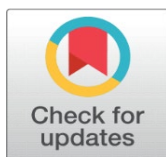
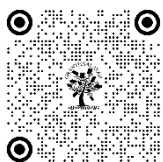


DUALISM AND REDEMPTION: ROUND CHARACTERS AND THE TRIUMPH OF RELIGION IN DOSTOEVSKY'S CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

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ABSTRACT

Crime and Punishment (1866) by Fyodor Dostoevsky is an outstanding psychological and religious novel, delving into the intricacies of the human soul through the development of its characters, each of whom becomes entangled in religious experience. This project explores the novel's deep characters using E.M. Forster's concept of round characters, specifically the protagonist Raskolnikov's psychological dualism, and spiritual struggle culminating in Orthodox Christian ideas of liberation. The study uses close reading informed by Bakhtin's polyphonic narrative to explore how Dostoevsky creates complex characters as repositories for theological and philosophical debates. The character's name Raskolnikov is a name that derives from the Russian raskolnik meaning schismatic, traditionally referring to adherence or non-adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church. Drawing on the relationship system of the novel, including especially that between Rodion and Sonia Marmeladova, who embodies divine wisdom (sophia), and Svidrigailov, who represents nihilistic despair, the work considers how Dostoevsky attacks Western rationalism and at the same time supports the spiritual values of Orthodoxy. It is clear that Raskolnikov's crime involves a great deal more than murder: his crime is neither physical nor impersonal but symbolic self-annihilation mediated by self-disgust and spiritual alienation. He is saved by embracing his suffering, confessing, and receiving the divine grace represented by Sonia's unyielding faith. The comparable wrongdoings of various individuals Raskolnikov's murder, Sonia's prostitution, and Dunya's sacrificial betrothal are different reactions to moral compromise, consistent with a background of Orthodox thought. The study finds Crime and Punishment to be a theological novel that illustrates the victory of Orthodoxy over nihilism, with the rounded character as a vehicle for the examination of sin, suffering, and redemption in the human condition.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, Round Characters, Orthodox Christianity, Dualism, Redemption, Raskolnikov

1. INTRODUCTION

The richness of Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment can earn its place on your bookshelf with the single read as the exploration of deep psychology and religion transcends time. The novel features characters of substantial complexity that E.M. Forster (1927) would call "round characters" a person "capable of surprising, in a convincing way" as well as also preserving the "incalculability of life" within the space of a book. The complexity of this dualism is embodied in the protagonist Raskolnikov whose name is derived from the word "raskolnik" meaning schismatic with its connotation of a disconnect with the church community (Ali, 2023). This etymological meaning is connected to the main distinction in the tale between rationalist philosophy and Orthodox faith. The presence of Bakhtin's (1981) polyphonic narrative is crucial to the comprehension of the way in which Dostoevsky composes multiple autonomous voices which refuse to be fully finalised by the author, enabling the characters to operate as independent consciousnesses, and not just as carriers of ideological positions (FUNG et al., 2016). The enduring relevance of the novel lies in its penetrating study of human nature under extreme conditions and in Dostoevsky's deliberate effort to reclaim a generation of young

radicals from nihilistic belief by reasserting the spiritual framework of Orthodox Christianity (Tucker 2008). With masterly psychological insight, Dostoevsky outdoes his prior nature-v-nurture anecdotes with the still darker parable of characters who dare to believe they have free will and are responsible, accountable in fact, for the ugliest aspects of human existence - suffering, degradation, violence, rape and murder. Through complex relationships between divine will and coincidence, or between divine will and human error, sin, and evil choices, Dostoevsky plays with determinism and free will to have his characters engage on the deepest questions of life, of existence, of suffering, and of redemption.

Table 1 Comparative Character Analysis Matrix

Character	Symbolic Function	Philosophical Position	Polyphonic Voice	Theological Significance
Raskolnikov	Schismatic Soul (Raskol)	Napoleonic Exceptionalism → Orthodox Faith	Dialogical consciousness in crisis	Death and resurrection paradigm
Sonia	Divine Wisdom (Sophia)	Unwavering Orthodox faith	Voice of spiritual authority	Madonna/Magdalene paradox
Svidrigailov	Nihilistic Double	Complete amorality	Monological despair	Failure of exceptionalism
Dunya	Sacrificial Sister	Moral pragmatism	Voice of familial duty	Parallel transgression theme
Porfiry	Intellectual Catalyst	Psychological investigation	Socratic interlocutor	Confessor figure

2. METHOD

This reading utilizes close textual analysis in conjunction with the theological and the philosophical to interpret the development of characters in Crime and Punishment. The approach is inspired by Bakhtin's polyphonic reading, one that acknowledges that Dostoevsky characters (in this instance) serve as "independent voices in a dialogical relationship" rather than subservient elements of a monological authorial intent (FUNG et al., 2016). Onoma-symbolic analysis will also consider character names, relations, and symbolic actions in Dostoevsky's works as interpreted by Cassedy (2005) within the Orthodox Christian tradition that Cassedy describes as foundational to Dostoevsky's art theory. Raskolnikov and Sonia are, however, the most complex of the three figures, stand[ing] for the struggle between sin and salvation (394) Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov for the clash between moral sensibilities and nihilism (397) and the sins of Raskolnikov, Sonia, and Dunya with their overlapping and intersecting relationships for an exploration of conflicting reactions to unprincipled behavior. Interpretive approach is informed by Orthodox theology which conceives spirituality as experiential rather than doxological with root in mystical transfiguration rather than rational theology (Russell, 2009). Character analysis draws upon Forster's theory of the round and flat character, investigation into the way psychological complexity serves theological narrative purposes, and Bakhtin's deployment of dialogical consciousness.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

