

---

## Crime And Punishment: Characteristics Of Katerina And Pulcheria

Fyodor Dostoevsky, a profound, intellectual author, published *Crime and Punishment*, which is full of suspense and dives through the minds of several characters. Dostoevsky allows the reader to feel for the character Rodion Raskolnikov, as he is the protagonist. The author wants the reader to feel slight sympathy for Raskolnikov and his crimes because of the way he justifies his actions. The characters, Katerina Ivanovna and Pulcheria Alexandrovna, both mothers, signify duality and act as foils. Dostoevsky's relationship with his own mother can reflect the personalities of both Katerina and Pulcheria, as she strongly cares for her children and models the "motherly" character. These characters hold several similarities such as being widows, dealing with suffering and psychological problems. However, Dostoevsky uses contrasting characteristics to differ these mothers, such as Katerina's physical abuse and Pulcheria's dignified demeanor. The use of Raskolnikov's viewpoints, foil relationship, and duality of characters help shape the way Dostoevsky wants readers to perceive both Katerina and Pulcheria.

At the beginning, Pulcheria Alexandrovna Raskolnikov is portrayed as a caring mother with an intense adoration for her children, Dounia and Rodion. Her distance from Rodion seems to distress her, and therefore she writes a letter to her son updating him with significant news. Throughout the letter Pulcheria appears to show her love and affection for him repeatedly "You know how I love you; you are alone with us, with me and with Dunya, you are our everything, all our hope.." (30). The amount of love and hope Pulcheria has for her son is evident and Dostoevsky seems to emphasize the word "love" with her, which represents how he wants the readers to perceive her. Pulcheria portrays in her adoration that Raskolnikov himself is her reason for living, and that she will do anything in regards to maintaining a happy life for her children. However, the reactions of Raskolnikov from the letter was not what Pulcheria had been expecting, and rather wished him to come to an understanding, thus the overemphasis of her genuine care for him in the letter. "It made me ill...if only you could have seen how [Dounia] endured it all and tried to comfort me and cheer me up" (34). Her figure as a mother weakens as she continues to believe that she could lose her relationship with her son and therefore begins to doubt her actions. Pulcheria tries her best to make those around her content, and rather cares more for others than herself. "I don't want to be the least in anyone's way, and for my own sake, too, would rather be quite independent" (40). The justifications made by Pulcheria for furthering to the progress of the marriage between Luzhin and Dounia is seen through Raskolnikov to be that she misrepresented the happiness of the family. Pulcheria's immense pride and loyalty for her children are not seen by Raskolnikov, as he thinks his mother is forcing her own daughter into "prostitution" by marrying Pyotr Petrovich. His mother states "but Dounia is a clever girl and has a heart of an angel, and will make it her duty to make her husband happy who on his side will make her happiness his care"(37). She intends that this marriage will allow for a better life for their family and open an opportunity for Raskolnikov to go back to school. Pulcheria ends her letter with memory of the past: "remember,...when your father was living, you used to lisp your prayers at my knee, and how happy we all were in those days" (41). As a mother, she cherishes each and every moment with her children as if it were her last. All of her acts of kindness and dignified deeds for her family, many times are washed away as Raskolnikov believes she is forcing marriage onto his own sister. However, her

---

treatment toward Sonia represents a snobbish attitude, instead of her motherly-like self. Her initial reaction is she “glanced at Sonia, and slightly screwed up her eyes” (238). Dostoevsky places this initial disgust for Sonia to resemble irony, since she immediately distrusts Sonia with her prostitution and low income, even though Pulcheria had done the same with her daughter by forcing of the marriage and suffering from poverty.

In addition to Pulcheria facing misconception of her personality from her letter, her life came to an end in an unfortunate, tragic end. At the point of confession for Raskolnikov, he alarms the family that he must leave them with no direct reason. ““Rodya, Rodya be reconciled with us! Let us be as before!”” (312). The author creates such an ominous scene to emphasize Pulcheria’s concern for Raskolnikov. Dostoevsky here is able to show that Pulcheria longs for the desire of restoring her life to the point of when she believed she was a valuable mother, where everyone was content and healthy. Now, she feels overlooked and dismissed by her own family. Pulcheria had grown anxious of the absence of her son but realized the reality and grows frustrated by reason, which results in her dying from a fever on top of her delirium. The realism that Dostoevsky portrays in this scene signifies the misconception of the whole embodiment of Pulcheria. In Pulcheria’s letter, she ended it with “Yours till death” (41), which represents irony since she died without ever seeing her son again and knowing about his crime, which therefore resembles her true relationship with her son and with the readers thinking she is a hopeless character. Despite, Donia and Rodion coming to the conclusion of not confessing to their mother of Rodion’s crimes for the sake of her sanity, Pulcheria was able to figure out the reality of her son’s behaviors thus demonstrating the ability of possessing those genuine motherly characteristics. Dostoevsky included positive diction towards Pulcheria, but accentuated these ideas of Raskolnikov which altered her portrayal. The author also ended Pulcheria’s appearance in the book with a sad, somber way which leaves the readers thinking unfortunate for her, rather than of her soft, motherly figure.

