

THE CHARACTER OF KOLIA KRASOTKIN IN "THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV": A SYMBOL OF YOUNG RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA AMIDST THE IDEOLOGICAL WAVE OF THE 19TH CENTURY

O PERSONAGEM KOLIA KRASOTKIN EM OS IRMÃOS KARAMÁZOV: UM SÍMBOLO DA JOVEM INTELIGÊNCIA RUSSA EM MEIO À ONDA IDEOLÓGICA DO SÉCULO XIX

QUYNH THI NGUYEN

University of Social Sciences and
Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City,
Vietnam

quynhnguyennv28@gmail.com

Received: 28 Apr 2025

Accepted: 29 May 2025

Published: 31 Jul 2025



Abstract: The character Kolya Krasotkin in Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov" appears infrequently, but is strongly connected to the ideological transformations of Russia during the period of transitioning development models after the Peasant Reform of 1861 (Nguyen et al., 2024). In this context, even a child can mature prematurely due to the rapid impact of social realities. Kolya can be seen as a spiritual symbol of the young Russian intelligentsia during this stage of ideological ferment. This period was characterized by a vibrant atmosphere with an interweaving of different, even opposing, intellectual currents; specifically, Western philosophical trends of the 18th-19th centuries, especially French Enlightenment thought, including Voltaire and

Diderot. Throughout "The Brothers Karamazov," Kolya Krasotkin is depicted as an adolescent archetype with an aspiration to reach intellectual maturity, yet still wavering and impulsive in his choice of ideals. This choice lies between scientific materialism, atheistic thought, and religious faith, influenced by Alyosha Karamazov. Through Kolya's case, Dostoevsky conveys a profound philosophical message about the mood and aspirations of the young Russian generation in their ideological choices during this historical transitional period: they might go astray due to "rationalist illusions" but can also find the light of truth if they learn to reconcile reason with faith. Kolya Krasotkin is often considered a minor character and has not been deeply analyzed. This article aims to contribute to the study of Kolya Krasotkin's role as a philosophical symbol in the context of contemporary Russia. He is a contradictory figure: both superficial and profound, both upright, benevolent, and altruistic, yet also extreme, embodying a naive voluntarism in his worldview.

Keywords: Kolya Krasotkin. The Brothers Karamazov. Rationalism. Atheism. Utopian Socialism. 19th-Century Russian Literary Philosophy.

Resumo: O personagem Kolia Krasotkin, de Os Irmãos Karamázov, de Fiódor Dostoiévski, aparece poucas vezes, mas está fortemente vinculado às transformações ideológicas da Rússia durante o período de transição dos modelos de desenvolvimento após a Reforma dos Servos de 1861 (Nguyen et al., 2024). Nesse contexto, até mesmo uma criança pode amadurecer precocemente em virtude do impacto rápido das realidades sociais. Kolia pode ser visto como um símbolo espiritual da jovem intelligentsia russa nessa fase de efervescência ideológica. Esse período foi marcado por uma atmosfera vibrante, com o entrelaçamento de correntes intelectuais distintas e até opostas; em

especial, as tendências filosóficas ocidentais dos séculos XVIII e XIX, sobretudo o pensamento iluminista francês, incluindo Voltaire e Diderot. Ao longo de *Os Irmãos Karamázov*, Kolia Krasotkin é retratado como um arquétipo adolescente que aspira à maturidade intelectual, mas ainda vacila e se mostra impulsivo na escolha de seus ideais. Essa escolha oscila entre o materialismo científico, o pensamento ateísta e a fé religiosa, influenciada por Aliócha Karamázov. Por meio de Kolia, Dostoiévski transmite uma profunda mensagem filosófica sobre o espírito e as aspirações da jovem geração russa em suas escolhas ideológicas nesse período histórico de transição: eles podem se perder devido a “ilusões racionalistas”, mas também encontrar a luz da verdade se aprenderem a conciliar razão e fé. Kolia Krasotkin costuma ser considerado um personagem secundário e ainda não foi amplamente analisado. Este artigo busca contribuir para o estudo do papel de Kolia Krasotkin como símbolo filosófico no contexto da Rússia contemporânea de Dostoiévski. Ele é uma figura contraditória: superficial e profunda ao mesmo tempo; íntegro, benevolente e altruísta, mas também extremado, incorporando um voluntarismo ingênuo em sua visão de mundo.

