

Title: Raskol'nikov in New York City: Laurence Sanders Answers Dostoevsky
Author: Christine A. Rydel, Grand Valley State University

Laurence Sanders's mystery, *The First Deadly Sin*, follows a modern-day killer in New York as he commits random murders with a climbing axe. In this contemporary twentieth-century novel set in an urban environment, the killer, who remains unknown to the police until the end of the novel, carries on a cat-and-mouse game with the main investigator, rather than the opposite. This murderer copies Raskol'nikov's crime many times, but with one marked exception: he consciously tries not to commit the same mistakes as does the hero of *Crime and Punishment*; in fact, he consciously plans how not to make them. Instead of acting in a fevered state, the New York killer carries out his carefully planned murders in a coldblooded and rational manner. And in yet another reversal of Dostoevsky, Sanders places his investigator, not his criminal, in a family situation that borders on the pathetic. Some other aspects of the Sanders mystery echo *Crime and Punishment*, but not on a one-to-one correspondence. For instance, Raskol'nikov's dream of a bacillus in the epilogue realizes itself in a Protean infection that continues to ravage the inspector's dying wife. And unlike Raskol'nikov, the New York pickaxe murderer is unencumbered by family and friends. Of course, the New York killer's lack of remorse remains the biggest difference between the protagonists of these two "mystery" novels. Therefore a question remains: if these two novels appear so different from each other, what binds them together? The title, *The First Deadly Sin*, i. e. *Pride*. Raskol'nikov's "copycat" also commits murders to see whether he can, but patterns his personal *Übermensch* on Raskol'nikov rather than on Nietzsche. And how much *Pride* does a character need to challenge Dostoevsky?

rydelc@gvsu.edu