A character who shares the job as a mother, but unlike Pulcheria, has differing conceptions is introduced in the book to represent foils. Katerina Marmeladov is married to a severe alcoholic, Semyon Marmeladov and lives in poverty and desperation. Her character is introduced as being mentally and physically ill, with no hope of treatment. “She is a lady of spirit, proud and determined. She scrubs the floors herself and has nothing but black bread to eat, but won’t allow herself to be treated with disrespect. to her feelings than from the blows”, (15) states Marmeladov. The author portrays the love Marmeladov has for Katerina to be strong, despite him not being able to support the family with his alcoholism controlling his life. The connection Katerina has with this alcoholism and her husband demonstrates how she treats others, especially her children. “My daughter by my first wife has grown up; and what my daughter has had to put up with from her step-mother whilst she was growing up, I won’t speak of” (17). Katerina has suffered emotionally from her past and takes that energy upon her own children, which can be a contribution to their own unhappiness. Her own husband provides her with as much love as he can, but Katerina continually gets aggravated by his actions such as him using her money to buy more drinks. The author developed a tragic and poor representation of their relationship together as well with the family. The diction represents how the readers could perceive her as to deal with misfortunate and struggle. Not only with the perception of struggle, but Katerina is idealized around the abuse she is involved with. “A boy a year older stood crying and shaking in the corner, probably he had just had a beating” (25) which represents Katerina taking her anger out on children and signifies immorality within her character. Once Raskolnikov meets Katerina, the author allows the reader’s viewpoints to be open to changing after showing Raskolnikov’s own opinions. After the horrific accident of Marmeladov’s death had occurred,

---

Raskolnikov suggested “Katerina Ivanovna,...Allow me now...to do something...to repay my debt to my dead friend. Here are twenty roubles”(188). The author here shows how Raskolnikov does have compassion for her as an individual, despite her cruel behavior with others. Raskolnikov does not judge her, which could be because of the amount of suffering and poverty that she deals with, in which he pities for. Due to this compassion Raskolnikov has for her, the author is able to convert the reader’s view of an abusive mother, to more of a mother who is trying to do her best based on her circumstances. The duality is crucial in showing the truth behind a character in a book. With Sonia’s developmental connection with Raskolnikov, Raskolnikov is able to grow a stronger relationship with Katerina. “Katerina Ivanovna told me to beg you... to be at the service...in the morning” (238), which strengthens the perception of the goodness in her character because Raskolnikov’s views seem to overlie many of the other characters in the book. The symbolism of Katerina’s certificate indicates her attempt of remaining prideful in her life full of hardships. As Katerina tries her best to convince and boast others around her of how her certificate “intended now to prove Katerina Ivanonvna’s right to open a boarding-school”(380), demonstrating her willingness to do anything to make her family not resemble substantial suffering. Katerina, continually suffering from her illness, dies the day of her husband’s funeral, resembling amplifications in the tragedy of her story. “And how did ‘the certificate of merit come to be on the bed beside Katerina Ivanovna? It lay there by the pillow’ Raskolnikov saw it” (431) . Compared to Pulcheria, Katerina dies proud of what she has done, despite her suffering from tuberculosis, which is shown through the certificate being by her side. Dostoevsky represents both Pulcheria and Katerina as foils, as they are complete opposites but resemble the same position of being a mother. Pulcheria, who genuinely is caring, loses her relationship and support from Raskolnikov to the point that she dies without ever seeing him. On the contrary, Katerina, who is introduced as the poor, abusive mother, later turns out to be one of the people whom Raskolnikov supports the most and she dies with the certificate by her side. These opposing sides support how the author wanted the readers to perceive both Katerina and Pulcheria as characters in the book.

Katerina Ivanovna and Pulcheria Raskolnikov resemble motherly relationships in the book; however, they have differing ideals and actions. Dostoevsky uses contrasting diction, dialogue, foils, and viewpoints of Raskolnikov to help the reader perceive that character in that one way. Through this, the author provides information to show that Pulcheria is what the readers think of as a good mother, but does not have the best relationship with Raskolnikov. With Katerina, the author shows that she uses her anger out on her children but just needed the support given by Raskolnikov, which strengthened their relationship throughout the book. Both of these characters die by the end of the book and are plagued by mental instabilities for different reasons, but represents the ideas of having characters with both good and bad sides to them.