's struggles with the translation of the title of the book. The Russian term "*prestuplenie*," which really means "a transgression" (*Russian-English Dictionary*, Smirnitzy, 1966, New York), would be best rendered into the Hebrew *'abera* ("transgression, trespass"). Nevertheless, Brenner refers to it initially as *'ašma* ("blame, guilt") (Brenner, 1967, p. 219), and later (p. 366) as *'avon* ("iniquity"). His final choice, however, was *het* ("sin"), which lends it the connotation of a transgression against divine law, or principles of morality (*Oxford Dictionary*, 1954). This connotation is missing in the English translation, "crime" being an offense against the law in general.

critics even labeled Brenner "The Hebrew Underground Man" (Friedman, 1920).<sup>2</sup>

## II. "Missabib lannəqudda" and *Crime and Punishment*

Very little has been said, however, about the possible ties between Brenner's early story "Missabib lannəqudda" ("Around the Point" or "Going in Circles"), which was published in 1904-1905, and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, which Brenner read before 1899 (Brenner, 1967, p. 220).

At first glance, the two stories have very little in common. Brenner's story does not tell about a murder or any other criminal act; rather, it revolves around the dilemma of a young Hebrew writer in Russia (at the turn of the century), who is trying to find his own way among the options open to young Russian Jews at that point in history (Socialism, Zionism, Nihilism, Traditionalism). This decision will, in turn, determine the language in which he will choose to write: Hebrew, with its pitifully small readership; or Russian, the language which could open the doors to a wider range of society.

As far removed as it is from *Crime and Punishment*, Brenner's plot has one obvious tie with the Russian novel, and this has already been commented upon by later critics (Cohen, 1972, p. 212, and Bakon, 1973, p. 275): the main character in each story contemplates suicide, chooses a bridge from which to jump, and retreats at the last moment. Although the circumstances of the bridge scenes are different in accordance with the different general message and direction of each narration, the occurrence of similar scenes is not accidental: it seems that Brenner borrowed from Dostoyevsky the underlying narrative structure of his novel, and modified it according to his needs.<sup>3</sup>

### *Narrative Affinities*

One of Dostoyevsky's famous notes for *Crime and Punishment* is from his third notebook (Dostoyevsky, 1967, p. 222):

Svidrigaylov is desperation, the most cynical. Sonia is hope, the most unrealizable (Raskolnikov must express this). He was passionately tied to both.

2. It should be noted, however, that recent research (Bakon, 1975, pp. 475-479) tends to see Gleb Usspiensky as a major source of influence on Brenner's antiaesthetic realistic style. The same work, though, excludes "Missabib lannəqudda" from this influence. Indeed, this is one of Brenner's few stories written completely in third person narration (using also the point of view of an omniscient narrator), and practically the only major one which does not pretend to be a non-fictional, non-artistic piece of work.

3. No doubt some of the modifications are intrinsic to the differences between the genres chosen by the two writers, but these are not within the limits of this analysis.

This formula can easily sum up the "narrative program" of "Missabib lan-nəqudda": we have only to substitute Uriel Davidovsky for Svidrigaylov; Yeva (Havva) Isakovna Blumen for Sonia; and Jacob Abramson for Raskolnikov. Indeed, Abramson's inner conflict is externalized by his vacillating attraction to his two friends. On the one hand, there is Davidovsky, the silent, solitary cynic, who has lost all hope, and therefore has cut himself off from his family and from his social milieu. Advocating the idea of Nirvana, he is an observant outsider in the game of life, rather than a participant, looking forward to his death, which is finally realized in his suicide.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, there is Yeva, the active, hopeful Socialist, who believes in Revolution as the only way for the Jews to survive. Being emotionally attached to Abramson, she constantly tries to persuade him to abandon his Hebrew writing and join the collective effort for a Russian renaissance.<sup>5</sup>

