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**DOSTOEVSKY'S**

# **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**



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# CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

## NOTES

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- *Introduction*
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- *Study Questions and Theme Topics*

*by*

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ISBN 0-8220-0328-7

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Printed in U.S.A.

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# CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

## LIFE AND BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

**D**OSTOIEVSKY was born of lower middle class parents in 1821 and lived until 1881. This period covers one of the most active and changing periods in Russian history until the communist revolution. Dostoevsky's father was a stern righteous man while his mother was the opposite extreme. His early education included an Army Engineering school where Dostoevsky was apparently bored to death with the dull drill and unimaginative life. After two years in the Army, he launched on a literary career at the age of 25, and his first novel, *Poor Folk*, became an immediate success, highly acclaimed by the critics. This novel showed Dostoevsky's first emphasis on the psychological analysis of inner feelings of the soul and the workings of the intricate mind. He penetrated deeply into every aspect. After this work the only important thing he wrote for many years was *The Double*, which treats a split personality and therefore suggests the conception of the character of Raskolnikov.

The most crucial time of Dostoevsky's life occurred after the publication of *Poor Folk*. Using the influence won from this literary achievement, he became involved in political intrigues of questionable nature. At this time in his life he was influenced by all the new and radical ideas entering Russia from the West. Like Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky became addicted to these new ideas and became dangerously involved in certain liberal movements. He was part of a group which was out to revolutionize Russia and to prove that Russia should catch up with the ideas of Western Europe. He began writing and publishing contraband articles on various political questions. These articles were illegal because at this time printing was controlled and censored by the government.

The group was arrested in 1849 and placed in prison. After due investigation, fifteen of the revolutionaries, including Dostoevsky,

were condemned to be shot before a firing squad. A few days later, the entire group were bound and placed before the firing squad. As all the horrible preparations were being completed, and the victims were actually ready to be shot, a messenger from the Tsar arrived with a reprieve. (Actually, the Tsar had never intended to have them shot; he was merely using this method to teach them a lesson.) But this soul-shaking, harrowing encounter with death created a strong never-to-be-forgotten impression that haunted Dostoevsky for years to come.

After the commutation of the death sentence, Dostoevsky was sent to Siberia for five years. These were the years in which Dostoevsky changed his entire outlook on life. During this time, amid horrible living conditions—stench, ugliness, hardened criminals, and filth—he began to re-evaluate his life. Here, he also had his first epileptic seizure. Here, he began to reject a blind acceptance of new ideas that were filtrating into Russia. Thus Raskolnikov's view of new ideas and their influence received its origin here. And here was the beginning of his views as a Slavophil. He came to believe that the salvation of the world was in the hands of Russia and that eventually Russia would rise to dominate the world. Therefore, each person must contribute his utmost to the development of Russian ideas and culture. These Slavophilic ideas are later expressed by Porfiry. Likewise, Dostoevsky formulated his thoughts about the necessity of suffering. Suffering, for him, became a means by which the soul is purified and expiated all its sins. Suffering became the means of salvation.

When Dostoevsky was released from prison, he took up his literary career where he left it years before and rapidly rose to become one of the great spokesmen in Russia. But the final years of his life were not easy ones. His first marriage was to a tubercular young widow with a young son by her previous marriage (a somewhat similar position to Katerina Ivanovna's), but this marriage terminated soon in her death. He lost his jobs as editor and was constantly forced to write in order to pay off huge debts that he had accumulated with impatient creditors.

At the end of his life he was considered Russia's greatest novelist and today stands as one of the world's greatest writers.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS FROM *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*

### NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

If the reader will remember to give strong stress to the syllable marked with an accent in this list, to give the vowels their "continental" value and pronounce the consonants as in English, a rough approximation to the Russian pronunciation will be obtained. The consonant "kh" sounds rather like the Scottish "ch" in "loch"; the "zh" represents a sound like "s" in measure; and the final "-v" is pronounced "-f."

### THE RASKOLNIKOV FAMILY

#### **RODÍON ROMÁNOVITCH RASKÓLNIKOV**

A poverty-stricken student who conceives of a theory of the superman or extraordinary man as a justification or rationalization for his crime.

#### **RÓDYA, RÓDENKA, AND RÓDKA**

Nicknames for Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov.

#### **AVDÓTYA ROMÁNOVNA RASKÓLNIKOV**

His devoted sister who was previously Svidragailov's employee and who is engaged to Luzhin. She arrives in St. Petersburg at about the time of Raskolnikov's crime.

#### **DÓUNIA**

Nickname for Avdotya Romanovna Raskolnikov.

#### **PULCHÉRIA ALEXÁNDROVNA RASKÓLNIKOV**

His mother.