Palavras-chave: Kolia Krasotkin. *Os Irmãos Karamázov*. Racionalismo. Ateísmo. Socialismo Utópico. Filosofia Literária Russa do Século XIX.

1. Introduction

After the Peasant Reform of 1861, Russia gradually drew closer to the Western world, absorbing progressive and revolutionary ideas such as 18th-century French Enlightenment thought, rationalism, utopian socialism, and atheism (Nguyen et al., 2025). During Dostoevsky's time, various philosophical and socio-political movements and doctrines were present in Russia, including Slavophilism, Pochvennichestvo, Westernizers, Liberalism, the Petrashevsky group, Narodnichestvo, Nihilism, Anarchism, Cosmism, Tolstoyism, Utopian socialism, Positivism, Egoism, Utilitarianism. Amidst these numerous intellectual currents, the historical mission of the Russian intelligentsia was to select suitable doctrines to awaken the Russian nation in the process of seizing new opportunities. Berdyaev, in his book "Spiritual Crisis of the Intelligentsia" (Nicolay Alexandrovich Berdyaev, *Spiritual Crisis of the Intelligentsia*, S-Petersburg, 1910, pp. 26–29), wrote about the path of seeking God as the redeemer for a new Russia. This was a path of mystification—a combination of Christian faith and the Russian spirit. However, there was also a great attraction from the West, aiming to "neutralize" Slavophilism, or Russian Nationalism. In this historical current, this combination focused on typical highlights: 18th-century French Enlightenment thought, early 19th-century utopian socialism, and Russian thought (radical democratic, utopian socialist, and political nihilism). The writer contemporary with Dostoevsky, I.S. Turgenev, in his work "Fathers and Children" (1862), described the new wave of young Russians after the reform through the character Yevgeny Bazarov, a nihilist doctor who advocated prioritizing utility over beauty and "negated the value of all laws except the laws of natural science".

In Dostoevsky's work "Crime and Punishment" (1866), the character Raskolnikov is a young intellectual caught up in atheistic thought and rational egoism; he commits a crime in the name of a personal "doctrine" before returning to faith.

In his last great work belonging to the group of five major novels, Fyodor Dostoevsky portrayed two young characters as a "re-evaluation" of his arduous ideological journey from utopian socialism to a "return" to the true essence of the Russian soul, where national consciousness intersects with the absorption of new ideas from outside. "The Brothers Karamazov" (1878–1880) systematizes Dostoevsky's creative process and ideological transformation, in which he depicts Russian realism and opposes nihilism and utopian socialism, with somewhat harsh judgments expressed through the character Kolya, particularly in the dialogues between Kolya and Alyosha. The adolescent character Kolya

(Nikolai) Krasotkin—though appearing infrequently—carries profound symbolic meaning. Kolya Krasotkin, nearly 14 years old, is an intelligent and very progressive boy, who “shows himself superior, conceited, but is a good friend, not arrogant”. However, he is also “mischievous,” “daring, reckless,” “strange, eccentric, ostentatious” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p.558, 559). This contradictory personality, coupled with an upbringing not very strict from his mother, led Kolya to be influenced by extremist ideas from “unorthodox teachers”. Kolya appears as a “little Bazarov” (the central character in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* (1862)). Kolya represents a new archetype of young intellectual—skeptical, rationalist, influenced by nihilism like Bazarov, but still with an opportunity to be reformed and guided towards inner truth, unlike the hardened Bazarov. Kolya is an embodiment of the student intelligentsia absorbing the chaotic contemporary Western ideas. He openly identifies himself as a “socialist” (but misunderstands the nature of socialism) and proudly declares his philosophy of “rational egoism” to Alyosha. In his conversation with Alyosha, Kolya dismisses history as “the study of a pile of human stupidities” and asserts that he “only respects mathematics and natural sciences” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, 594). This declaration shows that he has fully absorbed the extreme scientific thought of Russian critics of the 1860s, from Dmitry Pisarev to the social-democrats of the Russian Populists and Utopian Socialism—nihilists with the name “Nikolai” such as Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Nikolai Dobrolyubov, Nikolai Mikhailovsky. In his first conversation with Alyosha, Kolya expressed pride in his name Nikolai and seemed both pleased and surprised that Alyosha “treated him entirely as an equal” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p.580, 581). Kolya represents both Dostoevsky’s hope and anxiety for Russia’s future, concerning whether young people with great potential will follow Ivan Karamazov’s path or Alyosha Karamazov’s. This is the fundamental question of this article.