As we can see, Brenner makes use of the same narrative agents of desperation (= death), and hope (= life), which constitute Dostoyevsky's framework for the plot of *Crime and Punishment*. (Brenner's distribution of the agents between the sexes is the same as Dostoyevsky's.) At the same time, it must be noted that Brenner's particular semantic investment in each of his polar opposites is different, since his thematic concerns are so different from those of Dostoyevsky. This semantic difference is most apparent in the content of the "hope" suggested in each case. The life-sustaining metaphysical consolation offered by Sonia (which is "most unrealizable" even for Raskolnikov until the very end) is replaced in "Missabib lan-nəqudda" by a man-made "ism," which Brenner's torn protagonist cannot but reject.<sup>6</sup> His forced attempt at accepting this solution (after his failure to commit suicide, Abramson does join Yeva's socialist group) does not result here in inner reconciliation and spiritual resurrection (as in *Crime and Punishment*); rather, it starts the deterioration of the protagonist into a phase of utter confusion and schizophrenic existence. Abramson works on his article in Russian, while writing in Hebrew "for himself" (p. 96). His personal writings disclose a split personality, and anticipate the collapse of the seemingly harmonious coexistence; the first rumors of

4. Ideologically, Davidovsky could be traced to Kirilov (from Dostoyevsky's novel *The Devils*) too, but his "persona" and his narrative function are closer to those of Svidrigaylov.

5. Again, the discussions of Yeva's group bring to mind the revolutionists' jargon in *The Devils*; the dream of the socio-political revival is undercut by Brenner as well as by Dostoyevsky. It would seem that both writers rejected blind faith in any current doctrine of their time as an answer to the human predicament.

6. The semantic difference is demonstrated clearly by the names *Sonia* and *Yeva*: *Sonia*, deriving from the Greek "Sophia," conveys "wisdom"; *Yeva*, or rather its Hebrew counterpart "Havva" (Eve), which is used in the story by Abramson, derives from the Hebrew *hayyim*, thus conveying the idea of "life" and "vitality." This connotation is reinforced by her last name *Blumen* (from the German: "flowers").

pogroms send Abramson into raving daydreams and hallucinations, even madness, aggravated by Davidovsky's suicide.<sup>7</sup>

### *Symbolic Affinities*

The figurative-symbolic level of "Missabib lannəqudda" reveals the same pattern of affinity to *Crime and Punishment* as does the narrative program. Like Dostoyevsky, Brenner uses the technique of dreams as self-projections. Also, throughout the story, Abramson's wavering moods are constantly indicated by the contrasting terms "heavy headaches" (associated with Davidovsky, pp. 62, 63, 66) and "light-hearted joy and sunshine" (associated with Yeva, p. 63). This opposition, of course, brings to mind Dostoyevsky's use of dual imagery (sickness and death / health and life; stifling rooms / fresh air and light, etc. — Holquist, 1973).<sup>8</sup> But unlike Dostoyevsky, Brenner leads the plot and his main character away from the sunshine and the fresh air, and into an escalating headache (coupled with toothache), indeed, into a split mind . . . (pp. 90, 91, 96).

Again, like the characters in *Crime and Punishment*, most of the characters here have been uprooted from their families and live in rented rooms. The use of "room" as an image takes on a special meaning in the relationship between the main character and his alter-ego. Svidrigaylov's rented room (at the end) is comparable to Raskolnikov's coffin-room; Abramson actually rents Davidovsky's room at the very beginning of the story. Yet both Svidrigaylov and Raskolnikov *leave* their rooms to meet their final respective fates, whereas both Davidovsky and Abramson end their tale *inside* (Abramson stays in Davidovsky's room while Davidovsky commits suicide in a rented hotel room). Similarly, Raskolnikov's progression is from attachment to Svidrigaylov towards liberation from him, while Abramson absorbs Davidovsky by simulating his gestures and manner of speaking, and by replacing him in his parents' household.

In anticipation of this different ending, Brenner uses the bridge symbolism to prepare the reader for the modified direction his narrative takes.

7. Unlike Dostoyevsky, Brenner's treatment of the male-female axis (Abramson-Yeva) has two separate aspects; the problematic "point" between Abramson and Yeva is both psychological and ideological. Yeva is Abramson's only bridge to the other sex, and as such, his only option for getting a hold on life itself. Unlike Raskolnikov, whose problem is solely a mistaken way of thinking, and who has only to get rid of his "rational microbes" (see his final dream in the epilogue) in order to recover, Abramson's problem is deeply rooted in psychological complexes and inhibitions which are harder to cure. This fact doubtlessly contributes to the artistic justification of the impossibility of a reconciliation or solution for Abramson's problems.

