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# How Much Room Does a Man Need? Spatial Confinement and Moral Agency in Crime and Punishment, The Dwarf, and The White Tiger

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## ABSTRACT

Across a century and a half of urban modernity, Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment (1866), Cho Se-hŭi's The Dwarf (1978), and Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger (2008) trace impoverished protagonists through rapidly and unevenly modernizing cities: Petersburg, Seoul, and Delhi. Scholarship on these texts has largely asked the question Dostoevsky stages in Razumikhin's quarrel with Porfiry: does an oppressive environment generate crime? This article reframes that controversy. Separating physical space, the structural constraints that turn it into a trap, and the symbols that register its meaning, the study reads the garret, the condemned house, the basement, and the car through Bachelard's vertical house, Bakhtin's threshold, and the world-literary frame of combined and uneven development, testing its reading against each novel's privileged characters. The novels yield three answers: in Dostoevsky space and psyche shape each other; in Cho the trap crushes bodies while the gentlest minds never waver from their gentleness; in Adiga consciousness darkens where darkness confronts the light from which it is excluded. Across all three, confinement is neither necessary nor sufficient for harm; it governs whether harm must trespass into another's space or can be done on ground of one's own, whom it reaches, and who bears its cost.

## KEYWORDS

Spatial trap; confinement; world literature; Crime and Punishment; The Dwarf; The White Tiger

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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## 1. Introduction: How Much Room?

In Part 3, Chapter 5 of Crime and Punishment, Razumikhin bursts into Porfiry's quarters still agitated over the previous evening's debate. He rails against the socialist insistence that "crime is a protest against the abnormality of the social organisation and nothing more"; for such thinkers, "everything is 'the influence of environment,' and nothing else" (Dostoevsky, 1866/2003, Part 3, Chapter 5). Razumikhin's critique offers this study a strong architectural frame: the socialists, he complains, reduce human nature to "the building of walls and the planning of rooms and passages in a phalanstery." Porfiry seems to test Razumikhin's patience, but his real attention is on the guest seated opposite him, Raskolnikov, the murderer he suspects, and it is with that listener in mind that he replies, "environment accounts for a great deal in crime" (Part 3, Chapter 5). The dramatic irony adds significantly to the debate, and it leaves a question that readers have argued over ever since: does the narrow room manufacture the criminal, or does the criminal make his room narrow?

This article puts that question to three novels written across a century and a half. In each, a crisis of conscience unfolds in a confined space within a city undergoing rapid and uneven modernization. Raskolnikov thinks his way toward murder in a garret under the roof of a Petersburg tenement (Dostoevsky, 1866/2003, Part 1, Chapter 1). The dwarf's family loses its home to the redevelopment of Seoul (Cho, 1978/2006, "A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf"). Balram Halwai nurses his rage in a basement beneath his master's tower in Delhi (Adiga, 2008, "The Fourth Night"). Read in that order, the three novels house the poor above, then erase their house, then place them below. I offer this sequence as a pattern among three texts, not as a history of the novel.

The question was old even when Dostoevsky staged it. In 1886 Leo Tolstoy asked, in the title of a short parable, "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" His answer was grimly literal: six feet, the length of a grave (Tolstoy, 1886/1906, section IX). The novels studied here put Tolstoy's question to the city rather than the steppe. Their protagonists do not want more land; they want enough room

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to live as persons. Each novel asks what becomes of conscience when that room is taken away. Marmeladov states the need in Dostoevsky's second chapter: "every man must have somewhere to go" (Dostoevsky, 1866/2003, Part 1, Chapter 2).

Two of these novels have already been read side by side, yet the three have never been brought together, and none of the existing comparisons has approached them through the rooms, streets, and thresholds in which their crises unfold. Raskolnikov and Balram have been linked via the Nietzschean concept of the extraordinary man (Parmar, 2015) and contrasted as moral agents whose crimes meet divergent fates (Pal, 2024), while Schotland (2011) has paired Adiga with Richard Wright as chroniclers of subaltern violence. Substantial spatial criticism also exists for each text individually, from Toporov's (2003) mythopoetic Petersburg and Young's (2021) analysis of distanced space in Crime and Punishment to Lefebvrian readings of New Delhi (Ni, 2011; Mehmood, 2018). Yet The Dwarf remains absent from these comparisons, and existing studies largely frame the issue in the binary terms Razumikhin derides, asking whether the urban environment causes crime.

This article makes three contributions. First, reading Cho's novel between Dostoevsky's and Adiga's, it offers a comparison across Russian, Korean, and Indian Anglophone fiction that no single-tradition reading can provide. Second, it separates three layers that criticism usually runs together: the physical room; the constraints that make that room a trap; and the symbols through which each novel gives the trap meaning. Third, by setting each novel's confined characters beside its privileged ones, it shows that confinement is neither necessary nor sufficient for harm, but decides the form harm takes, whom it reaches, and who bears its cost. In doing so, the article brings into literary study a distinction familiar to criminologists between harm done by trespass and harm done at a distance (Shapiro, 1990; Benson et al., 2024).

The comparison is typological rather than genetic. I make no claim that Cho read Dostoevsky or that Adiga wrote with either in mind. The three novels are brought together because each registers, in form as well as content, the experience of a semi-peripheral city modernizing under pressure, a condition that the Warwick Research Collective (2015) theorizes as combined and uneven development. They also share a narrative problem: how to tell a poor man's violence from close enough to understand it without approving it. Their solutions differ, and the differences are part of the evidence. Dostoevsky uses close third-person narration surrounded by dissenting voices. Cho uses what his translators call a linked-story novel (yŏnjak sosŏl), a sequence of stories told from shifting perspectives (Fulton & Fulton, 2006). Adiga gives his murderer an unchallenged first-person voice, addressed in letters to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (Adiga, 2008, "The First Night"). All three novels are read here in English translation or in the original English; a note on translation follows the framework.

The argument unfolds in stages. Section 2 surveys the scholarship bearing on three problems (space in each novel, the strain that confined housing places on the mind, and the forms harm takes when its author is privileged) so that the gap this study addresses comes into view. Section 3 sets out the comparative method and the theoretical coordinates on which the readings rest. Sections 4, 5, and 6 then take the novels one at a time, testing the framework against each text rather than imposing it upon them, before Section 7 draws the three answers together and sets them beside the evidence of the privileged characters; the conclusion, finally, returns to the question with which Tolstoy began.