2. Literature Review

The topic of the influence of European ideological currents on 19th-century Russian intelligentsia has attracted many scholars. Gary Saul Morson (2023), in his work *Wonder Confronts Certainty*, outlined the opposition between two Russian cultural traditions: on one side, great writers (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, etc.) grappling with moral-spiritual questions, and on the other, revolutionary-democratic intellectuals like Belinsky and Chernyshevsky. In this context, *The Brothers Karamazov* is a necessary response to extremist thought and calls for a return to life’s true values. Morson views the character Kolya Krasotkin as a “caricature of

the grotesque ignorance” of this extremist intellectual class—a 13-year-old boy enthusiastically debating various “ideologies” that he only vaguely understands. More interestingly, Golstein (2023) notes that Kolya’s name (short for Nikolai) coincides with the baptismal name of a series of progressive intellectual leaders such as Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Mikhailovsky, implying that Dostoevsky intentionally fashioned Kolya to embody an entire generation of Russian intelligentsia of his time.

Regarding the character Kolya Krasotkin, it is necessary to mention the work of Richard Avramenko & Lee Trepanier (2013), which analyzes *The Brothers Karamazov* in relation to the Russian context of the 1860s. These authors view this work as a systematization of Dostoevsky’s ideological path. Accordingly, Kolya Krasotkin is interpreted as a character belonging to the second generation of nihilism-atheism, following Smerdyakov and Ivan Karamazov.

Scholars such as Robert Louis Jackson (1986) and Robin Miller (2008) have noted the role of children in Dostoevsky’s novels, especially the “purity and hope” they represent in contrast to the adult world. Kolya is a unique case: although innocent, he has prematurely “poisoned” himself with adult ideas, becoming a philosophical test for the influence of atheism on a pure soul.

Bruce Coffin (2004), in his article “Kolya Krasotkin and the Importance of Community...”, suggested that Kolya’s story is a microcosm reflecting the spiritual conflict of the Karamazov family. Specifically, “his progress against the dark forces within himself demonstrates a level of ‘enlightenment’ and ‘salvation’ that the more central characters in the novel have not achieved”. This observation implies that Kolya is actually a key factor in Dostoevsky’s intended ideological message: he represents the next generation that has a chance to overcome the struggles that the previous generation (Ivan, Dmitry) left unresolved.

From the above studies, a common theme is that the young characters in Dostoevsky’s works are all embodiments of the East-West ideological conflict within the Russian soul—between, on the one hand, Western-influenced materialistic and atheistic reason, and, on the other hand, traditional spiritual and moral values. However, in 19th-century Russian philosophy and literature, there had never been an adolescent character with such symbolic significance as Kolya Krasotkin.

Terrence W. Tilley (2023) (quoted in Vladimir Golstein’s review) also emphasizes Kolya’s “transformation”—from being a “young disciple of Rakitin” to being transformed by Alyosha. However, these studies have only presented conclusions without tracing the detailed philosophical-cultural factors that shaped Kolya’s character. This article will sketch a comprehensive picture of Kolya Krasotkin: his background, philosophical influences,

ideological development, and symbolic meaning. This article asserts that Kolya Krasotkin is a complex philosophical symbol: he is both a product of 19th-century Western European intellectual movements and Dostoevsky's solution to that spiritual crisis—a symbol of the hope for reconciliation between Western reason and Russian faith.