8. See also Gibian (1961).

### III. Between the Two Bridges

When we compare the parallel "bridge episodes," the first difference to be noticed is their respective locations in the plot. Dostoyevsky's famous bridge episode occurs quite early in the novel (at the end of Book II), and is incorporated into a network of devices demonstrating Raskolnikov's vacillation and lack of orientation. The main point which is repeatedly brought out in chapters 6 and 7 of Book II of *Crime and Punishment* is the incompatibility between Raskolnikov's conscious intentions, and his actual deeds. At the beginning of chapter 6 he leaves his room with "a firm purpose" (p. 173), and "with desperate immovable self-confidence and determination" (p. 174), but at the same time "he did not know where he was going; neither did he think of it" (p. 173). He knew that "he did not want to go on living like that," but "he had not the faintest idea" (p. 174) how to change it. His subsequent wanderings about the city are controlled by old habits and subconscious motivations, but not by conscious decisions. The result is a long chain of "happenings" into which he stumbles, without any planning (the street singers, the stall holders, the house on Sadoyova Street, the two prostitutes, the Crystal Palace, the bridge, the pawnbroker's house, Marmaladov's accident, his death, the bridge again, Razumikhin's home).

If we isolate the bridge scene proper from its context in Dostoyevsky's novel, it would hardly figure as a pivotal point of the plot. It is only another event that "happens" to Raskolnikov, and triggers still another decision (to go to the police) which he will not act upon (for quite a while . . .). Moreover, the actual suicide attempt at the bridge is not Raskolnikov's. A close reading of the text would reveal that "he felt so dreadfully weak" (p. 188), he would not be able to act in any way; all he wanted was "to sit or lie down somewhere in the street." Actually, he was on the verge of fainting ("everything began to dance and rotate before his eyes"), from which "he was perhaps saved," says the narrator, by the poor woman throwing herself into the water. Not until this scene is over does Raskolnikov verbalize the possibility of that kind of suicide, and immediately rejects it. From Dostoyevsky's treatment of suicide here, it is obvious that he did not consider it a real option, at least not for Raskolnikov. Since Raskolnikov did not go through conscious rational deliberations about suicide (as he did concerning the murder), it could not leave a deep impression on his mentality. His reaction to the woman's suicide is aesthetic rather than moral or philosophical. "He felt disgusted, 'No, that's horrible — the water — not worth it,' he muttered to himself" (p. 189).

Yet Dostoyevsky does not leave him there. After a few more incidents, he leads Raskolnikov back to the bridge, this time greatly changed in his attitude toward life (is this another scene of crime revisited?):

Five minutes later, he was standing on the bridge exactly on the same spot from which the woman had thrown herself into the water. "Enough!," he said solemnly and resolutely. "There is such a thing as life! Life is real! Haven't I lived just now? . . . And to think that I practically made up my mind to live in a square yard of space!" (p.208)

A few lines later, the narrator asks: "But what was it exactly that had brought about such a change in him? He did not know himself." Raskolnikov does not know, but the narrator does. Indeed, he assists the reader in tracing the sources of this change by linking it verbally to two former scenes within the framework of chapters 6 and 7. The obvious link is Raskolnikov's last challenging phrase, which is only a variation of his thoughts a few scenes back, following his exchange with the two prostitutes (p. 177). They somehow evoke within him an association of something he read about a man sentenced to death, who

One hour before his execution says or thinks . . . that if he had to spend all his life on a square yard of space — a thousand years, an eternity — he'd rather live like that than die at once! Oh, only to live, live, live!

The same association repeats itself in chapter 7, when Raskolnikov leaves the Marmaladovs. He is described by the narrator as being

full of a new, great and exhilarating sensation, of tremendous energy and will to live that suddenly surged up within him. It was a sensation not unlike that of a man condemned to death who is quite unexpectedly pardoned . . . (p. 206)

These three passages, in their chronological order, underline the beginning of a central motif in the novel — the struggle between affirmation and negation of life. What we have here is a gradual change towards affirmation, starting with a mockery of a convict's consent to "live on a square yard," developing into the sensation of unexpected pardon, and culminating in Raskolnikov's full challenge: "And to think that I practically made up my mind to live in a square yard of space!"

