

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Absolute Justice in Dostoyevsky's <i>Crime and Punishment</i></b>
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## **Abstract**

In the introduction to Dorothy Sayers' book, *The Omnibus of Crime*, she wrote: 'the detective-story is part of the literature of escape, and not of expression. We read tales of domestic unhappiness because that is the kind of thing which happens to us; but when these things gall too close to the sore, we fly to mystery and adventure because they do not, as a rule, happen to us' (109). While crimes sometimes do pay in reality, the world of literature, especially that of crime fiction, grants us an escape from the unsettling horrors where justice is unattainable. Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, although categorised as a crime fiction novel, transcends the genre's traditional decrees and expectations. Ending the novel with Raskolnikov's conversion to Christianity, the novel seemingly transforms into a Christian's testimony, a return of the prodigal son. In this sense, the novel seemingly achieves retribution. However, despite Raskolnikov's sentence, there is something unresolved in the novel. Through detailing the declining mental state of Raskolnikov—a poor student with a magnanimous impulse—and his interactions with other characters, the novel manages to convince readers that he is anything but a vile criminal. Regardless, this sympathy fails to save him. A vigilante hero that he is, he is reduced to a criminal in the legal system. The unsettling we experience as readers makes us struggle along with Raskolnikov, a character that could neither be just evil nor good.

This unsettling leads to this dissertation, in an attempt to make an argument about ways in which Dostoyevsky explore the concept of justice through textual strategies, including formal and thematic aspects. Despite the antithetical parallelisms existing scholarship focuses on, this thesis tries to explore that justice is intended to be unbalanced in the novel, shedding light on another possible reading of *Crime and Punishment*. The dynamics of the novel's antithetical parallelisms are explored with the philosophical framework of Hegel's dialectics to grapple with the complex concept of justice presented in the novel, and ultimately exposes the self-defeating nature of justice.

## Reflection

When I was working on my dissertation, I was constantly stressed, keep wondering whether what I had decided to work on 'goes beyond the obvious or predictable'. But once I finished the draft of my project, I 'wanted one thing, and one thing only: to be convinced of [my] idea.' (Shestov 494). It is not about wanting to be right, but rather to attain an intellectual thrill as I write and develop my ideas. And I cannot thank Professor Sorensen enough for his encouragement and support throughout the project, especially when I doubted myself, knowing that scholars do not seem to draw the same conclusions I do, he was the one that encouraged me to be comfortable with and even persuaded by my own writing.

I was once pliant—or an 'ordinary' as Raskolnikov puts it. But without really knowing, I changed. I only truly find myself when I am engaged in literary or philosophical discussions, and that rush in adrenaline in these exchanges is an irreplaceable sensation. Without studying literature, I would never have become who I am today.

'Since I'm nothing but literature, and can, and want to be nothing else, my job will never take position of me. It may, however, shatter me completely and this is by no means a remote reality.' - Kafka