The flood in the heart of Dostoyevsky

Dostoevsky is a Russian writer who deeply influenced by Christianity. Figuring out Dostoevsky's religious views is necessary to interpret his works. This paper tries to analyze the water imagery in *Crime and Punishment*, referring to *The Bible*, to explore Dostoevsky's deep understanding of Christian theology.

The prototype criticism theory was popular in the twentieth century. Northrop Frye believed that *The Bible* is the theoretical starting point of the mythological prototype. He argued that the source of literary evolution is myths, including the mythology in the Bible. The imagery in *The Bible* have been borrowed by the literature of the later world, which has been used symbolically.

According to its authors, *The Bible* summarized the history of mankind, with specific images appearing throughout and functioning symbolically. The *New Testament* and *The Old Testament* are both of mythological nature and provide different representations of faith. Dostoevsky reconstructed these prototypical themes and imagery, including the water imagery, reflecting his deep thinking in religion.

Water represents purification*.* In *Numbers 19,* the community of Israel used water for the purification ceremony. “To remove the defilement, put some of the ashes from the burnt purification offering in a jar, and pour fresh water over them.” In *Crime and Punishment,* the water prototype also has purification function. Raskolnikov carefully washed the blood on his axe for up to three minutes and threw the stolen goods into the river after the crime, which symbolized that he was trying to wash away his sins. Millions of drops dripped on Svidrigailov’s head before his suicide, which also represented purification.

Water represents rebirth or new life. In *Exodus,* when Israelites were almost dying of thirst, God told Moses to put a twig into the sea water and the water became cold and sweet. Then, they travelled on to an oasis called Elim. Without the appearance of water in the desert, Israelites would probably die. This is similar to the day dream of Raskolnikov when he was ill and dying. “He fancied that he was in Africa, in Egypt, in some sort of oasis . . . But he was drinking water from a spring which flowed gurgling close by.” Raskonikov got a fever after his crime and dreamed of drinking cold and blue water needed by a person with fever, which was like the discovery of water in the dessert above in *Exodus.* He lay in bed with general weakness and malaise for a long time but recovered his strength and senses after the dream. This scene implied that he hoped to regain something, his spiritual life, which he lost in the murder.

In Frye's opinion, the flood itself can be interpreted as a demonic image in the sense of the wrath and revenge of God while it can also be interpreted as an eternal life image, depending on whether we view it from the point of view of Noah, or from all others. When Moses led the Israelites out of the Red Sea of Egypt, he, with the help of the Lord, separated the Red Sea with the rods, forming the way for the Israelites to pass, after which the Red Sea drowned the Egyptian pursuers. The story of the Red Sea is similar to the story of the flood. Those who were chosen by God were saved while those who were opposed to God were punished. According to Frye’s theory, the passage of the Red Sea and the flood can further symbolize the sacred baptism and salvation. The baptized people were symbolically submerged in the water and the flood. When they woke up, they would reach the other side, the new world.

Similarly, in *Crime and Punishment,* Dostoevsky’s water imagery can be interpreted as a demonic image while it can also be interpreted as baptism and salvation, depending on the context and who was related to the water imagery. When Raskolnikov saw a tall woman jumping into the river, “the filthy water parted and swallowed up its victim for a moment”. “Filthy” and “swallowed” showed the power of destruction. The tall woman became the victim of the water, like the Egyptian army and those people out of the ark. If Raskolnikov, following the tall woman, invoked death for her relief and deliverance by jumping into the river, he would not have the chance to get salvation later. Lots of water imagery appear before Svidrigailov’s suicide. "The water fell not in drops, but beat on the earth in streams . . . Svidrigailov was wet through . . . The rain had ceased and there was a roaring wind . . . He began shivering, and for one moment he gazed at the black waters." Perhaps this rain, like the rain sent by God in the flood, cleaned the city and purified people full of crime. Unlike the flood story in *The Bible*, because the rain poured down throughout the city and even a person full of crime like Svidrigailov was soaked with water, everyone who was willing to contact with God in the city would get a chance to purification and salvation. However, after the rain, Svidrigailov thought: "I never have liked water . . . even in a landscape." At his end of life, he still refused to accept God’s salvation and failed to repent for his crime. Thus, the rain is reminiscent of the flood: both purify and condemn, the flood by killing those standing with evil, the rain by cleansing those who accept salvation. Because Svidrigailov refused salvation, the rain became a prelude of his destruction.

Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov were comparative figures. They both killed people and had sins on themselves, both struggled to get rid of their pain of the abyss brought by their crimes, both were helpless and lived on the periphery of suicide. However, Raskolnikov finally received salvation while Svidrigailov failed. The different views of water in their eyes uncovered different attitudes to faith from Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov, which implied the reason for the different endings of them.

Raskolnikov’s oasis dream was bright, open, beautiful, and pleasant. “And it was so cool, it was wonderful, wonderful, blue, cold water running among the parti-colored stones and over the clean sand which glistened here and there like gold…” The “glistened sand” and “parti-colored stones” shaped a bright image, the double use of “wonderful” emphasized his joy when he saw water in his dream, and the color “blue” conveyed Raskolnikov’s feeling of relaxation.

However, the water image in Svidrigailov’s dream before his suicide was dark, dirty, and disgusting. "By morning it will be swirling down the street in the lower parts, flooding the basements and cellars. The cellar rats will swim out, and men will curse in the rain and wind as they drag their rubbish to their upper storeys . . .” The dark basements and cellars, the rats and rubbish, and the curse, making people sick and fear, were driven by the water in Svidrigailov’s perspective.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).” Those who repented their sins were saved by water while those who refused to repent were punished. Since water represents salvation and baptism by Frye’s theory, these different unconscious associations related to water by Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov reflect their different attitudes to salvation. Raskolnikov saw water as a beautiful thing for the most of time in his life, which meant that he was baptized and willing to repent. His desire to get salvation and abandonment of suicide gave him the chance to undertake punishment and receive his salvation. In contrast, Svidrigailov’s dislike of water implied that he refused the baptism and the salvation. He tried to, if ever, make up his crime by shooting himself. But this was a cheap punishment would never earn him an opportunity to be redeemed. At the moment he pulled the trigger, the door of redemption closed forever. Although Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov shared similar life patterns, their different attitudes towards baptism and salvation led to their different choices at the turning point of their lives, when they were on the edge of suicide, where Raskolnikov headed for salvation but Svidrigailov headed for destruction.

The floods in the Bible had exterminated all creatures outside Noah's ark. Then, above the water was the new baptized world while below the water was the old world full of crime. But, undoubtedly, the fish in the water were exempted from the destruction and were blocked from the new world. In the representative works of Dostoevsky's, most of the main characters were in poverty and distress, living in the old world like those big fish lived underwater. They desired to get out of the old world full of crime and enter the baptized new world.

In conclusion, this article analyzes the water imagery in *Crime and Punishment* by mapping them to those in *The Bible* and then comparing those related to Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov. Through his ingenious reconstruction of water imagery, Dostoevsky says that even a man full of evils and crimes could receive salvation as long as he were willing to seek it with pious attitude. Perhaps the flood in the heart of Dostoyevsky never receded.