

Metamorphosis of Dostoevsky's Men: From Innocence to Savagery

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Abstract

The subject of men's mental and emotional well-being is a crucial aspect that often goes overlooked in the era of flourishing feminism. Literature has long explored the theme of psychological transformation, especially in male characters. During the 19th century, Russia underwent significant changes in social, political, and cultural aspects, resulting in the transformation of the country. One of the significant factors contributing to this transformation was the impact of Western ideologies and philosophies that began to spread in Russia. Men who were exposed to these ideas began to question traditional gender roles and expectations, leading to a redefinition of masculinity. This article aims to study the significance of analyzing the psychological metamorphosis of men through the lens of Fyodor Dostoevsky's male characters. Dostoevsky, an eminent Russian author, is widely acclaimed for his literary works that delve into the complexities of human nature. His novels, such as "Crime and Punishment" and "The Idiot," are notable for their intricate character development, particularly concerning male characters. This article examines two of Dostoevsky's male characters, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov from "Crime and Punishment" and Parfyon Semyonovitch Rogozin from "The Idiot" to illustrate how their psychological metamorphosis reflects the influence of societal and cultural context that leads to savagery.

Keywords

Dostoevsky, Russia, Metamorphosis, Psychology, Savage, Western Philosophy, Society, Culture

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1. Introduction

The National Institute of Mental Health has reported that mental disorders have an impact on both men and women. Men are more prone to suicide, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Unfortunately, this can sometimes lead to criminal behaviour. Certain symptoms may be more commonly observed in men than in women, and an individual's gender can influence the course of illness. Researchers are currently delving into the complex interplay of biological and psychosocial factors that contribute to mental health. It is concerning that men are less likely to seek mental health treatment compared to women within the past year. Recognizing the signs of a mental disorder in oneself or a loved one is the crucial first step toward receiving appropriate treatment. Starting treatment early can significantly enhance its effectiveness. Thus, it is very important to show importance for men's physical and mental wellbeing.

In the field of literature, authors frequently portray characters who experience significant transformations, challenging their initial states of innocence. Dostoevsky is an exemplary author who skillfully illustrates this process of metamorphosis. His male characters, who serve as central figures in his works, embark on a captivating journey from innocence to savagery. This article delves into the complexities of this transformation, thoroughly analyzing the catalysts that trigger change and the ensuing consequences. This article explores the psychological

transformation of two male characters in Dostoevsky's works, namely Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov from "Crime and Punishment" and Parfyon Semyonovitch Rogozin from "The Idiot". It aims to demonstrate how their evolution is a manifestation of the impact of societal and cultural surroundings, ultimately leading them towards a state of savagery.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, a renowned Russian writer, possesses an extraordinary gift for capturing the very essence of the human experience within his literary works. Specifically, his portrayal of male characters undergoes a profound transformation, influenced by the societal and cultural burdens placed upon them. Dostoevsky's men embark on a tumultuous journey, transitioning from a state of innocence to one of savagery, thereby exposing the intricate complexities of masculinity and the profound impact of societal expectations. By examining the characters Rogozin and Raskolnikov, both of whom descend into criminality, this article delves into the societal and cultural pressures that men face, explores the depiction of innocence by Dostoevsky, and uncovers the underlying origins of these pressures.

In his unpublished manuscripts dating back to the mid-1860s, Dostoevsky outlined a conceptual framework for the progression of history, dividing it into three distinct stages. According to his theory, patriarchy represented the primitive condition, civilization served as the transitional phase, and Christianity marked the ultimate and final stage of human

development. Many societies are deeply rooted in patriarchy, which enforces a range of expectations and limitations on men. They are frequently burdened with the sole responsibility of earning a living and upholding traditional gender norms. Consequently, this societal framework can be stifling, depriving men of individuality and self-expression.

2. Expectations on Masculinity

During the era when Fyodor Dostoevsky was penning his novels, Russia was deeply entrenched in a patriarchal system that placed men at the forefront, prioritizing their authority and power over women and children. This societal structure had a profound impact on the characters of Rogojin and Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's literary works, as they grappled with the constraints and expectations imposed by traditional gender roles. This type of patriarchy played a significant role in shaping the identities and behaviours of men, as seen in the works of Dostoevsky. Two of his most famous characters, Rogojin and Raskolnikov, both struggle with the expectations of masculinity within a patriarchal society.