## 2. Literature Review: Space, Confinement, and the Form of Harm

### *2.1 Space in the three novels*

Literary scholarship has long recognized that St. Petersburg in Crime and Punishment functions as an active force rather than a passive backdrop. Early comparative work by Fanger (1965) situated Dostoevsky alongside Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol as a chronicler of the modern metropolis, where ordinary streets warp into feverish intensity. Subsequent Russian semioticians read the imperial capital as a legible text in its own right: Toporov (2003) identified a "Petersburg text" running through Russian literature, mapping the space of Crime and Punishment through mythopoetic oppositions of centre and periphery, height and depth, while Lotman (2002) characterized Petersburg as an eccentric borderland poised between nature and culture and haunted by the threat of its own destruction. Berman (1982/1988) located Dostoevsky's capital at the heart of what he termed the "modernism of underdevelopment": a city forced into modernity faster than its society could absorb, turning the street into the arena where the poor confronted the promises of progress. Lindenmeyr (1976) brought this argument closer to Raskolnikov: just before the murder he daydreams about rebuilding the crowded Haymarket on the model of Napoleon III's Paris, and the filth of the real district quietly undoes the rational scheme. Frank (1995) situated the crime within 1860s radicalism, reading Raskolnikov's theory as Dostoevsky's answer to those doctrines.

More recently, scholarship has shifted from the symbolism of space to the ways characters perceive their surroundings. Young (2021) demonstrates that Raskolnikov's awareness of his body and environment is distorted, so that physical reality reaches him largely through memory, dream, and delirium. Space becomes concretely embodied chiefly when a third party overhears or intrudes upon others, as when Svidrigaïlov listens through the partition wall of Sonia's room. That insight matters for the present study, because subaltern rooms in these novels are rarely private: they remain porous to overhearing, entry, and surveillance. Yet Dostoevsky criticism has still not placed his garret beside the cramped rooms of the poor in non-European fiction.

The epilogue debate shows how much of this criticism already speaks a spatial language. Bakhtin judged the Siberian epilogue "conventionally monologic," a point at which the author's ideology interrupts the dialogue of the novel (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 92, as cited in Bowers, 2020, p. 96). In a 2020 cluster in Canadian Slavonic Papers, Bowers and Holland ask instead how the epilogue

works. Bowers (2020) argues that the crime plot and the redemption plot are each fulfilled and frustrated at once, leaving Raskolnikov in a "generic stasis" (p. 99) that allows his renewal to appear as an act of free will (pp. 103–104). Holland (2020) reads the murder, confession, and conversion as moments the narrative keeps anticipating and deferring, and shows that the penultimate sentence, with its "great future deed," revives the "great man" theory the conversion was meant to retire (p. 110). Masing-Delic (2009), reading the novel against Conrad's Under Western Eyes, finds in both writers the premise that the criminal is free and therefore responsible (p. 44). Morson (1994) gives that premise its narratological form: Dostoevsky's fiction keeps time open, so that what happens never exhausts what might have happened. These studies describe Raskolnikov as "trapped" (Bowers, 2020, p. 99) and caught in "entrapment" (Holland, 2020, p. 111), and Masing-Delic (2009) shows that his theory kills in order to make room for the good. Their vocabulary is spatial, yet none of them examines the rooms in which the entrapment takes place.

There is much less writing on The Dwarf in English. The Fultons' afterword explains the linked-story form and the factory years in which the book is set (Fulton & Fulton, 2006). Ryu (2015) includes the novel among the works that resisted Park Chung Hee's government, in a chapter she calls "Arrested Development." Lee (2022) turns to the dwarf's body, arguing that it is treated as a tool and disposed of when it wears out (pp. 116–119). Korean-language criticism has read the novel above all as a document of labour and the hope of solidarity; Yang (2025), for instance, analyses the conflict between workers and capital, the loss of moral value, and the solidarity the novel still imagines. Historians fill in the rest. Koo (2001) describes how South Korea's factory workers became a class, and the dormitories and long shifts he documents are the ones Yŏng-su and Yŏng-ho walk into. Shin and Kim (2016) show how Seoul's state-backed redevelopment pushed poor tenants and small owners out again and again. Read with this history, the demolition notice and the sold occupancy ticket are real events, not only symbols. What remains unexplored is how the loss of the dwarf's house looks beside Dostoevsky's high, narrow room.

The White Tiger has had the opposite fate: a great deal of criticism, much of it in disagreement. Mendes (2010) argued that the novel sells Western readers an exotic, "dark" India. Detmers (2011) read it as a "condition-of-India novel," holding the promises of progress against the lives of the poor. Khor (2012) asked what Balram's crime tells us about the limits of human rights and development discourse. Shingavi (2014) argued that its games of disguise end up endorsing a libertarian idea of getting ahead alone, while Zullo (2024) demonstrates how Balram's entrepreneurial ascent exposes the systemic violence buried beneath official narratives of rising Asia, and Saxena (2021) traced how such novels negotiate caste through capitalist ascent. Adkins (2019) described the "neoliberal disgust" that keeps master and servant apart, an idea I carry into the closed space of the car. Similarly, Ratti (2020) interrogates what justice means when a subaltern marginalized by both caste and class seizes retribution for himself, and Walther (2014) argues that the novel's animal tropes register the dehumanization of the poor within India's growth narrative. Spatial studies also exist. Ni (2011) draws on Lefebvre to map New Delhi as a socio-spatial hierarchy of caste and capital, while Mehmood (2018), combining Harvey's accumulation by dispossession with Lefebvre's right to the city, traces how the urban poor are displaced from the city's centre to its peripheries. Tickell (2015) comes closest to my concern. Reading the novel through the sociology of domestic service, he shows how employers manage the servant by regulating proximity, distance, and access, so that the servant is needed yet expected to remain unseen, a condition he describes as the servant's relational invisibility. While these studies map the macro-geography of Delhi, the basement beneath Buckingham Towers, the car, and the Bangalore office have yet to be read as a vertical sequence, and Balram has been linked to Raskolnikov only through morality and the Übermensch (Parmar, 2015; Pal, 2024).

### *2.2 Confinement and the mind*

Beyond literary studies, empirical research on confined housing points in two distinct directions. Reviewing environmental psychology evidence, Evans (2003) demonstrates that residential crowding, persistent noise, and inadequate daylight measurably elevate psychological distress without directly producing severe mental illness, while degraded built environments also act indirectly by eroding personal autonomy and social support networks—burdens that fall disproportionately on the poor. Sociological research on household crowding and aggression finds the link real but unstable. Regoeczi (2002) shows that behavioural responses to high density encompass both "fight" and "flight" reactions, interpersonal aggression as well as social withdrawal, in a nonlinear relationship shaped partly by who ends up sorted into crowded housing. Approaching spatial deprivation from below, Bhanye's (2025) ethnography of an informal settlement in Zimbabwe documents residents immobilized by poverty, chronic illness, and statelessness, for whom the neighbourhood functions as "a spatial trap" and home as "a terminal horizon" (pp. 8–9), yet who still sustain mutual care and "collective endurance" (p. 1). The evidence, then, indicates that dark and crowded interiors strain consciousness without determining it, an account that sits closer to what the three novels dramatize than to the deterministic doctrine Razumikhin attacks.