### THE MARMELADOV FAMILY

#### **SEMYON ZAKHÁROVITCH MARMELADOV**

A dismissed government clerk who is alcoholic and who is the



father of Sonia by a previous marriage. Presently married to Katerina Ivanovna.

### **KATERÍNA IVÁNOVNA**

Marmeladov's wife who had been previously married to an Army officer by whom she had three children. Socially, she was born into a higher rank than was Marmeladov.

### **SÓFYA SEMYÓNOVNA MARMELADOV**

Marmeladov's daughter by a previous marriage who is compelled to enter into prostitution to support the family.

### **SÓNIA**

Sofya's nickname.

### **PÓLENKA, LYÓYA, KOLYA**

Katerina Ivanovna's children by a previous marriage.

### **SVIDRIGÁILOV, ARKÁDY IVÁNOVITCH**

Dounia's former employer who follows her to St. Petersburg.

### **MÁRFA PETRÓVNA**

His wife who leaves Dounia three thousand rubles in her will.

### **LÚZHIN, PYOTR PETRÓVITCH**

Engaged to Dounia and employed by the government.

### **RAZUMÍHIN, DMÍTRI PROKÓFITCH**

A student and friend of Raskolnikov's who later becomes attached to Dounia.

### **LEBEZIÁTNIKOV, ANDREY SEMYÓNOVITCH**

A roomer in the same house that the Marmeladovs live in and who calls himself an "advanced liberal."

### **PORFÍRY PETRÓVITCH**

An official of the investigating department who is in charge of the "crime."

**ALYŌNA IVÁNŌVNA**

A moneylender.

**LIZAVĚTA IVANŌVNA**

Alyona Ivanovna's sister and also a friend to Sonia.

**PRASKŌVYA PAVLŌVNA**

Raskolnikov's landlady who complains to the police about Raskolnikov's failure to pay his rent.

**NASTĀSYA**

Her servant and a friend to Raskolnikov.

**AMĀLIA FYODORŌVNA**

The Marmeladov's landlady who is particularly disliked by Katerina Ivanovna.

**KAPERNAÚMOV**

Sonia's landlady.

**ZŌSSIMOV**

A doctor who attends Raskolnikov during his illness, and also a friend of Razumihin.

**NIKODĪM FOMĪTCH**

Chief of the police.

**ZAMĚTOV**

A clerk in the police station and friend of Razumihin.

**ÍLYA PETRŌVITCH**

A loud and boistrous police official.

**NIKOLĀY and DMĪTRI**

Painters who were working at the scene of the Crime.

**RUSSIAN NAMES**

The middle name of all male characters end in "–vitch" and of all female characters in "–ovna." This ending simply means

“son of” or “daughter of” the father whose first name is converted into their middle name. For example, Rodion and Avdotya’s father was named *Roman* Raskolnikov. Thus, their middle name, Rodion *Romanovitch* and Avdotya *Romanovna*, means Rodion, son of Roman and Avdotya, daughter of Roman.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Raskolnikov, an impoverished student, conceives of himself as being an extraordinary young man and then formulates a theory whereby the extraordinary men of the world have a right to commit any crime. To prove his theory he murders an old pawnbroker and her step-sister. Immediately after the crime, he becomes ill and lies in his room in semi-consciousness for several days. When he recovers, he finds that a friend, Razumihin, had looked for him. While he is recovering, he receives a visit from Luzhin, who is engaged to Raskolnikov’s sister Dounia. Raskolnikov insults Luzhin and sends him away because he resents Luzhin’s domineering attitude toward Dounia.

As soon as he can walk again, Raskolnikov goes out and reads about the crime in all the newspapers of the last few days. He meets an official from the police station and almost confesses the crime. He does go far enough in his ravings that the official becomes suspicious. Later he witnesses the death of Marmeladov, a minor government official, who is struck by a carriage as he staggers across the street in a drunken stupor. Raskolnikov assists the man and leaves all his money to the widow. When he returns to his room, he finds his mother and sister who have just arrived to prepare for the wedding with Luzhin. He denounces Luzhin and refuses to allow his sister to marry him. About the same time, Svidrigailov, Dounia’s former employer, arrives in town and looks up Raskolnikov and asks for a meeting with Dounia. Previously Svidrigailov had attempted to seduce Dounia and when Raskolnikov had heard of it, he formed a violent dislike for the man.

Raskolnikov hears that the police inspector, Porfiry, is interviewing all people who had ever had any business with the old

pawnbroker. Therefore, he goes for an interview and leaves thinking that the police suspect him. Since he had met Sonia Marmeladov, the daughter of the dead man that Raskolnikov had helped, he goes to her and asks her to read to him from the Bible. He feels great sympathy with Sonia who had been forced into prostitution in order to support her family while her father drank. He promises to tell her who murdered the old pawnbroker.