There is no overt explanation as to the reason for this change in Raskolnikov, but something is to be learned from the circumstances preceding those outbursts of affirmation. In both of them, Raskolnikov has just given money — first to Duklida (chapter 6), and then to Mrs. Marmaladov (chapter 7). Two motifs are linked together here — the motif of the unexpected, unexplained generosity, which constitutes one of the novel's most underlined motifs,<sup>9</sup> and

9. The constant monetary exchange is characteristic not only of Raskolnikov, but also of most characters in the novel (Luzin, Svidrigaylov, Dunia). Is it a substitute for the emotional-personal exchange which is lacking here most of the time?

the motif of the affirmation of life. The meaning of this pattern surfaces when we juxtapose it with its counterpart in Book I. There, Raskolnikov surprises us with the same gratuitous acts (to the Marmaladovs in chapter 2, and to the policeman in chapter 4), but we also watch him change his mind in each case (pp. 44, 68). His inability to *give* wholeheartedly, symbolizing his inaccessibility to people, seems to change at the end of Book II. The density of the money-giving incidents in this episode (four times in chapters 6 and 7: the singing girl, Duklida, the waiter, the Marmaladovs), this time without any of the regrets that accompanied them in Book I, seems to signal a gradual warming in Raskolnikov. His open generosity to others regenerates in return his energy and will to live, thus outlining (even so early in the plot) his potential for salvation. This affirmative tendency is yet to suffer many setbacks in the course of the narrative, but the seeds for its victory are already here.

Out of this richly woven narration, Brenner singled out two elements — the suicide attempt at the bridge and the giving of money to a prostitute — and adapted them to his narrative program. Needless to say, for purposes of our comparative analysis, the money-giving incidents immediately preceding the bridge scene (chapters 6 and 7 of Book II) are of more significance than Raskolnikov's single gratuitous act towards Sonia in Book I (chapter 3); still, this last incident is the only instance cited by Bakon as a possible inspiration for Brenner's bridge scene (Bakon, 1973, p. 274). By so doing, Bakon actually overlooks the whole pattern of gratuitous acts and the bearing it has on the suicide attempt. No wonder, then, that Bakon arrives at the conclusion that Dostoyevsky's influence on Brenner (in this case) is external and subsidiary. From the ensuing examination, however, it would seem that Brenner used not only a wide range of Dostoyevskian structures, but also reacted to the actual message of *Crime and Punishment*. His reworking of the bridge scene (using both the money-giving and the suicide episodes) reflects his challenge and rejection of Dostoyevsky's position in the fundamental issue of the value and meaning of life. Due to the brevity of his work, though, we will not find here any of the repetitious patterns, and therefore both incidents are closely compressed together (p. 92). But there are many other modifications here of a more meaningful nature.

Unlike Dostoyevsky, Brenner positions his bridge episode towards the end of his narrative, as a climactic action from which there is no way back. Abramson is led to the bridge, not by his feet (like Raskolnikov), but by his mind. His attempt at suicide is a result of a deliberate decision, and a desperate searching after an existential answer:

He was indeed free to do anything, and he really did everything; still, a certain "point" was facing him: in the final accounting — this is not it. Life is what it

is, what it is . . . Now, the point is: what will happen? Time goes by, the days pass, he lives, the world is as usual, the boat is sinking — what will be, what will be?? (chapter 13, p. 83; translation mine - Y.F.)<sup>10</sup>

Abramson undergoes the contemplation as well as the realization of suicide by himself. Brenner's treatment of the suicide attempt is moral and tragic: this is *the* test of Abramson's freedom of will. If Raskolnikov puts the limits of human freedom to the test by killing another person, Abramson does it by trying to kill himself — a despondent act, stemming from a desperate quest for meaning. Abramson fails to jump from the bridge, not because of aesthetic reasons (see Raskolnikov's reaction), but out of lack of conviction. Life can offer him nothing but mere existence, yet he cannot forsake it:

No, no, no. He will not be anymore, and all this will still exist. All this will remain, and he will be a meaningless piece of dust forever . . . No, no, no. (chapter 17, p. 92)

