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## **A Psychoanalytical Exploration of Guilt after Crime in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Demons*: Relevance and Comparison with Today's Guilt and Crime**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper will analyze the theme of guilt and repercussions in three famous works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky. It is hoped that the study will help in understanding the impact of real-life scenarios on the world of literature. It was found that guilt triggered a positive effect in criminals, leading to repentance. The protagonists of the three novels have also displayed guilt, although with the help of religion. The endings of the three novels underscore the importance of the effect of this emotion in our lives.

**Keywords: Guilt, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, The Brothers Karamazov, Demons, Criminal Behavior.**

The repercussions of criminal activity are multifarious in nature. In the cases where the criminals are caught, the repercussions usually include legal and societal in nature. The repercussions on the mind of the individual are almost always forgotten. Even though the victim's mental state is assessed and taken into consideration up to a certain extent, the perpetrator is almost always neglected. The effects of the action of committing a crime and if caught, go through the legal proceedings and be jailed, could be harrowing for a person, especially if he had been pushed into committing that crime. The role of society and the socio-political conditions in a country, in exacerbating the rise of crime and criminal activity, cannot be ignored. Vice News reported on the spread of gang violence and femicide in the country of Honduras, make it one of the deadliest countries for women in the world. MOMUCLAA is one of the organizations which combat the rise of femicide in the country. They express poverty, poor societal reform on the part of the government and youth unemployment as major causes for the increasing rates of violent

encounters. The youth are forced to be integrated into gangs and violent groups, realizing that there are very few career opportunities in their home country. Guilt becomes an important byproduct of participation in criminal activity and the perpetration of crime. The article "Interpersonal Guilt, Shame, and Psychological Problems" by O'Connor and Berry looks into the phenomena of guilt in criminals. It explores guilt as an emotion, comprising various facets. The guilt emerging from the fear of hurting or having hurt someone is only one of those multiple guilts (O'Connor and Berry). Guilt and its association with the perpetration of crimes and criminal activity has been used extensively in literature. The exploration of such guilt enabled the readers to get a glimpse into the mind of the criminal. The criminal, through efforts by the writer, goes from being a character who deserves the harshest retribution to a subject of pity and empathy. He still deserves retribution, but the audience are encouraged to extend their understanding of him. The author, in doing so, encourages the readers to explore the reasons behind the creation of such criminals, and questions the socio-political narrative which allows for the perpetration of such crimes. This paper focuses on the exploration of criminal guilt in the books of Fyodor Dostoevsky, namely *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Demons*.

The conception of guilt has been used in numerous ways in literary and artistic representations. Older representations of guilt on pages or canvas explore it as a narrative that resulted in shame and fear; a negative reaffirmation of the fact that not everything could be beautiful and nice. Authors had associated guilt with the aftermath of crime almost always. Samuel Richardson and Thomas Hardy in their books *Pamela* and *Tess of the D'urbervilles* are poignant examples. A master's thesis paper submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Alberta, extrapolated that Richardson did not affirm or applaud the change in Mr. B's character. He had willfully incorporated the guilt in the character to highlight the societal double standard that existed while dealing with the issues of men and women. (Ndana) We find a similar treatment of the subject in Hardy's *Tess of the D'urbervilles*. Alec D'urberville is shown as being repentant after his heinous treatment of Tess, similar to Mr. B. (Hardy) However, their apparent guilt is shown as a ploy to engage with the protagonists, and neither manages to draw attention or sympathy from the readers. Similar representations of guilt and shame are also seen in paintings like that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting, 'Found'. The painting had been described by Helen Rossetti as being the representation of guilt and shame of a young woman on her status of becoming a fallen woman. The association of guilt here is with the act itself and the person

suffering from looks at herself as the problem. It is only with the rise of more modern understanding and sensibilities that we see the incorporation of the role played by societal issues in the perpetration of the crime, and subsequently in the formation of guilt. The book, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature*, opens with a detailed understanding of the phenomenon of confessions. It reports the instance of the Boorn brothers, who had been falsely convicted of killing their neighbor. The brothers were encouraged to confess the crime that they did not commit and were released of those charges, only when the alleged murder victim arrived on the scene. (Brooks). Confessions have for long been used as a means to impress the concept of guilt and fear in a person. The condition of being guilty of a crime or not often came secondary to the ritualistic admittance to a crime. This state-imposed and facilitated guilt is contrasted with the guilt that Fyodor Dostoevsky associates within his works.

