

# The description of marmeladov in crime and punishment

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Often in literature a minor character that appears only briefly nevertheless has a significant effect on such aspects of a work as theme and the development of other characters. This is especially true in the case of Marmeladov, the alcoholic ex-clerk in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. A dominant theme of the novel is that of moral redemption through suffering. Raskolnikov, who commits a heinous crime because he believes himself to be above morality, is beset with fear and guilt about his actions. Although he pays no heed at the time, in the beginning of the novel Raskolnikov is exposed by Marmeladov to the concept of divine forgiveness. In the course of the novel Raskolnikov must come to the realization his feelings of guilt will only be relieved when he confesses his sins and finds faith in God.

It is significant that Marmeladov is introduced in the very beginning of the novel. In this way Dostoyevsky sets the scene for Raskolnikov's eventual spiritual awakening. When Raskolnikov enters the bar he has just been setting into motion his plot to kill the old pawnbroker. Thus, their first meetings, Marmeladov serves as Raskolnikov's conscience, proclaiming in florid language that God will forgive all the old sinners come Judgment Day. He is confident that at the Resurrection God will receive him and the other "children of shame" because "...not one of them believed himself to be worthy of this" (Dostoyevsky 27). This suggests that the only way to redemption in Dostoyevsky's world is through humility, a characteristic that Raskolnikov certainly lacks at this point in the novel.

It is clear that Marmeladov's philosophical pronouncements are not taken seriously by his listeners because of his appearance. Not only is he drunk, but filthy and dressed in rags. It is difficult to give credulity to a speaker outfitted in such a manner, and so it is no wonder that Raskolnikov takes pity on his newfound friend rather than seriously considering anything he has to say. In this way the sensitive and upright side of Raskolnikov's nature is exposed, particularly when he lays money that he himself is in need of on the windowsill in Marmeladov's room.

Nevertheless, despite his infrequent acts of kindness, the character of Raskolnikov, who is young, arrogant, and irreverent, provides a direct contrast to that of Marmeladov, who is old, humble, and pious. The only traits these two characters have in common are poverty and guilt. Yet, while Marmeladov states categorically that poverty is not a sin and is rather resigned to his feelings of guilt about reducing his family to utter penury and his daughter to a life of a streetwalker, Raskolnikov loathes his own pennilessness and is obsessed by guilt. The difference between the two is that although a sinner, Marmeladov admits this fact and is repentant. In comparison, Raskolnikov believes he shall simply "get well and not worry" after his crime is committed (Dostoyevsky 99).

Significantly, before he murders Alyona Ivanovna, Raskolnikov justifies his crime with the rationale that her death will benefit many others, and that he as a superman should not be subject to moral law. In particular, if he becomes financially independent, his sister will not have to sacrifice herself for him by marrying Pjotr Petrovich. This is why he goes ahead with the

murder despite the fact that he, unlike Marmeladov does have a place to turn in the form of his mother and sister. Nevertheless, after he commits the crime and inadvertently murders an innocent in the form of Lizaveta, he is unable to cope with his feelings of remorse. In short, despite his dark impulses, he has retained his innate sense of right and wrong.

Clearly, Raskolnikov's mental anguish stems from the fact that he cannot accept that he has done wrong, and so clings to belief that through his own strength of will he may absolve himself from guilt that clouds his mind and visits psychosomatic illness upon his body. Obsessed with this idea of strength, it takes him a long time to recognize that his only salvation lies in admitting his own weakness and confessing his crimes. Ironically, the person who helps him to come to this realization is Sonia, a pathetic character even more downtrodden than her unfortunate father. Like Marmeladov, who incidentally was the reason she was forced to prostitute herself, Sonia acknowledges her unworthiness before God but still believes that he will forgive her for her sins. Perhaps this belief is actually a result of her father's influence, as in his first encounter with Raskolnikov Marmeladov exclaims that God " will forgive my Sonia."

Despite the fact that Sonia has suffered so much, she is still an incredibly resilient character because of her piety. Although at first Raskolnikov feared she would " worry him about religion," most of her influence on him was through example (Dostoyevsky 446). Because she accepts her lot in life and has faith in God's forgiveness, she is able to love others, including Raskolnikov and her father, unconditionally. Drawn to this strength of

character, Raskolnikov admits his crime to her and receives the ultimatum that the only way he can absolve himself of guilt is through confession. While this seems to him an act of weakness, it is only after he has the humility to kiss the earth and state “ I have killed” that he can face the consequences of his actions and begin his mental healing (Dostoyevsky 433).

In the end, one could not say that Raskolnikov has a spiritual awakening. His love of Sonia does change his attitude towards life. However, in the theological sense, at the novel’s conclusion he is still somewhat of a skeptic. Marveling at his newfound comfort in the New Testament, he doubts whether Sonia’s “ convictions are [his] at last” (Dostoyevsky 446). At best, Raskolnikov’s internal schism begins to heal as he moves closer to finding faith in God without having a true experience of revelation. Rather than cheapening the acquisition of divine grace, Dostoyevsky makes it clear that faith arises only out of years of struggle and not a little suffering. The novel ends on the hopeful note that Raskolnikov’s soul is gradually being renewed as he passes “ from one world to another” and is initiated into “ a new unknown life” of spiritual harmony (Dostoyevsky 447). It is unfortunate that only near the end of the novel after Marmeladov’s death that Raskolnikov is able to put his extreme arrogance and self-centeredness aside. In this way he begins to fulfill Marmeladov’s prophecy that sinners will find redemption.