In contradistinction to Raskolnikov's "sensation of indifference and apathy" (p. 189), Abramson is filled with mercy, for himself as well as for the world around him. While Raskolnikov is "watching *mechanically* the last pink reflection of the sunset, the row of houses . . .," Abramson "felt *compassion* for everything, for the air, all objects, the bridge, the houses on both sides . . ." (p. 92). Raskolnikov is fascinated by the "darkening water of the canal," but there are still some "last rays of sun" in his setting (p. 188); Abramson's setting is "a damp, dark, night . . . the water and the sky were pitch black" (p. 92), and so is Abramson's fate. The attempt to escape his threatening insanity, and his realization that there is no answer, had led him to the bridge:

In a minute it all became clear: a frightening lucidity, frozen and pale, pierced through his forehead . . . finally, here it comes, that which had glowed within him for a long time now . . . (chapter 17, p. 91)

When the clock struck seven, Abramson said to himself that it was time to carry out the deed; otherwise, he might be too late . . . (chapter 17, p. 92)

Abramson's failure on the bridge might bring him back to life, as indeed happens in the physical sense ("He broke into a run, as if released from iron shackles"); but paradoxically enough, his way back is not the route to harmony and spiritual resurrection. His resignation to the Socialist solution is a compromise, the tension of which will tear him apart. Therefore, despite the denial of suicide, the affirmation of life is not actualized here. While the experience

10. All translations from the Hebrew are mine. The quotations refer to Brenner (1961).



itself evokes in Abramson a refusal to part with everything that means "life" ("all of which will be lost when he will be no more"), he still considers himself dead. Clinging to his physical existence he marks his future fate with a bitter mockery — "Abramson turned his face to the river and laughed loudly: there has been a man and he doesn't exist anymore, but the world isn't missing anything" (p. 92).

Unlike Raskolnikov, who is destined to spiritual resurrection despite his negative experience on the bridge itself, Abramson is destined to spiritual death despite his positive experience on the bridge.<sup>11</sup> This future development is intimated here by the exchange with the old prostitute. Detached from its context, Abramson's action is a replica of any of Raskolnikov's gratuitous acts: Abramson gives the prostitute the only coin he has, his salary for his work in the Jewish library; but his own interpretation of his action is different from Raskolnikov's. Abramson knows that the recipient of his generosity is an old drunkard, worn out and inarticulate, who is not going to benefit from his money. Therefore, his exchange with her is not followed by an upsurge of a will to live (see Raskolnikov's responses), but by the ironic realization of the insignificance of both this gesture and his life as a whole:

There was a man — and no more. And the world is not missing anything. The writer of the article "The Influence of Hassidism" does not exist, and the world is not missing anything. Heilberg grins and yawns. Sneisser puts his spectacles on his nose, and nobody will ever remember him. (p. 92)

While Raskolnikov's confrontation with the two women results in the regeneration of his will to live (*Crime and Punishment*, p. 177), Abramson's exchange with the old woman points in the opposite direction. By giving away his salary, Abramson actually gives up his previous identity, but he does not gain a new one. His generosity does not bring him back to life, but symbolizes his giving up on life.

That this difference is not accidental can be learned from the attributes employed by the authors in qualifying their respective agents of change. Dostoyevsky describes Duklida as "young and good looking," and even her voice is "still very clear and musical" (p. 176); the woman Abramson meets is old, drunk, and inarticulate. The definition of her futile existence — "selling her worn out body for a few pennies and some drops of alcohol" (Brenner,

11. The paradoxical characteristic of Dostoyevsky's bridge scene was noticed also by A. Cohen (1972, p. 212), but he does not recognize the parallel paradox in Brenner's story, which is meant to reject Dostoyevsky's illogical optimism. Even though Cohen deals with Brenner's ambivalent relations with Dostoyevsky's belief in metaphysical redemption, he relegates it to Brenner's later writings, and does not apply it to the portrayal of Abramson.