After another interview with Porfiry, Raskolnikov determines to confess to Sonia. He returns to her and during the confession, Svidrigailov is listening through the door. He uses this information to try to force Dounia to sleep with him. She refuses and he kills himself later in the night.

Porfiry informs Raskolnikov that he knows who murdered the pawnbroker. After talking with Sonia, Raskolnikov fully confesses to the murder, is sentenced to eight years in a Siberian prison. Sonia follows him and, with her help, Raskolnikov begins his regeneration.

## STRUCTURE

The general structure of the novel must be seen in terms of the main character, Raskolnikov. We must keep in mind his dual personality as the controlling idea behind the murder and behind his punishment. Raskolnikov is used as a representative of the modern young Russian intellectual whose fate is intricately bound up in the fate of Russia herself. Therefore the story is a parable of the fate of a nihilistic and skeptical youth in nineteenth century Russia, whose materialism and revolutionary opinions Dostoevsky hated and feared. (See general background on Dostoevsky's imprisonment.) This book was to be a vision of the ultimate error and moral sufferings of those who had so cut themselves off from established authority and morality that they lost all respect for human life. Therefore, the life and aims of Raskolnikov became in some ways the fate of the young Russian intellectual.

But Dostoevsky loved Raskolnikov. The entire story is pre-

sented from Raskolnikov's viewpoint and most of the actions and most of our views are seen through his eyes. Dostoevsky, as author, seldom leaves Raskolnikov except when, in some short scenes, his thesis demands attention elsewhere.

The plot of the novel presents a double conflict, one external and one internal: the one conflict between the estranged individual and his hostile universe, the other a clash between an isolated soul and his ethical or esthetic consciousness. Since the plot is a double conflict, the first general structural problem is to understand Raskolnikov's dual personality. There are several ways of seeing this. In its broadest view, Raskolnikov fluctuates between the ideas of (1) complete self-will and power, and (2) extreme meekness and self-submissiveness.

Actions in the novel which seem to be contradictory are a result of Raskolnikov's fluctuation between these two aspects of his personality; therefore, the first part of the novel deals with a crime committed by this young intellectual. The crime was a result of a theory he conceived about the nature of man's abilities; that is, some men have abilities which make them extraordinary while others possess no abilities. It was this intellectual aspect of his character which caused him to conceive and execute his crime. He wanted to see if he had the *daring to transcend* conscience. His punishment comes about as a result of the *transcendence of conscience*. Therefore, one aspect of his character is a cold, inhumane, detached intellectuality which emphasizes the individual power and self-will. The other aspect is the warm, compassionate side, revealed in his charitable acts and his reluctance to accept credit.

The problem in the novel, therefore, is to bring these two opposing parts of Raskolnikov's personality into a single functioning person. To do this, Dostoevsky opens with the crime which is handled rather quickly so as to get to the punishment. The murder is the symbol of Raskolnikov's thinking. It is the result of having cut himself off from authority, from love, from men. But since Raskolnikov is a dual personality, Dostoevsky also felt the need of creating two additional characters who, taken separately, represent the two opposing aspects of his nature. Thus, Sonia is the warm

human, compassionate, charitable aspect of Raskolnikov's character. She is the meek and submissive personality. Svidrigailov is the detached cold manifestation of the self-will and power and intellect. Consequently, so often in the novel, when Raskolnikov is attracted to Sonia, he is repulsed by the depravity of Svidrigailov. Likewise, when he is talking or going to see Svidrigailov, he is disgusted with and repulsed by Sonia's tears and weaknesses.

With Raskolnikov's character established as a dual one, and with these two characters, Sonia and Svidrigailov, representing the two alternating aspects, the general pattern of the novel is to bring Raskolnikov back into one functioning character. Thus we must have *two redemptive* characters. Here the importance of Sonia's role is seen. As she represents one aspect of Raskolnikov's personality, so must she function as the person who is to redeem that aspect. Therefore Sonia is the redemptive figure for Raskolnikov's humane personality. Through her suffering, she makes him realize the importance of a love for humanity, that a human being cannot be a louse or a parasite sucking the life from other human beings. But it should be emphasized that Sonia does not accomplish her purpose by overt action. She is the passive figure whose simple presence serves to inspire Raskolnikov's actions.

The other redemptive figure is Porfiry. Here is the intellectual man who has used his intellect for the good of man. Here is the man who sees in Raskolnikov the potential of a great being who made up a theory and then was ashamed that it broke down. Porfiry is the man who recognized that the theory is base but that Raskolnikov is far from being base. His purpose, therefore, is to make Raskolnikov see the difference between the baseness of the theory and the ever present potential in himself. What Porfiry realizes is that any idea, if it is conceived of for the benefit of humanity, must be a human idea and must be executed by a humane person. He tries to make Raskolnikov see that the idea is base because it views a large portion of mankind as base.