### *2.3 Privilege and the form of harm*

It is well established in criminology that crime is not confined to the poor. Sutherland introduced white-collar crime to correct theories that equated crime with the lower classes (Benson et al., 2024, p. 7). Shapiro (1990) argues that the concept should describe the act rather than the actor. White-collar offenders violate trust, which allows them "to rob without violence and burgle without trespass" (p. 346), and their leniency in the courts arises less from status than from the way their offences are organized: concealed, collective, and hard to detect (pp. 346, 359). Benson et al. (2024) accept an act-based definition but trace the form of such crime to position. Social status gives access to offences committed "by non-physical means and by concealment or guile" (Edelhertz, as

cited in Benson et al., 2024, p. 9). The middle and upper classes rarely burgle, not because they are more virtuous but because they have "other easier and less risky ways" of taking what they want (p. 12). These studies supply a vocabulary of trespass and its absence, access, distance, concealment, and escape. What they do not supply is an account of physical space: they describe the positions from which privileged harm is done but not the rooms.

### *2.4 Where this article stands*

The gap, then, is not simply that no study reads the three novels together. Critics of Dostoevsky describe Raskolnikov as trapped without examining his room in comparative light; housing research measures the strain of confined space and finds its link to aggression unstable; criminologists explain how the privileged harm others at a distance without asking where they stand when they do it. And criticism of all three novels has largely accepted the terms of the environment debate: either space produces the crime or the criminal is free of it. This article brings these conversations into contact and asks a different question: not whether cramped and stolen space produces violence, but what form violence takes under confinement, on whom it falls, what changes when the person doing harm has room to spare, and whether each novel keeps a place for the one who lives under the same pressure and stays kind.

## 3. Method and Framework

The analysis that follows rests on a world-literary comparative method, an analytical distinction between space, trap, and symbol, and three theoretical coordinates: the house as a vertical structure of consciousness, the threshold as the site of crisis, and inner moral freedom.

### *3.1 Comparing semi-peripheral cities*

The Warwick Research Collective (2015) argues that the modern capitalist world-system is single yet radically uneven, and that literature registers this structural unevenness in both its form and its content. From this perspective, novels from very different traditions can be productively compared not because one directly influenced another, but because each records the pressure of capitalist modernization upon a particular semi-peripheral society. St. Petersburg following the reforms of the 1860s, Seoul during the industrial drive of the 1970s, and New Delhi after economic liberalization represent precisely such semi-peripheral crucibles. Berman (1982/1988) had already characterized the first as the city of a "modernism of underdevelopment," and that diagnosis applies equally to the other two. Each novel stages the collision between new wealth and entrenched misery in concrete architecture: a planned capital with tenements behind its grand prospects, a redevelopment zone where a "Felicity Precinct" is bulldozed, and a luxury tower with a servants' warren underneath. Grounding the comparison in shared structural unevenness rather than shared tradition also explains why the obvious fourth text, Richard Wright's Native Son, is omitted here: Wright's Chicago belongs to the core of the world-system, and his novel has already been paired with Adiga's (Schotland, 2011). One might object that the core has peripheries of its own, Wright's South Side among them; the distinction drawn here concerns each city's place in the world-system and does not deny such internal unevenness.

### *3.2 Space, trap, and symbol*

The distinction between space and trap matters for method. Critics of each novel have described the economic, social, and political pressures on its characters. A trap in the physical sense adds something different in kind: walls, a door, and a size that determine what a person sees, hears, and can reach. Bhanye's (2025) "spatial trap," a place made inescapable by several constraints acting at once, is close to the definition used here. A symbol is the meaning a novel gives to that trap through recurring images. I read the physical layer in each novel and ask what it adds to the others.

The characters on either side of each novel's class divide offer a necessary check on the argument. If confinement alone were enough to turn a mind toward harm, all who share the same trap would turn to violence; yet Sonia, the dwarf, and Balram's father, the rickshaw-puller who wears himself out without ever turning on another, show that they do not. If confinement were a necessary condition of harm, those with room to spare would remain innocent of it; yet Luzhin, the speculator, and the Stork's family show that they do not. Since each novel supplies evidence of both kinds, the question cannot be settled in the binary terms on which Razumikhin's quarrel is staged. Confinement, then, shapes not only how these characters live but what they do, yet it never decides on its own which of them will turn toward harm.

### *3.3 The vertical house*

In The Poetics of Space, Bachelard (1958/2014) argues that the house is lived vertically, organized by the polarity of cellar and attic. The attic belongs to clear and rational thought; the cellar belongs to the dark forces beneath consciousness. Bachelard writes of the house as a shelter that "protects the dreamer" (Bachelard, 1958/2014, Chapter 1). The novels studied here imagine the opposite: houses that cramp and wound. His vertical scheme nevertheless gives this article its axis. Raskolnikov's crime is thought in an attic; Balram's is felt in a cellar; and the dwarf's family, whose house is demolished, loses its place on the axis altogether. Bachelard also offers his own account of the modern city, in which people "live in superimposed boxes" (Chapter 1). Each reading below tests his scheme against its novel.

### *3.4 The threshold*

Bakhtin (1984) identified the threshold as the characteristic space of Dostoevsky's fiction: staircases, landings, doorways, and corridors where a life reaches a point of crisis and decision (pp. 169–170). In his essay on the chronotope he calls these "the main places of action," where "crisis events occur, the falls, the resurrections," and time "is essentially instantaneous," as if it "falls out of the normal course of biographical time" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 248). The threshold is a space of passage, not dwelling. It is where the poor, who have little room of their own, are most often found, and where each of the three protagonists meets the moment of choice. Failures and refusals to cross matter as much as crossings: Chi-sŏp's advice to "stay there" at the contact point, which Yŏng-su does not take, and Raskolnikov's slow climb to the police station, which Holland (2020) reads as a final act of deferral (p. 115).

### *3.5 The freedom that remains*

Space explains pressure; it does not settle action. Frankl (1946/2006), writing from his experience of the Nazi camps, argued that "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms," the freedom "to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (Part One). His claim must be applied with care. Frankl wrote about the freedom of a person who is suffering, not about the guilt of the poor, and his testimony cannot be made into a reproach to those whom confinement breaks. Read that way, it supplies the ethical limit of a spatial reading: even where confinement pushes a person toward violence, the push is not a verdict. Dostoevsky builds his novel on that premise, and Dostoevsky the journalist argued it outright, attacking the doctrine of environment for dissolving personal responsibility (Dostoevsky, 1873/1994). Each novel tests the premise through characters who endure the same conditions differently.