1961, p. 92) — does not allow, in my mind, for the affirmative interpretation implied by Bakon. By addressing the drunk prostitute as “my sister,” Abramson does not grant preference to “this degree of sub-existence” (Bakon, 1973, p. 276), but rather admits his own failure and meaninglessness. The familial bond between them is that of failure. They both fail to exercise their human free will, they both refuse to take responsibility for their condition: the old woman escapes into alcoholism, the young writer will later escape into insanity.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Abramson’s “new” life does not bring him any peace of mind. Since he writes in Russian and in Hebrew simultaneously (in Russian — professionally, and in Hebrew — privately, in his diary), his “socialistic” stage could be seen as the harmonious coexistence he had originally set out to achieve.

Even if for the meantime he is not, and cannot be, in perfect harmony, his desire to achieve it is very great . . . only one question was raised in his mind: is there hope to remove the “point,” and to reconcile the oppositions? (chapter 2, pp. 62–63)

But the superficial reconciliation is shattered from within by gnawing doubts and inner conflicts. Typically enough, Abramson’s guilt complex takes the form of the Hebrew idiom *səhora bənapši*, (literally meaning “using one’s soul as merchandise,” that is, “selling oneself”), which brings to mind the description of the old prostitute:

What am I doing here? Perhaps I cling to *this* only out of fear of the *implied*? (Am I) *trading my soul*?? (chapter 20, p. 96; emphasis in the original.)

The last idiom brings out the connotation of “disloyalty,” “betrayal,” a “sellout,” which can also be found in the semantic field of the Hebrew term for prostitution. It is not surprising then, that under the weight of such self-accusation, Abramson soon loses control over his delicate balance, and completely surrenders himself to the deadly tendency first outlined on the bridge.

#### IV. Summary

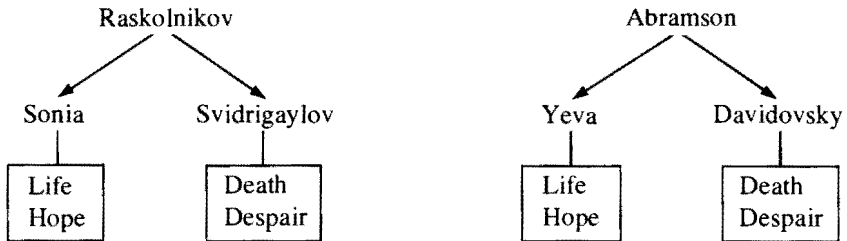
The above juxtaposition of the two works points to an intriguing case of literary affinity. There is room to argue that Brenner was inspired by Dos-

12. In the framework of this interpretation it would seem hard to accept Bakon’s argument for the myth of the death and rebirth of the hero (Bakon, 1973, pp. 276, 279). Moreover, the final irony of the scene is not directed at the old prostitute, nor at the hero’s futile rejuvenation (pp. 277, 278). It rather reflects the protagonist’s self-awareness of his inability to resolve his problem. Bakon’s wording “Life, any life is preferable to a meaningless piece of dust” (p. 276) is not supported by the text. The idea of becoming “a meaningless piece of dust” is indeed revolting and frightening, but life itself is no less meaningless. There is actually no preference on Abramson’s part, only the realization that he is unable to act in the same way his friend Davidovsky is able to (Brenner, 1961, p. 93).

toyevsky's themes and concerns, but rejected the solution offered in *Crime and Punishment*. Metaphysical consolation is not an option available to Brenner's protagonist; Abramson is called upon for self-reliance, but cannot live up to it, and hence his tragic fate.

Nevertheless, Brenner cleverly borrows Dostoyevsky's basic narrative plan, thus challenging the Dostoyevskian message from within. This Janus-faced affinity can best be demonstrated by charting out the parallel structures and their different semantic investments.

The underlying structure of both plots consists of the traditional struggle between the forces of life and death, or hope and despair. In both cases, the positive agent is a woman, the negative is a man, and the protagonist is torn between them:



Despite the common structure, the two novels convey different messages, since the contradicting forces are imbedded with different semantic meanings. The positive pole represented by Sonia is the metaphysical consolation, whereas Yeva speaks for Russian Socialism; Davidovsky's nihilism is qualified as aristocratic and heroic, while Svidrigaylov's is viewed as morally corrupt, even though somewhat attractive.