Thus Raskolnikov in the beginning of the novel is a dual personality with the two aspects of his personality represented by Sonia and Svidrigailov, then the problem is to bring this personality

into an integrated whole. This task is assigned to Sonia and Porfiry. The emphasis is that man cannot separate the humane aspect of his life from his other endeavors. Whatever man does must be done in terms of general humanity.

Raskolnikov's punishment, that is, the general suffering he undergoes, is a result of this split personality. It was one aspect that murdered, but it is the other humane side that then must suffer.

## PART AND CHAPTER ANALYSIS

### PART ONE

#### CHAPTER ONE

##### *Summary*

On a hot evening in July, a young student, Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov, is seen on his way to visit an old pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna. He is in a confused state in which he avoids contact with his landlady and all other associations. Upon arriving at the pawnbroker's, he seems to be disgusted with the entire procedure and finds it all to be loathsome and degrading. After transacting his business with the pawnbroker, he leaves in a state of extreme agitation.

##### *Comment*

A. Note Raskolnikov's state of mind, his "sick frightened feeling," his isolation, and his need to avoid all company.

B. The physical description of Raskolnikov in this first chapter is the only one in the entire novel. He is described as being exceptionally handsome, slim "well-built with beautiful dark eyes and dark brown hair." This description should be emphasized. Too often, illustrators depict Raskolnikov as physically depraved and/or deformed. Dostoevsky wanted to emphasize his physical attractiveness as to remove any possible view that the crime was based on

physical deformity. The physical beauty of the character contrasts with the ugliness of the crime.

C. Even here in the first chapter, Raskolnikov's plans are far from being complete. He notices that the most trivial detail could spoil the entire plan. Thus, this is the first indication that the crime has not yet been worked out completely in all detail. This fact, seemingly insignificant at this point, becomes central to Raskolnikov's redemption when he tries to explain his crime to Sonia at the end of the novel.

D. Note the very careful preparation for the crime, such as counting the number of steps from the house; yet in the midst of this careful planning, he is also suddenly troubled with the loathsomeness and ugliness of the crime; that is, that it is atrocious and degrading. And even though the thought of it repulses him, he continues to proceed toward its completion.

E. The visit to Alyona Ivanovna's shows Raskolnikov's confusion and disgust with the whole episode even as he prepares for its execution. The visit also shows that Raskolnikov is not the hardened cold criminal.

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER TWO

#### *Summary*

After his visit to Alyona Ivanovna's, Raskolnikov feels the need for a drink, so he stops in a tavern. Here he meets Semyon Marmeladov who tells him about his life. Marmeladov had been in the government service but lost his position because of his alcoholism. However, he had recently been reinstated as a clerk in a government office. But he has been drinking for five days and is now afraid to go home. He tells of his marriage to Katerina Ivanovna, a widow of a higher class than he who married him out of destitution. Before he was reinstated in his position, he tells how his daughter, Sonia, had to enter into prostitution in order to support the family, because he



refused to quit drinking. Five days ago, he stole all the money the family had and spent it on drink. Now he is afraid to go home. Raskolnikov helps to take Marmeladov home, and when there sees the abject poverty in which the family lives. His sympathy prompts him to silently leave them some of his money.

### *Comment*

A. Of greatest importance in this chapter is the beginning of the establishment of Raskolnikov's *dual* character. That is, we shall see later that Raskolnikov functions at times as (1) a warm, compassionate, humane individual and (2) as a cold, detached, intellectual being. At the beginning of this chapter, he has avoided society of late but suddenly feels the desire to be with someone. Then at the end of the chapter, his humanitarian impulses cause him to leave his only money with Katerina Ivanovna, but immediately, he changes his mind and "would have gone back."

B. In his meeting with Marmeladov, we have our first introduction to Sonia and to the entire Marmeladov family and also to Lebeziatnikov. Marmeladov's story reflects upon Raskolnikov's condition. The discussion of hopelessness, "when one has no one, nowhere else one can go," becomes one of the dominant motifs throughout the rest of the novel. This discussion forces Raskolnikov to consider the hopelessness of his own life. Later, after the murder, Raskolnikov remembers the impassioned cry of "having nowhere to go."

C. Marmeladov's story is one in which he as a human being is seen as an alcoholic whose family is starving while he drinks, whose daughter had to enter into prostitution in order to support the starving family, and whose life has been one of degradation. Since Raskolnikov's murder will be based partially on the rationale that certain people fit into a category of being a louse, then this story should indicate to Raskolnikov that his theory should apply directly to Marmeladov, especially when Marmeladov cries out, "Dare you assert that I am not a pig." But rather than despising Marmeladov as a louse, Raskolnikov feels great sympathy for him and for his suffering, thus contradicting his own theory.