### *3.6 Narrating the killer*

Keen's (2007) work on narrative empathy explains why readers can feel with a murderer without approving of him: empathy responds to perspective and situation and is not moral endorsement. Dostoevsky creates that empathy through close third-person narration, and Bakhtin famously read his novels as polyphonic, refusing any single authorial verdict (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). Cho distributes the narration across both sides of the class wall. Adiga gives Balram the only voice in the novel, so that judgment must be found in what the narrative shows rather than in what any character says. Section 7 argues that the number of voices in each novel follows the number of rooms it can imagine.

### *3.7 A note on translation*

Crime and Punishment is quoted in Constance Garnett's translation and The Dwarf in that of Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton, while The White Tiger, written in English, is read in the original. Quotations from the three novels are located by part and chapter, by story title, or by the "Night" of Balram's letters rather than by page, so that readers may follow them in any edition. Where an argument turns on a word in the source language, as with the Russian prestuplenie and the Korean place names Nagwŏn-gu and Haengbok-tong, the original is supplied, and Korean names follow the McCune–Reischauer romanization used in the Fulton translation.

## 4. Crime and Punishment: The Garret, the Threshold, and the Square Yard

In Crime and Punishment space does more than set the scene: it sets the order of events. The novel moves from a cupboard under a roof to a riverbank above an open steppe, and each turn of the plot is also a change of room: incubation in the garret, transgression on a staircase, exile on the bridge and in the street, and a slow return to shared space in Siberia.

It is the novel's own debate, staged in Porfiry's quarters, that frames this spatial reading. When Razumikhin complains that the socialists would reduce human nature to "the planning of rooms and passages in a phalanstery," his target is a spatial determinism, the belief that a building arranged correctly would make crime disappear (Part 3, Chapter 5). Porfiry's reply, that environment "accounts for a great deal," is never refuted; Razumikhin can answer it only with an extreme case, a murder he believes no environment could explain. Dostoevsky allows each man a part of the truth, and the conversation then turns to Raskolnikov's article "On Crime," as though to suggest that the alternative to environmental determinism need not be moral freedom at all, but an egoistic idea that claims the right to transgress. The novel, in the end, does not choose between the room and the idea; it shows, rather, how each feeds the other.

The garret is where the idea grows. Raskolnikov's room is "more like a cupboard than a room" (Part 1, Chapter 1), and Dostoevsky makes the link between room and idea explicit: it was "in that hole, in that awful little cupboard of his" that the plan had "for a month past been growing up in him" (Part 1, Chapter 5). After his mother's letter he feels "cramped and stifled," and "his eyes and his mind craved for space" (Part 1, Chapter 3). The room does not cause the murder. It gives the idea silence, time, and height. From up there, other people shrink into figures in a sum, which is why the overheard talk of a "louse" and of "simple arithmetic" (Part 1, Chapter 6) sounds to him like his own thought spoken aloud. The theory is itself a theory of room. Masing-Delic (2009) observes that in the logic of the idealistic murderer the harmful must be removed "so as to leave more room for the good" (p. 45). Raskolnikov, who has almost no room himself, imagines making room by subtraction.

Bachelard's attic fits this room only in part. For Bachelard, "verticality is ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic," and the attic belongs to "the rationality of the roof" (Bachelard, 1958/2014, Chapter 1). Raskolnikov's garret has the height without the clarity: it breeds abstraction rather than reason. It is closer to what Bachelard calls the city dweller's "conventional hole" (Chapter 1), a

phrase that Dostoevsky, writing nearly a century earlier, had anticipated when he called Raskolnikov's room "that hole" (Part 1, Chapter 5).

The crime itself is imagined as a movement across a boundary. The Russian word for crime, prestuplenie, carries the sense of a stepping across, and Raskolnikov's language keeps returning to that image. His article allows the extraordinary man "to step over a corpse" for an idea (Part 3, Chapter 5), and when he confesses to Sonia he says he wanted to know "whether I can step over barriers or not" (Part 5, Chapter 4). The plot stages the idea literally. The murder takes place behind a door opened "a tiny crack" on a staircase (Part 1, Chapter 7), and the decisive scenes of the first two parts take place on landings, in doorways, and on the stairs between other people's flats. Bakhtin's threshold is here at its most literal.

After the murder the novel introduces its most precise spatial motif. Walking the streets, Raskolnikov remembers a condemned man who would rather live forever "on a square yard of space" on a narrow ledge above the ocean than die at once, and he exclaims, "Only to live, to live and live!" (Part 2, Chapter 6). Here is Dostoevsky's answer to Tolstoy's question: a person can endure in almost no room at all. Marmeladov's insistence that "every man must have somewhere to go" (Part 1, Chapter 2) is the social version of the same claim. The square yard, however, changes meaning as the plot advances. By the canal it returns as a bitter joke about prison ("There'll be the square yard of space"), and in Part 5 it has become "a foretaste of an eternity 'on a square yard of space'," a cold and permanent misery (Part 2, Chapter 6; Part 5, Chapter 5). The same square yard that first stood for the will to live comes to stand for life cut off from everyone. Guilt is experienced as a room with no one else in it.

Dostoevsky sets two other rooms against the garret, and the plot turns on the choice between them. Svidrigaïlov imagines eternity not as something vast but as "one little room, like a bath house in the country, black and grimy and spiders in every corner" (Part 4, Chapter 1). That is the garret's logic carried past death, and Svidrigaïlov follows it to suicide. Sonia's room is just as poor and stranger still: it "looked like a barn," a "very irregular quadrangle" with one corner too sharp to see into (Part 4, Chapter 4). Yet it is the room where the story of Lazarus is read aloud and where Raskolnikov first speaks the truth to another person. As Young (2021) points out, Svidrigaïlov eavesdrops on that confession through the partition wall: even a space of grace remains porous to surveillance. Both rooms are cramped. What separates them is whether anyone else can enter, and for what.