3. Content

Kolya Krasotkin – “The Child Rationalist” in *The Brothers Karamazov*

The character Kolya Krasotkin is described by Dostoevsky in the section “Boys” of *The Brothers Karamazov*, placed in relation to children of his age group, 13-14 years old. However, this boy possesses extraordinary qualities, being quite mature and superior for his age, with cleverness, tenacity, audacity, quick wit, often appearing cold and even mischievous (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 557). Kolya is willing to bet on lying face down between railroad tracks as a train passes, to prove to the youngsters (ages 10-14) that he is not a braggart or boastful, and that he does not want to be considered a child, unfit to be their friend. This calculated recklessness, or “mischievousness,” astonishes and impresses the children. Even though Kolya's face was “white as a sheet” after returning home and he had a slight fever the next day, “spiritually, he was very cheerful, elated,” feeling the joy of a victor—triumphing over himself, over fear, and proving his courage. His daring acts, such as lying between railroad tracks or firing a homemade cannon into a neighbor's house, not only reflect youthful impetuosity but also a challenge to traditional values that deny individuals opportunities for self-expression. Dostoevsky analyzes Kolya's character as a model of the contradictions in young people facing the choice of their ideal path. Kolya possesses a tolerant, altruistic heart, ready to forgive those who hurt him, as in the case of Ilyusha (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 579). He also longs to be a leader in his group, desiring respect from his peers and adoration from younger children. However, this symbol gradually morphs into a small tyrant, at times even disrespectful. He teases elders and speaks rudely to people at the market. This reflects a paradox: the young intelligentsia, despite speaking much of freedom and equality, sometimes exhibit authoritarianism and triumph in real life—just as Dostoevsky warned about “youth leaders” in revolutionary movements. Here, Kolya likes to lead but lacks moral guidance, leading to deviations. His mother (Mrs. Krasotkin, a widow) loves her son but is not meticulous about his studies, unaware of what books a boy his age should read, allowing Kolya to pore over sensitive ideas from his deceased father's bookshelf. Consequently, Kolya, nearly 14 years old, already has a clear ideology: he identifies himself as an “atheist” and “socialist”.

In a conversation with his peer Smurov, Kolya explains socialism as “everyone being equal, property being common, abolition of marriage, and religion and law being optional for anyone” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, 570). Kolya declares himself an “incorrigible socialist” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 597) but is reminded by Alyosha of his youthful naivety: “When you are older, you will see how age affects one’s opinions. I think you are not speaking your own words” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 597, 598). This implies that Kolya’s views are merely a collection of clichés, a form of utopian socialism based on Fourier’s ideas that Dostoevsky himself once pursued in the 1840s. Believing in socialism, Kolya tells himself he “must know how to talk to the common people” and “acknowledge the wisdom of the people” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 571, 574). Yet, he despises peasants and advocates for gender inequality (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 574, 599), while the utopian socialist Fourier fought for gender equality and even coined the term “feminism”. Thus, Kolya’s utopian socialism is linked with naive and vulgar voluntarism.

In his religious views, Kolya clearly demonstrates a young person’s atheistic stance. Speaking with Alyosha, Kolya believes that God is a product of imagination, fear, and cognitive helplessness: “God is only a hypothesis... but... I admit that God is necessary to maintain... world order... if there is no God, one must invent one...” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 597). This argument is not far from Feuerbach’s views. However, Kolya, despite having read something about Voltaire and 18th-century French Enlightenment thinkers, showed confusion about Voltaire’s religious views. Voltaire opposed the Church and sharply criticized the clergy, pointing out ignorance and moral degradation due to superstition, but still considered God a spiritual symbol. Kolya reads Voltaire’s “Candide” (1759)—a work that exposed the falsehood of miracles and those who exploit faith to deceive people. Nevertheless, he believes that “Voltaire did not believe in God but still loved humanity,” leading Alyosha to gently remark: “Voltaire believed in God, but only a little, it seems” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 597). Kolya interprets this subtlety as Alyosha “lacking resolve when expressing an opinion about Voltaire”.

At the same time, Kolya labels Alyosha as a mystic and wishes to “cure” Alyosha of God and other such things (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 597). This is an influence from materialistic atheists, from Diderot to Holbach. For them, miracles are deception, and religion, in the end, is merely a tool of the autocratic state used to oppress the people. Having read and assimilated these views, Kolya explicitly states to Alyosha: “Christianity only serves the rich and powerful, to keep the lower classes in bondage” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 598).

Extreme rationalism, in fact, turns out to be an expression of irrational thinking. Alyosha's words reveal regret for a boy full of enthusiasm but appearing wavering and lacking proper direction in his choice of ideals: "I am saddened that such a lovely nature as yours, which has not yet begun to live, has been corrupted by crude irrationality" (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 599).

However, Alyosha's sincere exhortation shows that, through the two characters Kolya and Alyosha, Dostoevsky expresses a humanistic idea of freedom and an aspiration for ideals, which were prominent characteristics of young Russians in the 1840s-1860s. Russia at that time, besides Ivan and Rakitin, also had enthusiastic individuals who asserted their self-reliance and refused to accept the shackles of the autocratic political system that bound them. Kolya's ideology is temporarily distorted, but it is a distortion in the process of seeking a brighter path. That is a fundamental difference between Kolya and his peers (Kolya is more advanced in his thinking), as well as those of the older generation, including Rakitin. Dostoevsky skillfully portrayed Kolya's complex yet clear psychological development in his attitude towards Ilyusha, from misunderstanding to forgiveness and deep empathy. The humanistic nature of this development foreshadows a bright future for Russia on the eve of historical changes.

