

## Protagonist and Antagonist Essay

Crime and Punishment is considered by many to be the first of Fyodor Dostoevsky's great books. Crime and Punishment is a psychological account of a crime. The crime is double murder. A book about such a broad subject can be made powerful and appealing to our intellectual interests if there is a link between the reader, the action, and the characters. Dostoevsky makes all these links at the right places. The action takes place between the protagonists and the antagonists. The protagonists include Dounia, the Marmeladovs, Sonia, Razumhin, Porfiry Petrovich, and Nastaya. The antagonists of the story are Luzhin, Ilya Petrovich, and the landlady. Raskolnikov could be considered to be the primary protagonist, while Svidrigailov could be thought of as the primary antagonist.

In every story the protagonist is the character that the reader cares most about. In Crime and Punishment the reader cares about Rodion Raskolnikov. He is the primary and most significant character in the novel. We are introduced to this complex character in Part 1. We get to know the poverty stricken condition that he resides in, and we get to know his family situation as we read the long letter from Raskolnikov's mother. Then we witness the murder as it is graphically described by Dostoevsky. After reading this graphic description of the murder, how can the reader be sympathetic towards Raskolnikov? How can the reader believe that a murderer is the protagonist? It is, in fact, not hard to accept this murderer as the protagonist. Raskolnikov believed that by murdering the pawnbroker, he rid society of a pest. We realize that if the victim would

have been someone other than an evil old pawnbroker the crime would never had taken place. He could never have found the courage to kill an innocent person. It would not prove anything to him. So, Raskolnikov was not a criminal. He does not repent because he does not feel that he had sinned. All he did was violate laws that were made by society. Raskolnikov definition of crime was evil will in action. Raskolnikov knows that he possesses no evil will, and so he does not consider himself a criminal. He is capable of justifying his crime. He murdered a pawnbroker that was of no use to society and wanted to use her money to improve his life and career. Not only was he helping himself by attempting to improve his career, but he was also helping society as society would benefit from his career. He would also free his mother and sister from the encumbrance of financially supporting him, and thus maybe even prevent the marriage of his sister to the evil Luzhin. We are introduced to Raskolnikov's thoughts about mankind when we read about Raskolnikov's published article. He divides man into two classes: the extraordinary man and the ordinary man. He considers himself extraordinary and the pawnbroker to be ordinary. Presumably, the murder of the pawnbroker was an experiment of his theory. One could argue that his experiment failed because he had to rely on his family and friends and because he confessed, unlike how his theory suggests. Maybe he was not the extraordinary person he thought he was. Maybe his theory was bogus. In either case, his theory proved that Raskolnikov had an intellectual side. From this we can believe that he did not murder for the money but he really believed that he was superior and he was doing society a favor. Perhaps he was not superior, but it can be

safe to say that he did society a favor. The same society that he did a favor for does not believe in Raskolnikov's explanation. Society believes that murder is wrong. Society's morals and rules dictate that crime is wrong no matter what the circumstances. It is evident that Raskolnikov did not believe in society's definition of crime and he proved this by murdering the pawnbroker. We still find sympathy for him, as deep down inside we perchance realize that Raskolnikov may have a valid point and society may be at fault. At the end we are able to forgive Raskolnikov for he has finally confessed and will go through a moral rebuilding process. We realize that Raskolnikov is the protagonist of Crime and Punishment.

As it is necessary for a story to have a protagonist, it is also essential for an antagonist to be existent. Oddly enough, the primary antagonist in Crime and Punishment is the kind of character that the protagonist would like to be. Arkady Svidrigailov is Dounia's (the sister of Raskolnikov) former employer. Svidrigailov enters in the life of Raskolnikov about half-way through the story. Ironically, he enters into the story right after Raskolnikov awakens from a nightmare in which he tries to kill the pawnbroker but she refuses to die! Prior to his entrance the reader is already under the notion that Svidrigailov is evil because there is mention of him being responsible for the death of his wife, and also a carnal crime involving a young girl. We are left with an impression that is sensual and callous, a perfect description of an antagonist. Raskolnikov appears to recognize the fact that he has more in common with Svidrigailov