The novel tests the link between cramped rooms and dark minds from the other side. Its privileged characters are not confined, and they are not innocent. Luzhin, a prosperous man of business, tries to ruin Sonia by slipping a hundred-rouble note into her possession and then accusing her of theft. The scheme fails only because Lebeziatnikov saw him do it: "When you were saying good-bye to her at the door, while you held her hand in one hand, with the other, the left, you slipped the note into her pocket" (Part 5, Chapter 3). The privileged man also does harm at a threshold, but with a handshake rather than an axe. Svidrigaïlov has money, and Raskolnikov's mother is convinced that he caused his wife's death (Part 4, Chapter 2). Bowers (2020) describes him as "a successful transgressor" whom happiness still eludes (p. 102). His trap has no walls, yet when he imagines eternity he pictures the small grimy room, and he spends his last night in a "long, blackened wooden building" on the city's edge before shooting himself (Part 6, Chapter 6). Dostoevsky gives darkness of mind to men with room to spare and makes the narrow room an image of what that darkness looks like from within. Here the cramped space works less as a cause than as a symbol of a mind closed on itself.

The ending completes the spatial arc. In the Epilogue Raskolnikov sits on the riverbank, the "vast steppe" opens before him, and he feels that "there there was freedom" (Epilogue, Chapter 2). Tolstoy's Pahom dies running across a steppe to own it; Raskolnikov is revived by looking at one he does not own. The turn is late, and the novel does not let it seem easy. Throughout most of the epilogue Raskolnikov remains notably unrepentant (Holland, 2020, pp. 115, 117), bitterly questioning bare survival: "To live in order to exist?" (Epilogue, Chapter 2). The square yard is offered early in the novel and accepted only on its last pages. The most confined place in the book, the prison camp, is where his mind finally turns outward: "Life had stepped into the place of theory" (Epilogue, Chapter 2). The resolution is possible because the novel has kept a room, Sonia's, from which a return to a shared world can begin.

## 5. The Dwarf: The Cancelled House, the Smokestack, and the Klein Bottle

In The Dwarf space shapes the form of the book before it shapes any single scene. The linked stories open in a classroom where a teacher explains the Möbius strip, a surface on which "inner" and "outer" turn into each other ("The Möbius Strip"), and the late story "The Klein Bottle" returns to the problem with a bottle that has "no inside or outside" ("The Klein Bottle"). Between these two figures the narration passes among the dwarf's children, a middle-class housewife, and the chairman's son. The book's structure is itself a lesson in topology: the worker's world and the owner's world look like two sides of a wall, but the stories keep showing that they are one continuous surface.

Inside that structure, the family's plot begins with a house being cancelled. A notice addressed to "Mr. Kim Pul-i, 46-1839 Felicity Precinct, Eden District, Seoul" announces the "Condemnation of Hillside Structures in Redevelopment Zone," and the mother calculates that it would "take a miracle" to manage in the twenty days left ("A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf"). In Cho's Korean text, the district and precinct are Nagwŏn-gu and Haengbok-tong, "Paradise" and "Happiness," establishing a biting spatial irony rooted in the original language. Bachelard's claim that "the house shelters daydreaming" (Bachelard, 1958/2014, Chapter 1) assumes a house that lasts long enough to be dreamt in. Cho's house lasts twenty days. It turns out to be a legal permission that can be withdrawn, and Bachelard's phenomenology here describes what the poor are denied rather than what they inhabit. A

phenomenology of intimate space needs Lefebvre's (1974/1991) reminder that space is produced by power, or it will mistake an eviction for a change of mood.

Once condemned, the family's house becomes a piece of paper traded among brokers, its occupancy rights passing from hand to hand. The dwarf's daughter, Yŏng-hŭi, goes after the speculator who bought the family's ticket, submitting to sexual abuse in his flat across the river while she waits for her chance to take the papers back from his strongbox as he sleeps ("A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf"). When she returns, the houses, the creek bank, and the smokestack have been razed: "Only a broad clearing" ("A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf"). Yŏng-hŭi's ordeal exposes the gendered toll of Seoul's spatial order. The trap that claims her father's house exacts her body as the ransom for its papers, while her recovery of them constitutes a counter-trespass into a privileged room that the narrative refuses to call a crime.

The novel registers the class boundary through what crosses it. A sewer creek separates the family's alley from a residential district, and across it drifts "the smell of grilled meat" ("A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf"). In the factory the boundary becomes sound: the noise in Yŏng-hŭi's weaving room is "more than ninety decibels," almost double the level at which, as the text notes, "conversation is impossible" ("The Cost of Living for a Family of Ŭngang Laborers"). That acoustic assault strips away the very resource Evans (2003) identifies as an indirect buffer for mental health: the social support sustained through conversation. The poor are defined by what reaches them from other people's space and by what is taken from their own.

The vertical axis survives only as fantasy. From the bank of the creek, the children picture their father "standing at the very top" of the brick factory's smokestack, the moon "one step in front of him"; later a "black iron ball" crosses the sky while he waves from the top. The plot then reverses the image. When the smokestack is demolished, the crew discovers that "he'd fallen inside it" ("A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf"), and Yŏng-su later records that his father "fell into the smokestack of a brick factory" ("The Fault Lies with God as Well"). Yŏng-ho, however, calls it "Murdered Father" ("The Cost of Living for a Family of Ŭngang Laborers"). The novel never settles whether the father fell, chose to die, or was killed by his circumstances, and the uncertainty matters to a spatial reading: in every case his death takes place inside the only height the trap had left him. Yŏng-su draws the measure himself: "Just because Father was small was no reason for the life allotted him to have been so small" ("The Fault Lies with God as Well").

Lee (2022, p. 119) reads this death as the disposal of a worn-out part. A spatial reading adds that the body is fitted to the space before it is discarded in it. The dwarf's "small build" lets him "work bent over inside the cramped water meter hole" ("Knifeblade"), and his son works on the assembly line "jammed from the waist up inside the trunk of a car" ("The Cost of Living for a Family of Ŭngang Laborers"). Against this, the son imagines a place built to his father's scale: "Father should have lived in a place like Lilliput. There would have been nobody to say, 'Look at the midget'" ("The Cost of Living for a Family of Ŭngang Laborers"). Cho's worker is built into the car; Adiga's servant, as Section 6 shows, sits inside it to drive the master.

The topology finally drives the plot toward violence. In "The Klein Bottle," Yŏng-su, now an assistant mechanic at Ŭngang Textile, looks at the bottle and concludes that "the notion of enclosure itself is an illusion": "If you just follow the wall, you can get out." In the same story Chi-sŏp, the labour activist whom the father had liked, gives him the opposite counsel: "Then stay there. Don't leave. Think there, act there. Stay at the contact point—the place where workers and bosses meet" ("The Klein Bottle"). Framed in spatial terms, Chi-sŏp's plea articulates the novel's nonviolent alternative, echoing the worker solidarity that Korean scholarship places at the novel's core (Yang, 2025). Yŏng-su leaves the contact point. In "The Spinyfish Entering My Net," told by the chairman's son, the court learns that he came to kill the chairman and "had mistaken Uncle for him." The chairman's brother "had taken the elevator downstairs" while the chairman stayed in his office ("The Spinyfish Entering My Net"). Where Bachelard mused that "elevators do away with the heroism of stair climbing" (Bachelard, 1958/2014, Chapter 1), Cho makes the elevator decide who dies.