In summary, with characteristics such as intelligence, fondness for reasoning, intellectual self-esteem, contempt for faith, and being captivated by new scientific-political ideological systems (atheism, socialism, rational egoism), Kolya Krasotkin emerges with all the attributes of a "child rationalist". However, what differentiates him is that he still retains a benevolent heart and has not completely lost his moral intuition. This makes him a living example of Dostoevsky's argument: human beings are born good, but misguided reason can corrupt that goodness if faith does not guide them. Kolya is only 13 years old, his life has "not really begun," so he still has an opportunity to be molded. Dostoevsky places much hope in this character, which will become clearer when Kolya is compared with his "elders" Bazarov and Raskolnikov below.

Influence of 18th–19th Century Western Thought on Kolya Krasotkin

In "The Brothers Karamazov," through the narrative, Dostoevsky points out the imprint of Western philosophical-political thought on Kolya Krasotkin. This includes 18th-century French Enlightenment thought, particularly Voltaire's skepticism and materialism-atheism; the atheistic and nihilistic ideas of Russian democratic-revolutionaries, notably Nikolai Chernyshevsky; and utopian socialism, primarily Fourier's ideas, which Dostoevsky himself absorbed in the 1840s.

On Voltaire's influence: In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky mentions that Kolya sometimes would not leave his reading room, familiarizing himself with various ideas, and admiring Voltaire for his “love of humanity” despite not believing in God. Kolya quickly witnesses injustices (such as his poor friend Ilyusha being humiliated and then falling ill and dying). As a result, he loses faith in the goodness of the world, but instead of questioning optimistic philosophy, Kolya chooses to doubt the existence of God. It can be said that Voltaire instilled in Kolya a mocking skepticism: Voltaire is famous for his maxim “crush the infamous” (*Écrasez l'infâme*) (Voltaire, 1953, *Correspondance de Voltaire*, Vol. 20, Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, p. 267). This refers to his desire to eliminate the fanatical dogmas of the Church. Kolya, from a child's perspective, also wants to “crush” what he considers superstition, albeit in a more childish way. Although Kolya is an atheist, he possesses a benevolent heart and despises injustice. At his friend's funeral, Kolya tightly embraces Ilyusha's father and sobs uncontrollably. This action aligns with Voltaire's spirit of “tolerance”—loving humanity more than adhering to dogma: “We have enough religion to hate and persecute one another, but not enough to love and help one another” (Voltaire, 1763, *Traité sur la tolérance*, Gallimard, Paris, p. 152). This action demonstrates that a benevolent and altruistic child like Kolya can be an atheist without being extreme.

On Chernyshevsky's influence: Regarding the influence of Chernyshevsky's revolutionary, atheistic, and nihilistic thought on Kolya, his work *What Is To Be Done?* (1863) can be mentioned. This work advocated an ideal “cooperative” model where people live in equality, work collectively, and achieve sexual and women's liberation—which fundamentally aligns with what Kolya naively describes when he talks about “everyone being equal, no one having private property”. Kolya's mother in the story forbade him from reading this “dangerous” book, but Kolya seems to have grasped some of its ideas through Rakitin. Kolya calls himself an “incorrigible socialist” (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 597). This phrase recalls the character Rakhmetov in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?*, a resilient individual who adopted an ascetic lifestyle to firmly adhere to his ideals: “He did not sleep on soft beds like everyone else. He lay on a hard plank, studded with nails, believing that he needed to accustom himself to pain to not be weak in the face of sacrifice” (Chernyshevsky, 1989, p. 178).