*Crime and Punishment* provides a unique outlook at the themes of guilt and the psychological implications and effects that it could have on a man. It follows the story of a young student named Raskolnikov and his journey through guilt and his subsequent redemption. The incorporation of the idea of correlating the worth of men and their right to commit a crime is almost reflective of the current socio-political scenario. The idea that wealthy and powerful men could get away with crimes, while impoverished men suffered retributions for it, is a narrative, which is almost present in every political landscape in the world. Raskolnikov's theory about the perpetration of crime and the way criminal activity being condemned only when the perpetrator did not belong to the upper ranks of the society, is reminiscent of the narrative of Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*. In the novel, a black man is falsely accused of raping a white woman and is taken into custody. The novel deals with the epidemic of racial injustice in America. (Lee) Raskolnikov's theory, if taken into consideration, reveals a broader understanding of the injustices in the society. To prove the validity of his theory, Raskolnikov kills a pawnbroker. However, Raskolnikov had not thought about the internal conflict the action would cause in him. The seemingly abhorrent act of having killed an innocent woman, makes him confess. Catharsis is only afforded to him when he goes to jail. (Dostoevsky)

*Demons* deals with the same socio-political narrative against which Raskolnikov had prepared his theory. It centers around a political revolution by Pytor the consequences of which are dire and brutal. The ideological representation of the aloofness of the rich and the mighty is exhibited from the fact that Nikolai wanted to be a part of the revolution only if he had been given

a higher position. The narrative traverses through multiple loops, vacillating to and fro in between the apparent truth and the discoveries of past betrayals. Important characters like Nikolai and Ivan die at the end, leaving behind the expression of a system that allowed for such betrayals. (Dostoevsky)

*Brothers Karamazov* centers around the complex family-dynamic of three Karamazov brothers and the people associated with them. The patriarch of the family is a neglectful, duty less man named Fyodor. He serves as the anthropological form of the social background in *Crime and Punishment*, much like Nikolai in *Demons*. The narrative is interspersed with religious iconography and symbolism which is contrasted against the normative and rather cruel conditioning towards the world. (Dostoevsky)

## **Research Methodology**

The study has taken into consideration the socio-political and historical narratives against which guilt is often put. It aims to analyze the formation of guilt and the psychological reparations of it, in the works *Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Demons*. The study looks into the origins of state facilitated and aided guilt and tries to create a narrative that explores the positions when it is used wrongfully. It aims to do so by conducting a review of existing literature on guilt and psychological trauma and correlating it with the literary and cinematic works that existed.

## **Analysis**

The formation of guilt often plays an important role in detecting crimes and unlawful activities. The criminal court had for long depended on the formation of the guilt consciousness in a person, for the judgment to pass. If the man accused did not plead guilty or surrender himself to the jury, he would have been tortured until he was forced to confess. A similar narrative is shown in the character of Iqbal in *The Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh. Iqbal is forced by the police to plead guilty to the scheme to create communal tensions in Mano Majra and participate in the murder of the village moneylender, Lala Rampal. (Singh). Iqbal is an example of what Dan Simon in his book "In Doubt: The Psychology behind Criminal Justice Process" talks about. The book explores the narratives as to why people engaged and participated in false confessions which put them in jails and correction homes. The narrative of guilt and the psychological considerations that came along with it are different in Fyodor Dostoevsky's works. His works circumnavigate the

