
Crime And Punishment: Rodion Raskolnikov's Character

Central to the prosecution of any crime, especially murder, is moral conviction that an individual will experience as a result of their actions.

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's psychological drama, *Crime and Punishment*, protagonist Rodion Raskolnikov's theorizes that there are certain extraordinary individuals in society to whom mundane laws do not apply as they are "ubermensch" whose primary objective is the betterment of society through any means necessary. Dostoevsky's psychological progression of characters and influences of others on the protagonist function to manifest a corollary of Raskolnikov's questionable theory by employing dreams, symbols, themes to depict Raskolnikov's failed pursuits of becoming a superman as he gains morality. Through his transformative journey, Dostoevsky shows how Raskolnikov ultimately learns that he can achieve fulfillment in life without setting himself apart from society and becoming an extraordinary individual.

A crucial component of his character, Raskolnikov's superman theory influences much of his psychological experiences throughout the book, as they are all associated with the idea of him testing his postulation. Prior to committing the murders, Raskolnikov believes that he is an "extraordinary man", thus takes the stance that he is exempt from abiding by the statutes of society and can break laws as he pleases. He suggests that "extraordinary men" including Napoleon, Lycurgus, Mahomet, and Solon "were all without exception criminals, from the very fact that, making a new law, they transgressed the ancient one,...and they did not stop short at bloodshed...if that bloodshed...were of use to their cause' (211). Using this self-absorbed and egotistical mentality, he decides to commit the heinous crime of murdering Alonya, with the belief that he is relieving society of evil. Right away, Raskolnikov compares himself to other individuals. Raskolnikov experiences a deluge of emotions as he debates whether or not he should kill the old crone, ultimately justifying his formulation of the crime by implying that it is merely a test to determine if he is indeed an extraordinary man who is able to transcend the obligations of morality. Renowned scholar of Russian literature, Edward Wasiolek suggests that Raskolnikov's overt motivations are "...to be a benefactor of family and humanity or to be a superman exempt from the normal constraints of law..." through which "Raskolnikov seems to be saying: I did the murder because I am a special and heroic personality" (Wasiolek). Raskolnikov's pompous mentality exhorts him to test the boundaries of morality while his cognitive dissonance leads him to truly believe that what he is doing is not wrong.

Despite his cruel intentions, Raskolnikov's subconscious thoughts revealed within his dreams manifest his intrinsic capacity for morality. In his first dream, Raskolnikov is a young boy accompanying his father to visit the countryside. The two pass by an atrocious scene in which a drunken man, Mikolka savagely beats his horse that is unable to move due to an absurdly heavy load.

Svidrigailov's bleak belief of eternity being "one little room...black with soot, with spiders in every corner" (244) and that he "would certainly make it like that" (245) signifies his selfish lack of spirituality. His abhorrent description of the beating of his wife also depicts his utter moral debility and depravity, as he perversely declares that "women are highly gratified at being

outraged...it's their only amusement" (239) Yet, rather than realizing Svidrigailov's lack of conscience or values, Raskolnikov sees Svidrigailov's ability to assert his power as a

When Raskolnikov actually kills the old woman, he loses control of himself, his mind completely devoid of any logic or lucidity. In this moment, his impulses fully overcome him, and he is unable to cope with his emotions after the fact. He questions why he actually killed the old crone, wondering "(insert quote from when he is questioning himself and his actions)", and ____After he commits the murder, Raskolnikov physically cannot stand his suffocating guilt and isolation from those he loves. Consequently, Svidrigailov's imperviousness to moral responsibility attracts Raskolnikov, whose inner turmoil nearly engulfs him. Raskolnikov, tortured by ostracization from his family and friends, almost wishes that he could live detached from humanity in the same painless way that Svidrigailov does. Despite having committed such immoral acts, Svidrigailov declares that his "conscience is perfectly clear" (238), indicating his oblivion to decency and values, and showing how Svidrigailov symbolizes the evil of living without a conscience. Raskolnikov however, laughs bitterly, knowing that he can never dismiss his crime in the same monstrous and self-willed way that Svidrigailov can.

He finally confesses to Sonya. Raskolnikov rejoins society, achieves redemption and regains once more the capacity for emotion. In this way, humble and pious Sonya reflects how spirituality overcomes the sensual and intellectual elements of Raskolnikov's tripartite soul. After the murder, Raskolnikov accepts suffering as part of redemption. His will to suffer motivates both his crime and his final confession. Raskolnikov's true recognition of himself and his abilities also reflects his sense of spirit. The spiritual side of Raskolnikov ultimately prevails, because his affliction and confusion teach him how to feel again. An unbearable need to confess to his crime relentlessly torments him until his confession to Sonya, whose love represents Christian humility, reconnects him to mankind. Raskolnikov endures the natural suffering that all people experience, including the "lesser men" whom he abhors. In this way, Raskolnikov's confession ultimately humbles him, rejoins him to humanity and gives him a reason to live. This represents his need for morals, love and human relationships in order to achieve peace and functionality in his life.