Although Kolya is far from being like Rakhmetov, his self-proclaimed label shows his yearning to become a “revolutionary hero” according to that literary-philosophical model. Furthermore, the philosophy of “enlightened egoism” that he champions is precisely the moral cornerstone that Chernyshevsky promoted in his work. Dostoevsky surely saw the

danger when such a philosophy fell into the hands of children: it could become an excuse for them to be egoistic in a negative sense (only concerned with self-gratification). Kolya reveres empirical science and disdains history and religion. In “The Brothers Karamazov,” both Rakitin and Kolya are products of the anti-artistic, science-worshipping trend—an extreme of the rationalist generation. Chernyshevsky’s ideas also influenced Kolya in his contempt for traditional authority, demonstrated by his arrogant attitude towards teachers and teasing of local people. Fortunately, Kolya met Alyosha—who promptly showed him an alternative model of authority: a moral authority that is not coercive or punitive, but rather one that reforms through love and equality (Alyosha talks to Kolya as an older friend, not lecturing). Thanks to this, Kolya began to respect and heed Alyosha’s advice—something no one else had managed to make him do before.

On the influence of utopian socialism: Kolya assimilated this doctrine through Fourier, but it was a hasty, uncritical assimilation, seemingly closer to a crude, leveling socialism, the kind of “barracks socialism” that Plato described in his “Republic”. This is because Fourier did not intend to abolish the family; he merely demanded the elimination of social injustice caused by private property and aimed for a just, egalitarian society based on common ownership as a foundation for economic development.

In summary, the stream of Western thought from Voltaire to Chernyshevsky and utopian socialism has forged Kolya into a rebellious, atheistic, yet altruistic and tolerant individual, imbued with positive humanistic-Enlightenment ideas. Kolya is a contradictory image, embodying a conflict between extremes, the resolution of which requires time and the character’s subsequent “commitment”.

Comparing Kolya Krasotkin and Raskolnikov – Differences in Philosophical Depth

In common, Kolya and Raskolnikov are both young characters created to reflect the conflict between new and old ideas in Russian society. They are intelligent but conceited, dissatisfied with the present, and strongly influenced by Western philosophy. In Raskolnikov’s (23 years old) thought, there is an imprint of atheism and voluntarism, whereby an individual asserts the right to act, ready to kill others for self-conceived purposes, regardless of their immoral or unethical nature. In Kolya, this idea has not materialized, but he also exhibits some behaviors that exceed what is permissible for a child, from teasing others to plotting mischief. In both cases, the desire for self-examination and “repentance” is quite evident. Raskolnikov is tormented after his crime, while Kolya suffers from believing he indirectly caused the chain of events that led his friend Ilyusha to become sad and ill.

Although Ilyusha's illness was not actually caused by Kolya, he still blames himself, thinking that if he had reconciled earlier, Ilyusha would not have despaired to the point of self-isolation, sadness, and sickness. This remorse demonstrates that Kolya possesses an intense moral inner life no less than Raskolnikov, differing only in that he did not commit a crime so grave as to warrant legal punishment. In terms of personality, both characters are lonely within their communities. Raskolnikov lives reclusively, constantly preoccupied with his "great mission". Kolya, though surrounded by many younger friends, maintains a solitary stance against the adult world—he has no father, no siblings, and his mother does not grasp his thoughts.

Thus, Raskolnikov and Kolya are souls detached from traditional roots, daringly clinging to new doctrines to find meaning in life, pretending to be cold and distant, yet deep down they are empty and long to connect with others.

Regarding their differences, first, the context and degree of extremism in Raskolnikov and Kolya differ significantly. Raskolnikov in the 1860s (in *Crime and Punishment*, 1865) is much more extreme than Kolya in the 1870s (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1879-1880), which aligns with Dostoevsky's own ideological evolution. While Raskolnikov invokes the symbol of the "extraordinary man" like Napoleon and "cosmic will" à la Schopenhauer, even "will to power" (a concept later developed by Nietzsche, who was born more than 20 years after Dostoevsky), leading him to commit murder, experience remorse, contemplate suicide, and finally cling to Sonya's love and move towards faith, Kolya, fortunately, does not fall into such a tragic and desperate situation. He only dreams of "overthrowing all values," mocks medicine and social sciences, and advocates for the abolition of an unjust society towards people. Yet, he ultimately returns to his conscience and compassion upon witnessing the profound grief of the retired officer at his son Ilyusha's death. The characters' reactions to death also differ in intensity. When Raskolnikov faces the death of the pawnbroker woman he killed, he is horrified by nightmares, leading to remorse and repentance. Kolya, when confronted with Ilyusha's death, no longer displays arrogance or childish defiance; he cries out loudly: "– Is it true that religion says we will all rise from the dead, we will live again and meet each other again, even Ilyushechka?" (Dostoyevsky, 2013, p. 825). That moment is the turning point: the atheistic boy acknowledges his spiritual yearning. This is why Coffin (2004) observed that "Kolya achieves an enlightenment and salvation that other main characters do not reach".