In The Poetics of Space, Bachelard cautions that "outside and inside form a dialectic of division" whose rigid geometry "blinds us" when applied as metaphor (Chapter 9). Yŏng-su sees through the division, as Bachelard recommends. But in a world where the division is enforced by guards and wages, seeing through it leads him to violence. Cho holds two truths together. The wall is an illusion in the sense that the two classes are one surface. It is also real enough to kill, and the attempt to walk through it destroys a man who was not even the target.

Cho's privileged characters complete the test. The speculator keeps his office and apartment in Yŏngdong, across the river, and his strongbox holds money, "a pistol and a knife" ("A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf"). The violence of privilege exists, but it is locked away and held in reserve. The chairman's son, Kyŏng-hun, ends the novel in a house screened by woods and an iron gate. He dreams that the spiny fish caught in his net tear him "to shreds," and wakes screaming; then he watches the watchman "push the iron gate shut" and resolves to see a psychiatrist in secret ("The Spinyfish Entering My Net"). His space is the opposite of the dwarf's in every respect, and his mind is not light. Cho's evidence is therefore double. A dark, crowded space does not darken the father's mind, and a spacious, guarded one does not keep the son's mind clear. What the gate does is keep the consequences out.

## 6. The White Tiger: Basement, Egg, Cage, and a 150-Square-Foot Office

Adiga's spatial design begins as a map and ends as a single room. Balram explains that India is "two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness" (Adiga, 2008, "The First Night"), and the plot is his passage from the second to the first. Every stage of that passage is housed: the village beneath the Black Fort, the basement of Buckingham Towers, the sealed car, and finally an office in Bangalore. Caste hierarchies permeate each stage. Although Balram's surname marks his traditional caste trade, his

claim that the old castes have collapsed into two—the big-bellied and the small-bellied—does not abolish caste; it relocates it into spatial governance. In Delhi, unwritten rules governing who may enter which room, where servants eat, and who waits outside perform the boundary work once maintained by village custom.

The first spatial act in the novel is a climb. At the end of the First Night Balram swims across the pond, climbs to the Black Fort, puts his foot on its wall, and looks down on Laxmangarh; the chapter ends with his announcement that eight months later he slit Mr. Ashok's throat ("The First Night"). The ascent is a prolepsis of the crime. In the Second Night he reimagines the scene through Iqbal: the "little man" on the ramparts answers God by spitting at him ("The Second Night"). Iqbal's self rises through obedience and self-control (Iqbal, 1915/1920, section 9), and his Iblis is both the proud refuser and a spur to human growth (Schimmel, 1963). Balram keeps the refusal and the elevation and drops the discipline. His height is a ruin, and his defiance is aimed at gain.

In Delhi the vertical order is literal. The servants live underground, in "a warren of interconnected rooms" where an electric bell and a red light summon them upstairs ("The Fourth Night"). Balram takes the one empty room no one wants. Its plaster still shows "the marks of the hand that had applied" it, and at night the walls are covered with cockroaches that land on his mosquito net; still, "it was mine, and no one teased me" ("The Fourth Night"). This is the inversion of Raskolnikov's garret: a cramped and solitary room that incubates a crime, placed below the masters rather than above the street. It also differs from the garret. Raskolnikov retreats to think; Balram chooses his room to escape the other servants, so his isolation is already a step out of the class to which he belongs. His pleasure in a room that is "mine" is a small recovery of the personal control that confined housing erodes (Evans, 2003). The basement also gives architectural form to Tickell's (2015) relational invisibility: the servants are kept within call, wired to a bell, yet housed out of sight. Bachelard's cellar here is not the dark irrational layer of a single mind. It is a social floor wired to a bell. And where Bachelard observed that "sky-scrapers have no cellars" (Bachelard, 1958/2014, Chapter 1), Buckingham Towers has one: it is where the servants live.

The car extends the basement into the city. The cars of the rich move through Delhi "like dark eggs," cracking open only to throw a bottle onto the road ("The Fourth Night"). Inside the egg Balram is close enough to his masters to watch them in the mirror. Outside it lies the pavement, where his father would have slept, and he notes, "We were like two separate cities—inside and outside the dark egg.... So I was in some way out of the car too, even while I was driving it" ("The Fourth Night"). The egg gives a hard shell to the class disgust that Adkins (2019) finds between master and servant. Balram is a threshold figure, inside and outside at once. Even the boundary of the mall needs no guard: the drivers wait outside because "no one had to tell us these things" ("The Fourth Night"). Tickell (2015) observes that the moments when Balram and Ashok briefly change places as driver and driven anticipate the murder, in which Balram takes his master's place and finally his name. The threshold position is unstable precisely because it can be crossed.

The plot's turning point gathers three images of enclosure. The Rooster Coop shows birds packed into wire-mesh cages "jostling just for breathing space," aware of the butcher above and still not trying to escape ("The Fifth Night"). At the zoo Balram watches a white tiger pacing behind bamboo bars; its eyes meet his "like my master's eyes have met mine so often in the mirror of the car," and he faints, saying, "I can't live the rest of my life in a cage" ("The Sixth Night"). Between these scenes, a couplet he hears read aloud in a book market, "You were looking for the key for years / But the door was always open!", returns as he lies among the cockroaches and again as he prepares the broken bottle ("The Sixth Night"). While Walther (2014) interprets these animal motifs as the dehumanization of the poor within India's growth narrative, spatially they also mark the moment when the trap becomes legible to the one confined inside it. Here the threshold is reinterpreted. The door that was "always open" is the possibility of murder. Nothing about the room has changed; what has changed is what he is willing to see as a way out.

The murder is staged as a reversal of space. Balram tells Ashok that a tyre is damaged and coaxes him out of the "dark egg" that has sealed the master off from the street: "Come out of the car, sir. Trust me" ("The Seventh Night"). Ashok kneels in the mud to inspect the wheel, and the vertical order of the novel turns over in a single sentence: "He got down on his knees. I rose up over him" ("The Seventh Night"). Seen from above, the master's head becomes "just a black ball," with the parting of his hair "leading like a painted line on a highway" to the spot where the bottle will fall ("The Seventh Night"). The servant who lived beneath the tower now stands above his master, on the ground where servants wait. Balram's account of the moment joins violence to release: "I was blind. I was a free man" ("The Seventh Night"). He also offers a reason drawn from the logic of the coop rather than from rage: the family would punish his own, so "I was just getting my revenge in advance" ("The Seventh Night").