In both narratives, however, the *bridge scene* functions as a turning point in the struggle between the opposing poles. Furthermore, the dramatic impact of both scenes is achieved by means of a logical paradox. In each case the outcome is different from the expectations raised at the beginning of the scene, and foretells the direction the plot is going to take. Raskolnikov experiences despair and revulsion at the sight of the suicide attempt, but leaves the bridge full of the will to live, which finally brings about his spiritual resurrection. Abramson experiences compassion and refuses to part with life, but leaves the bridge full

of despair and resignation—a forewarning of his future spiritual death. Thus, for Raskolnikov, the reversal is:

Negation (despair)



Affirmation (will to live)

and for Abramson, the reversal is:

Affirmation (compassion)



Negation (despair)

This tension between the opposing forces of life and death is the kind of contradiction Lévy-Strauss considers to be the common reduced structure of all myth. In his reconstruction of the meaning of myth, all mythic thoughts strive to reconcile the unmediated oppositions man perceives in life, the most obvious of them being Life and Death. Since there is no possible mediation between them, they will be replaced by another pair of oppositions, and yet another, until a pair which can be reconciled is to be found:

Mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation . . . two opposite terms with no intermediary, always tend to be replaced by two equivalent terms which allow a third one as a mediator. (Lévy-Strauss, 1955, p. 439)

If we apply this definition to Dostoyevsky's novel, we can conceive of "Crime" and "Punishment" as the unmediated opposites representing Death and Life (or despair and hope), respectively (Holquist, 1973, p. 117). Dostoyevsky's symbols of "Disease" and "Health" might seem to be the proper choices to close the chain of substitutions, since they can be mediated by "Cure," which indeed is the solution offered in the novel.

The same chain of substitutions does not work, however, in "Missabib lannəqudda." Despite the similar symbolic use of Disease (Abramson's headaches), Brenner is unable to conjure up the miraculous cure. Unlike Dostoyevsky, he seems to say that the contradictions faced by his protagonist are insoluble. The traditional mythical answer of full reconciliation is denied here, as was also noted by Lévy-Strauss (1955, p. 444):

The purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction—an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real.

To sum up: "Missabib lannəqudda" differs from *Crime and Punishment* not only in the specific substitution it offers for the initial oppositions, but also in

its final statement. The *myth-like* belief in the possibility of cure is replaced here by a *tragic awareness*: there is no way out of the human predicament.<sup>13</sup>

In order to mark this divergence, Brenner reversed the dynamics of his narration. In contradistinction to Raskolnikov, Abramson moves from the positive pole of his contradiction (Yeva) towards the negative one (Davidovsky). The bridge scene is a central signifier of this reversal, as is the replacement of mental deterioration for physical recovery.

13. It should be noted, however, that Brenner's position is somewhat softened in his later works, where he endows the human condition with some "redeeming features."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bakon, Y. 1973. "Hamma'amad 'al haggešer." *Ha-Sifrut*, April: 275–281.  
 ———. 1975. *Brenner hacca'ir* II. Tel Aviv.
- Brenner, Y. H. 1961. "Missabiḅ lannəqudda." *Kol kitḅey Brenner* I, pp. 60–103. Tel Aviv.  
 ———. 1967. *Kol kitḅey Brenner* III. Tel Aviv.
- Cohen, A. 1972. *Yəcirato hassiprutit šel Y.H. Brenner*. Tel Aviv.
- Dostoyevsky, F. 1966. *Crime and Punishment*. Tr. David Magarshack. Baltimore.  
 ———. 1967. "The Notebooks for *Crime and Punishment*." Ed. and Tr. Edward Wasiolek. Chicago.
- Friedman, A. D. 1920. "Y. H. Brenner vəgibborav." *Hattəqura* V:397–447.
- Gibian, G. 1961. "Traditional Symbolism." *Crime and Punishment and the Critics*, pp. 77–89. Ed. E. Wasiolek. San Francisco.
- Gnessin, U. N. 1946. *Kitḅey U. N. Gnessin* III. Tel Aviv.
- Holquist, J. M. 1973. "Disease as Dialectic in *Crime and Punishment*." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Crime and Punishment*, pp. 109–118. Ed. R. L. Jackson. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.
- Lévy-Strauss, C. 1955. "The Structural Study of Myth." *Journal of American Folklore*, LXXVIII. 270:428–444.