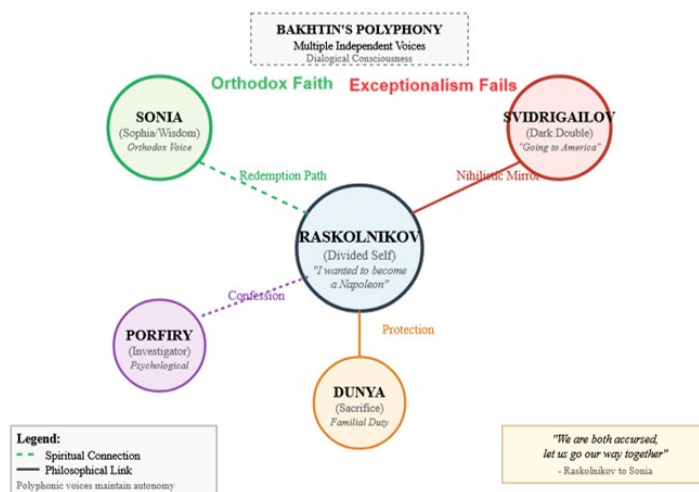


Figure 1 Polyphonic Character Dynamics and Redemptive Pathways

The examination discloses Raskolnikov's personality to be essentially torn between the warring forces of evil and good, empirical rationalism and belief. Dostoevsky's ideal (the extraordinary man doctrine) is no more a pure

Nietzschean philosopher, than he is a mere Napoleonic superman but vacillates somewhere between the two, derived from Raskolnikov's insistence that I wanted to be a Napoleon, and that's why I killed her (Dostoevsky). His confession shows that it is a desire to assert his own will among men of his own kind who are "men who are above such common laws as those which are laid down for the Government of ordinary Men and who have right to commit any crime and to transgress the law in any way" (p. 259) that was the motive of his killing. Humiliation as theological prerequisite models' Orthodox tradition, according to Russell (2009), where authentic humanity is recognized and grace is needed only through humiliation. Sonia Marmeladova turns out to be the novel's spiritual heart, her name springing from sophia for divine wisdom, so that she becomes redemptive mediator (Slattery, 1994). As a prostitute, Sonia is spiritual in the abject sense whorish, degraded, yet paradoxically holy because she loves her family at the expense of herself. When he confesses to her, Raskolnikov says: "I have come to you, we are both accursed, let us go our way together" (p. 322) understanding their common but divergent sins.

Svidrigailov becomes, in a sense, Raskolnikov's "intimate" of darkness, in the understatement being the furthest pole, diametrically opposed to a spirituality of meaning. His absolute amorality and suicide in the end are the logical conclusion of the nihilist's ideology when spiritually unmoored as he says, matter-of-factly, at the end: "I am going to America" (p. 489) before he shoots himself, America being the metaphor for the void. The parallel between the two men, their crimes, their troubled sleep, the quest for salvation in female love underscores how near characters are and yet how far they are separated by spiritual temperament (Tucker, 2008). Whereas Raskolnikov is redeemed by Sonia's faith and embrace of suffering, Svidrigailov is condemned by Dunya for despair and self-immolation. This disparity acts as an expression of Dostoevsky's emotional persuasion rather than his rational persuasion, compelling readers to feel rather than analyze the consequences of philosophical decisions, through character identification.

The novel features not one but several characters committing transgressive acts that test the limits of Orthodox morality Raskolnikov's murder, Sonia's prostitution and Dunya's preparedness to marry for family advantage and in each case these acts are justified as acts of violation of established morality for some higher purpose. Only those who confess sin and accept redemptive suffering to achieve spiritual transformation can be saved (cf. Ali 2023). Raskolnikov's progress from solitude to communion, from rational arrogance to humble confession, mirrors the Orthodox model of spiritual conversion through the descent into suffering and the rise through grace. The Siberian epilogue finalises this conversion, and Raskolnikov's internalisation of punishment as his redemption: "Life had succeeded Life" (549) as Raskolnikov's progression from theorising of faith to living faith, represented through Sonia.

4. CONCLUSION

Crime and Punishment achieves this lasting infamy by virtue of what Dostoevsky does: He makes round characters some of the most profound round characters in literature move like a swarm of bees around complex theological and philosophical tensions within the narrative structure of a polyphony. Even the hero's trademark name – Raskolnikov the schismatic – announces the story's main debate (between rationalist philosophy and Orthodox belief) that runs all along. The relationships with Sonya as divine wisdom and redeeming love and Svidrigailov as the incarnation of nihilistic despair reveal in Raskolnikov's life is the victory of Orthodox Christianity over Western rationalism and theories of the extraordinary individual. The genius of the novel lies less in abstract theological argument than in compelling readers to undergo spiritual verities by psychologically identifying with complex characters whose voices remain autonomous within Bakhtin's dialogical world. As Cassedy (2005) suggests, Dostoevsky utilizes fiction as a means of intensely exploring the meaning of Christianity by way of personal experiences of faith and doubt. The simultaneous failures of different characters is far from a mere juxtaposition of their shortcomings and exemplifies in a microcosm the importance of repentance by suffering as part of an Orthodox spiritual outlook and the place of confession and divine grace. In the end, Crime and Punishment is a monument to literature's ability to ferret out the answers to humanity's most urgent questions in the lives of characters impossibly complex and spiritually profound enough to endure over the ages and transcendent of culture and time.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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