The privileged in The White Tiger also do violence, and the novel shows how space protects them. Pinky Madam, driving drunk, hits a child on the road, and the family's answer is a typed statement for Balram to sign, swearing "that I was alone in the car, and alone responsible for all that happened," and that he makes the statement "under no duress" ("The Fourth Night"). His grandmother's thumbprint is already on the page as a witness. Balram insists that the case is not unusual: "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters" ("The Fourth Night"). When Pinky wants to find the child's family and pay compensation, the Stork dismisses the idea: "As if we were all murderers here" ("The Fifth Night"). That Pinky, the most foreign of them, is the one who wants to make amends is a reminder that conscience in this novel does not follow class. Goh (2012) argues that the novel exposes an unbridgeable divide between returning Overseas Indians and resident nationals; spatially, it is also the gulf between those who can exit a crime scene by aeroplane and those who must remain and sign for it. Her crime happens on an open road and is erased through a signature, a police contact,

and silence; Balram's happens in the mud beside the car and can be escaped only by flight. Space does not decide who has a criminal mind in Adiga. It decides who can make a crime disappear. Tickell (2015) opens his reading with a real case that follows the same pattern: an Indian diplomat in New York, charged over the wage she had falsely declared for her maid, was moved to her government's United Nations mission and its full immunity, and the maid's exploitation was "largely forgotten" (pp. 150–151).

The novel tests the pattern once more at its close, when Balram himself has room. One of his drivers hits and kills a boy on a bicycle. At the scene Balram tells the boy's brother that the driver "was following my orders, to drive as fast as he could," and he later admits that his clients' schedules mean his drivers "have to drive recklessly" ("The Seventh Night"). He takes the brother to the police station, where an assistant commissioner whom he has "lubricated often" declines to record the case and arranges for the number plates to be changed so that the death can be reported as "a hit-and-run" ("The Seventh Night"). Balram's description of the brother is spatial: he "understood at last that the trap had shut on him" ("The Seventh Night"). The next day Balram visits the family, tells them "the fault is mine," and leaves twenty-five thousand rupees ("The Seventh Night"). In one respect he has changed: he goes to the family the Stork refused to see. Yet the form of the harm has changed with his position. The boy dies at a distance from Balram, through a driver keeping his schedule, and the death is made to disappear through a contact and an altered record, much as Pinky's was. Balram names the change himself: "I complain about the police the way the rich complain; not the way the poor complain. The difference is everything" ("The Seventh Night"). Once Balram has room, the harm done in his name takes the shape of the harm he once suffered. Here Ratti's (2020) inquiry into subaltern self-fashioning and justice receives a spatial answer: acquiring room confers the power to withhold justice as well as to seize it.

The ending answers Tolstoy in its own terms. Balram writes from "this 150-square-foot office of mine," proud that it is "the only 150-square-foot space in Bangalore with its own chandelier," and he admits that it is "still a hole in the wall" ("The First Night"). In the last Night he looks up at the chandelier and wants to shout, "I've broken out of the coop!", while still imagining the day when "all my chandeliers come crashing down" ("The Seventh Night"). Bachelard's "conventional hole," which Dostoevsky's "that hole" had anticipated, returns here as Balram's "hole in the wall." The man who could not live in a cage has built himself a lit one.

## 7. Space, Trap, Symbol, and the Form of Harm

The question this article set out to examine was not whether dark and narrow space causes violence, but what it does to the mind and to the harm that follows. The three novels give three different answers, and the differences are the main result of the comparison.

In Crime and Punishment space and mind shape each other. The garret gives the idea silence and height, but after the murder the same streets turn hostile because the mind has changed. Two pieces of evidence keep the novel from making the room the cause, and so from sliding into the determinism Razumikhin attacks: Sonia lives in a poorer and stranger room without her mind darkening, and the most confined place in the book, the prison camp, is where Raskolnikov's mind turns outward. Nor does the novel side wholly with Razumikhin, for the garret plainly feeds the idea, much as Porfiry's remark that environment "accounts for a great deal" would lead one to expect. The outcome is a return.

In The Dwarf the trap works on bodies and lives more than on minds. The novel names the trap in a single sentence, "Rights were not acknowledged; duties alone were enforced," and it names the father's mind just as plainly: "Father was a warm man, though. He held out hope for love" ("The Fault Lies with God as Well"). What changes Yŏng-su is less darkness than mechanization: on the assembly line he is fitted into the trunk of a car, and in the factory he concludes that enclosure is an illusion. The outcome is the destruction of the family and a killing that misses its target.

In The White Tiger the darkness of origin does not darken Balram. He is content in his cockroach-covered room because it is his. His mind darkens where the two Indias touch: "the Light and the Darkness both flow into Delhi" (Adiga, 2008, "The Sixth Night"), and he lives at that meeting point, in the mirror of the car, at the mall entrance he may not pass. The outcome is success and freedom from punishment, enjoyed in a lit room of 150 square feet.

### *7.1 The privileged and the form of harm*

Setting the privileged characters beside the confined puts each of these answers to the test, and Table 1 gathers the results.

Table 1. Confinement and the form of harm in the three novels

| | The confined | The privileged |
|---|---|---|
| Who | Raskolnikov; Yŏng-su; Balram as chauffeur | Luzhin, Svidrigaïlov; the Yŏngdong speculator, Kyŏng-hun; the Stork's family, Pinky, Balram as entrepreneur |
| Where harm is done | By crossing a threshold into another's space: an axe in a flat, a knife in a tower; in Balram's reversal, the master is drawn out onto the servant's ground: a broken bottle beside a car | Without trespass, on their own ground or in space they control: a note slipped into a pocket at a doorway, abuse in the speculator's own flat, a child struck from Pinky's car, a driver kept to his master's schedule |

| | The confined | The privileged |
|---|---|---|
| Whom it reaches | Proximate figures: Lizaveta, the chairman's brother, Mr. Ashok | The precarious poor at large: Sonia, Yŏng-hŭi, a child on the road, a boy on a bicycle |
| What follows | Confession, trial, or fugitive flight | Erasure: the offence goes unrecorded or is borne by someone else, while a strongbox, a coerced confession, and an iron gate keep the consequences out |

Across all three novels, characters with room to spare also inflict harm, demonstrating that confinement is not necessary for wrongdoing. Equally, because others in the same spatial trap remain compassionate, confinement is not sufficient either. Rather, spatial position governs the form of harm, its reach, and who bears its cost. The privileged never need to cross into anyone else's space: they do harm on their own ground, in a doorway, a flat, or a car of their own, or at the further remove of a driver's schedule, and what follows is erasure rather than pursuit. In Shapiro's (1990) terms, their position allows them "to rob without violence and burgle without trespass" (p. 346). Even when, like Pinky or the speculator, they do violence with their own hands, the trespass is absent, and they require no physical getaway, only what Katz calls "a metaphysical escape" (as cited in Shapiro, 1990, p. 355). Benson et al. (2024) explain why: those with "other easier and less risky ways" of extracting what they want rarely need to break in (p. 12).