than he would like. The reader feels that Svidrigailov may be showing what Raskolnikov is capable of doing. Svidrigailov appears to fit Raskolnikov's definition of the extraordinary man. Svidrigailov stands alone without the comfort of family and friends. He believes that he is omnipotent, and the reader reluctantly believes that. Svidrigailov does not believe in right or wrong. The only thing he believes in is him being right. Along with fitting Raskolnikov's definition of the extraordinary man, Svidrigailov also fits his definition of a criminal. Svidrigailov possesses evil will. He is evil will in action. He is under the impression that society is evil and, in order to survive, it is essential that he be evil. So, he wants to fulfill his desires and he is willing to hurt anybody to achieve them. The most unappealing trait of Svidrigailov is the fact that he does not suffer from any moral doubts about his actions. He felt no remorse when he raped the young girl, or when he beat his wife and maybe even killed her. He does not fear God. After observing the character of Svidrigailov, the reader realizes that the extraordinary man theory may not be a myth. When we see Svidrigailov attempt to rape Raskolnikov's sister, we realize that the antagonist is Svidrigailov.

In every story it is interesting to note the similarities and differences between the protagonist and the antagonist. Rodion Raskolnikov and Arkady Svidrigailov are two exciting and original characters that have many similarities and one critical difference that make them what they are. Upon a close inspection of Svidrigailov, we realize that he is but an older variation of Raskolnikov. Upon looking at Svidrigailov, the reader fears that Raskolnikov, the protagonist, is capable of doing the dishonorable deeds that Svidrigailov has done. It is acknowledged that Svidrigailov is omnipotent in his own eyes. He is capable of doing anything without fear or remorse. Raskolnikov wishes to be this way. In fact, he comes close. He did not repent after he murdered the pawnbroker. He felt no remorse when he ended the life of the innocent sister of the pawnbroker. Raskolnikov does evil for the same reason that Svidrigailov does evil. They both want to be beyond good and evil. They both wish to be beyond the laws created by society. They both exhibit moral indifference after crimes. Just as Svidrigailov does evil because he believes that society is evil, Raskolnikov commits murder because of his extraordinary man theory. Would this mean that Raskolnikov is no different from Svidrigailov? Does this mean that Raskolnikov is the antagonist along with Svidrigailov? It would if it were not for one major difference. Raskolnikov would like to be an extraordinary man. He would like to commit any crime without remorse. The critical difference that differentiates Raskolnikov from Svidrigailov is that Raskolnikov is not the extraordinary man. Raskolnikov has morals while Svidrigailov has jettisoned his morals. Raskolnikov is sickened by acts of violence. He is able to accept crime intellectually, but he is unable to be "extraordinary" because his moral sense prevents him from being a monster. Raskolnikov did not repent after he murdered the pawnbroker because he accepted the crime intellectually. He firmly believed that the murder of the pawnbroker would be good for society. Because of the ordeal that Raskolnikov went through after the crime, he would never be able to hurt another soul as long as he lived. Raskolnikov knows

that his theory may be correct, but he cannot be the extraordinary man. He knows now that evil cannot satisfy intellect. His ethics prevent him from coming in terms with his crime and open the way for moral regeneration. About 90% of Crime and Punishment is about punishment, Raskolnikov's punishment. The suffering of Raskolnikov leads to his confession and salvation. Svidrigailov does not confess to any wrongdoing. Instead, he takes the easy way out by committing suicide. We find that we are willing to forgive Raskolnikov for his crime because he has confessed and is going through moral regeneration while in Siberia. The reader realizes that Raskolnikov is but an incomplete Svidrigailov. So, Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov are two people with many similarities but one critical difference that makes one the protagonist and the other the antagonist.

After reading Crime and Punishment one is quick to realize the authenticity of both, the protagonist (Raskolnikov), and the antagonist (Svidrigailov). Dostoevsky uses supporting characters to show the reader the thoughts of both these characters. The reader is able to feel close to all the characters and this contributes to making Crime and Punishment the kind of tale that it is. Dostoevsky has successfully created two characters that realize that they are alike yet they also know that they can never be the same because one is willing to suffer as suffering leads to salvation while the other, in a cowardly fashion, commits suicide.