formation of guilt in a person who belongs to the common world. He is not a part of a gang or an anti-social group. The closest we have to the association of a character to an antisocial or a rebel group is the discussion between Nikolai and Pytor in *Demons*. The protagonists in his novels, through whom Dostoevsky primarily explores the narrative of guilt and psychological consciousness, are well-bred men from families ranging from a wealthy, powerful family like that of Nikolai, a neglectful father as in the case of the Karamazov brothers and an impoverished and lonely one in the case of Raskolnikov. The young men are swayed into the respective paths because of the effects of the people and the surroundings that they are into. The result is guilt, the implications of which are dire in the case of Nikolai, who killed himself. The article "The Role of Guilt and Its Implications in the Treatment of Criminals" by Gad Czudner and Ruth Mueller, impresses upon the importance of the treatment of guilty consciousness for the rehabilitation of the criminals in society. They look into the former understanding of guilt being associated with the movement towards the right track and try to establish a plan wherein guilt could be effectively used to cause its destruction and help the person lead a normal life afterwards. (Czudner and Mueller). The incorporation of guilt in the novels by Dostoevsky brings about a catharsis in the individuals concerned. Raskolnikov goes to jail to repent, Nikolai kills himself, unable to bear the burden of the crimes that he had committed. Dimitri gets sentenced for a crime that he did not commit; however, he partakes in the punishment, intending to cleanse his soul and emerge as a new individual.

*Crime and Punishment* deals with the most nuanced and complex understanding of individual guilt in all of Dostoevsky's works. Raskolnikov formulated a theory and the experimentation of it forced him to kill a man. He had previously believed that the cruel and abominable nature of the man would be enough to justify his murder. The murder would provide him with a chanced understanding and proof of how societies worked. This idea is the example of Dostoevsky's inner disgust for capitalism and pseudo capitalism, wherein people were deemed important based on their position in society. However, something that Raskolnikov had not warranted, was the individual guilt that he would be going through for having killed a man. Raskolnikov's guilt is perhaps further heightened on seeing the death of Marmeladov and realizing that he had left behind a wife and a daughter. Raskolnikov had not realized that his theoretical and inhumane experimentation had a practical and a psychological consequence, a consequence that he was not strong enough to bear. He confesses to his crimes and is sent to jail.

The incorporation of the idea of guilt in *Demons* is multi-leveled. On one level, the readers are met with Nikolai's guilt which germinated and proliferated throughout the length of the three books, on the other hand, we have the guilt of the other characters in their multiplicity. Nikolai's guilt is the result of the treatment that he had meted out to the women he had engaged with. It is furthered by his acquittal of the murders in the events after the gala. The psychological consciousness having grown a lot, Nikolai finds solace in his act of committing suicide. The novel also deals with Kirillov's suicide, which, unlike Nikolai, finds its roots in the psychological turmoil that had already been present in him. His committing suicide, unlike Nikolai's, is not an act wherewith to achieve catharsis, but the result of a long-drawn struggle with life, which had been increased with the guilt of having pushed a man towards his death. Their guilt is contrasted with the psychological influence that Pytor had exerted on the people around him, forcing them towards their conclusions.

*Brothers Karamazov* is the expression of transgenerational psychological trauma. The sons, having been forced to live with a neglectful father and a horrible human being, are victims of trauma inflicted by their parents. Their guilt is unique to each brother- Ivan is guilty of not having been able to save his father; Dimitri finds himself guilty for having become a violent and temperamental man; Alyosha's guilty consciousness finds its expression in his movement from a rambunctious soldier to a monk. Dostoevsky's novel is set against a religious background, with Alyosha devotedly believing in his church. His guilt and sense of betrayal are furthered when he realizes that the man, he had almost worshipped was not as holy as he had previously believed. One cannot forget or ignore the setting against which Dostoevsky had set these three novels. It is based on a social structure that focused on the wealthy and the powerful, including both the societal and the religious.

### **Limitations**

This paper does not consider the approach of Dostoevsky towards criminal guilt and psychological trauma as the ultimate one. These characters are set in a social scape which perpetuates the capitalistic notions like America. Dostoevsky's novels are set in socialist Russia, which makes the approach narrower in its outreach. There are no divisions in race in the novels, which becomes an important narrative in the case of American novels. Therefore, while

Dostoevsky's novels depict a true picture of the effects of guilt in a person, it is by no means an all-encompassing one.

### Conclusion

It is interesting to note how Dostoevsky uses external factors to corroborate and aid his understanding of the internal matters of a human being. The novels provide an interesting outlook on the psychological trauma faced by an individual. He lays down that the so-called benevolent society exercises its opinion and aims at people in very subtle ways and impresses on the role played by the larger society towards the denigration of an individual to societal status. The guilt that he explores in his novels is not entirely free from individual intentions, but it serves as a means to highlight how society perceives people and their actions, and how individuals react to the guilt.

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