The confined act by hand and within reach, and the people they reach are near them, often poorer or gentler than the intended target. Lizaveta returns while Raskolnikov is still in the flat, and she is herself kept "in complete bondage" by her sister (Dostoevsky, 1866/2003, Part 1, Chapter 6). The chairman's brother dies because he took the elevator. Mr. Ashok, the most considerate member of the family Balram serves (Tickell, 2015), is killed kneeling in the mud while the Stork and the Mongoose remain untouched. Conversely, the confined must physically cross a forbidden threshold: Raskolnikov steps into the pawnbroker's flat, Yŏng-su enters the corporate headquarters, and Yŏng-hŭi enters the speculator's apartment to retrieve her family's papers. Balram reverses the movement, drawing his master out of the car so that the killing happens on the servant's ground. Each must then confess, stand trial, or flee. Balram's later career confirms the pattern from the other side: once he owns a company, the harm done in his name happens at a distance and is settled with a contact and money.

### *7.2 Rooms and voices*

Bakhtin's polyphony turns out to be spatial as well. Dostoevsky surrounds Raskolnikov with voices that live in other rooms (Sonia's, Razumikhin's, Porfiry's office), and their presence keeps any single verdict from closing the novel. Cho distributes the narration across both sides of the class wall, so the Möbius form is also a form of polyphony. Adiga confines the narration to one voice writing at night in one 150-square-foot office. In these three novels, at least, the number of voices follows the number of rooms the narrative can imagine. The fewer the rooms, the fewer the voices, and the fewer the voices, the less space remains for an alternative to the killer's account.

The same holds for the figure who lives in the trap and chooses otherwise. Sonia and Razumikhin are fully present in Dostoevsky. Chi-sŏp's counsel to "stay there" is heard in Cho and set aside. In Adiga the alternative survives only in memory and in the cage at which Balram faints. Frankl's last freedom is tested accordingly. Dostoevsky confirms it: the square yard of space is Frankl's minimum, a life still worth choosing in almost no room. Cho complicates it, for Chi-sŏp's counsel is an exercise of exactly that freedom, and the novel shows how little protection it offers against a bulldozer. Adiga parodies it: Balram also claims to have chosen his own way, but his choice is self-assertion presented as freedom, and he exercises it by enclosing himself again.

### *7.3 How much room for a woman?*

Both Tolstoy's parable and this article's title frame the question in the masculine, just as the novels' killers are men. Yet the novels' spatial orders weigh differently upon women. As Massey (1994) argues, the organization of space is also an organization of gender, and all three texts bear this out. Sonia's irregular room is paid for through prostitution, and Luzhin's planted note shows how effortlessly a poor woman can be branded a thief. Yŏng-hŭi surrenders her body in a speculator's flat to recover her family's housing papers. Pinky, the sole character in Adiga who wishes to make amends, possesses the mobility to leave and exercises it, flying out of the novel. In each case a woman's access to space is bought or forfeited through her body. And in each case the woman refuses violence: Sonia reads Lazarus, Yŏng-hŭi plays her broken guitar, and Pinky asks to find the child's family. The question "how much room does a man need?" yields a harsher answer for women: less room is allotted, and more is paid for it.

### *7.4 The trap as symbol*

This is where the spatial trap works as a symbolic factor. In each novel it is a real trap: the economic, social, and political constraints on the poor take physical form in a room, a house, or a car. But none of the novels lets the room decide the outcome on its own. Each uses the trap as a symbol that gives shape to a state of mind: the garret, Svidrigaïlov's bath house, the Klein bottle, the coop. The trap intensifies what other constraints have begun; where the mind goes from there differs from novel to novel. The novels are not case studies, and none of them claims that such conditions produce violence. They do show that the room in which a moral

choice is made is a built and policed place, not a metaphor. Because the argument rests on three novels from three traditions, these relations are a typology of positions, not a history of the novel.

## 8. Conclusion

This study opened with the exchange in Porfiry's room, and the comparative evidence of the three novels rejects both extremes of the debate staged there. Confinement does not mechanically manufacture the criminal, as the socialists whom Razumikhin derides would have it, yet neither is the transgressor free of his room, as Raskolnikov's theory of the extraordinary man presumes; Porfiry's quieter claim, that environment accounts for a great deal, comes closest to what the novels show. In Crime and Punishment the garret feeds an idea that the mind has already begun, and the prison camp, the narrowest place of all, is where the mind turns back toward others. In The Dwarf the trap crushes bodies and scatters a family while the gentlest minds stay turned toward the moon. In The White Tiger the mind darkens not in the basement but at the threshold where Balram can see the light from which he is excluded.

The privileged characters show what space does not do. Luzhin, Svidrigaïlov, the speculator, the chairman's son, and the Stork's family all have room, and all do harm. Space, in these novels, intensifies what other constraints have begun, gives the mind's condition a visible form, and decides the outcome: who is within reach of violence, who can make a crime disappear, and who pays.

The question has not lost its force. In August 2022, members of one family drowned when floodwater filled their semi-basement home in Seoul, the city where the dwarf's family lost its house four decades earlier, and the city announced that it would phase such homes out; news reports described the flats through Bong Joon-ho's film Parasite, which had made them known to the world (Al Jazeera, 2022; Bong, 2019). The parallel is offered only as a direction for further work, but it suggests that the question these novels ask is still being asked.

Tolstoy's peasant Pahom runs from dawn to dusk to claim all the land he can encircle, and falls dead at the finishing point. His servant digs him a grave, and the story ends with its measure: six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed (Tolstoy, 1886/1906, section IX). The novels studied here ask a gentler version of the question. A person needs very little room to live. To remain humane, he needs some.

## Statements and Declarations

### *Data availability*

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no new datasets were generated or analysed during this study.

### *Declaration of generative AI use*

Generative AI (Claude, Anthropic) was used primarily for editorial review, language refinement, and assistance with reference checking after the research and central arguments had been developed. The study's conception, analysis, interpretations, and final scholarly decisions remain the author's own. The author takes full responsibility for the manuscript.

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