In the narratives of both characters, the role of the guide is subtly arranged by Dostoevsky. Raskolnikov is fortunate to meet Sonya as a spiritual salvation. But Sonya only

saves Raskolnikov through love and endurance; she does not engage him in ideological debate. Kolya, on the other hand, has Alyosha—a special kind of “angelic messenger”: Alyosha is more rational than Sonya, yet as benevolent. Alyosha patiently listens to Kolya boast about all sorts of “isms,” then gently asks questions that make Kolya reconsider. Alyosha’s subtlety, skill, and compassion in his interactions gradually transformed Kolya, making him realize the immaturity of his ideas. If Raskolnikov suffered because no one truly understood or loved him, Kolya received love earlier, even before he fully succumbed to sin. Kolya is like a young sapling that can be bent, and meeting a skilled gardener, he quickly flourishes. It is no coincidence that Dostoevsky introduces Kolya at the end of his creative career: after dissecting so many tragedies, Dostoevsky in his later years offered a solution—that the younger generation like Kolya, if rightly educated through love, would guarantee Russia’s future. Conversely, without such love, they could destroy themselves.

Finally, regarding the symbolism of each character, embedded by Dostoevsky in “The Brothers Karamazov,” a distinction can be observed, tied to Dostoevsky’s ideological journey. Raskolnikov (in *Crime and Punishment*) is a symbol of division and destruction (the name Raskolnikov originates from “raskol,” meaning “schism” or “division”), as well as vague perception and unavoidable consequences. In contrast, Kolya Krasotkin symbolizes a “mirror” reflecting Russia’s future. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky perhaps entrusted the image of Russia’s future to Kolya. A young, talented, daring, but also arrogant, rebellious, and easily misguided Russia. Kolya faces choices, but ultimately chooses to hold Alyosha’s hand before Ilyusha’s stone, symbolizing the choice of faith and love instead of doubt and hatred. Kolya does not die or suffer hard labor in exile; instead, he continues to live among his friends, with the vow “not to forget Ilyusha”—meaning not to forget the lesson of love. The symbol of Kolya thus conveys the message that the young generation may fall due to misguided ideas, but love and faith can bring them back, and they will unite to build a better future. This is Dostoevsky’s profoundly humanistic vision.

Conclusion

Kolya Krasotkin in *The Brothers Karamazov* emerges as an embodiment of 18th-19th century Western European ideological influences through the image of a 19th-century Russian adolescent. Through this work, it can be seen that Dostoevsky constructed Kolya as a “cultural-philosophical mirror” reflecting both the dangers and hopes for the young Russian intelligentsia of his era. On one hand, Kolya demonstrates the powerful allure of

rationalism, atheism, and utopian socialism imported from the West. On the other hand, it is precisely through Kolya's journey that Dostoevsky suggests a positive way out of this spiritual crisis: Kolya is not entirely "possessed" by foreign ideas; he is saved by the love and faith brought by Alyosha. In Kolya, Dostoevsky proves the argument that the inherent nature of the Russian soul (which values emotion and religious faith) can ultimately be reformed from foreign influences if the younger generation is guided by love. Kolya's "humanistic return" implicitly rejects the nihilistic thesis that humans are merely products of circumstance and doctrine: despite being "programmed" by many misguided ideas, Kolya still possesses inner freedom to choose the light. This is a positive message in Dostoevsky's worldview, and for this reason, Kolya Krasotkin holds a unique position in his works—a philosophical symbol of the future, where reason and faith no longer exclude each other but find common ground.

Kolya Krasotkin thus serves as a bridge between two generations of intellectuals in Russian literature—the despairing radicals and those who rediscover hope. Through the character of Kolya, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the penetration of Western thought into the Russian spiritual landscape of the 19th century and Dostoyevsky's literary response to this phenomenon. In today's context, as global "waves of ideology" continue to shape the minds of young people across the globe, the message of Kolya Krasotkin and *The Brothers Karamazov* remains urgently relevant: we must equip the younger generation not only with modern knowledge, but above all with humanistic values and compassion, so they may stand firm against the temptations of extremism in all its forms.

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