In "The Idiot", Rogojin, the son of a "hereditary honourable citizen", embodies the ideals of traditional masculinity. He is a wealthy man (inherits his father's wealth after his demise) who exudes confidence, assertiveness, and success in his career. However, Rogojin's masculinity is also intertwined with his desire to possess and control women. He is engaged to Nastasya, a woman with a troubled past of mental instability and self-harm. Rather than recognizing her as an individual with her own desires and agency, Rogojin views her as a mere possession to be controlled. This possessiveness is evident in his treatment of Nastasya, as he frequently belittles her and resorts to threats of violence. "So then I rushed at her, and beat her till she was bruised all over." (Dostoevsky. p. 207)

Similarly, in "Crime and Punishment", Raskolnikov, the main character, grapples with the expectations of masculinity in a patriarchal society. He is an intelligent and ambitious man who believes in his own superiority over others due to his intellectual abilities. However, Raskolnikov's masculinity is also tied to a sense of entitlement and a belief in his own superiority. He justifies his murder of an old woman by convincing himself that she is a burden on society and that her death will benefit others. "No more than the life of a louse, a cockroach, and it's not even worth that, because the hag is vicious. She'll eat you alive:" (Dostoevsky. p. 81). This belief in his own superiority leads him down a path of further crimes, as he becomes increasingly convinced that he is above the law. "Forgot to close the door behind him, but still did it, still murdered two people, in accordance with the theory." (Dostoevsky. p. 548)

3. Societal Norms and Cultural Constraints

Rogojin is a multifaceted character who embodies both the positive and negative aspects of patriarchal masculinity. On one hand, he is a wealthy individual who inherits his father's possessions, commands respect from his peers, and possesses a strong sense of pride and self-assurance. However, on the other hand, Rogojin's patriarchal inclinations become problematic when he becomes possessive and controlling towards Nastasya Filippovna, a woman who has captured his attention. He becomes envious and manipulative, attempting to coerce her into marriage against her wishes. This behaviour reflects the status of being within the cultural constraints that men should exert complete control over women's bodies and choices. Thus, he couldn't go beyond the cultural constraints and set her free without taking possession of her. "But Rogojin understood how things were tending, at last. An inexpressibly painful expression came over his face. He wrung his hands; a groan made its way up from the depths of his soul. 'Surrender her, for God's sake!' he said to the prince." (Dostoevsky. p. 164)

Similarly, Raskolnikov is a troubled young man who grapples with the conventional expectations of masculinity. He is intelligent and ambitious, yet feels confined by societal norms that dictate he should pursue a traditional career path as a lawyer or government official. Instead, he turns to criminal activities as a means to assert his independence and establish his superiority over others, which by itself is a Western ideology. "There was also a theory at work nothing special, as theories go according to which people may be divided don't you know into human material and those who are somehow exceptional; that's to say, people who, on account of their lofty status, are outside the law, and not only that, who themselves write the law for the others for the material, I mean the rubbish." (Dostoevsky. p. 589). However, this act of violence ultimately leads to his downfall, as he becomes consumed by guilt and remorse. Raskolnikov's struggle with patriarchal expectations underscores the conflict between individual freedom and societal constraints that were prevalent during Dostoevsky's era.

4. Transformation to Savagery and The Downfall

The character of Rogojin undergoes a gradual and intricate transformation into savagery, which ultimately culminates in his heinous act against Nastasya Filippovna. Throughout the novel, Rogojin's intense jealousy and obsession with Nastasya drive him to commit increasingly brutal and merciless actions, ultimately resulting in her tragic demise. "All this is mere jealousy—it is some malady of yours, Parfen! You exaggerate everything," said the prince, excessively agitated." (Dostoevsky. P. 213). At the beginning of the story, Rogojin is portrayed as a wealthy and influential individual who is deeply infatuated with Nastasya. He exhibits possessiveness

and control, constantly monitoring her every move and decision. His jealousy becomes evident when he perceives Prince Muishkin as a threat to his own position due to Nastasya's relationship with him. As the narrative progresses, Rogojin's jealousy intensifies, leading him to become more violent and cruel. He physically assaults Nastasya on multiple occasions. These acts of brutality serve as clear indications of Rogojin's increasing savagery and his willingness to employ force to maintain dominance over Nastasya. Furthermore, Rogojin's obsession with Nastasya drives him to engage in deceitful and manipulative behaviour. He spreads malicious rumours about her past, tarnishing her reputation and undermining her connection with Prince Myshkin. This manipulative conduct serves as a clear manifestation of Rogojin's jealousy and his readiness to employ underhanded tactics to retain control over Nastasya. The final breaking point for Rogojin occurs when he discovers Nastasya's confession of love for Prince Myshkin. Consumed by rage, Rogojin succumbs to an uncontrollable passion and murders Nastasya. "It has been inside the book ever since—and—and—this is what is such a marvel to me, the knife only went in a couple of inches at most, just under her left breast, and there wasn't more than half a tablespoonful of blood altogether, not more." (Dostoevsky. p. 613). This act serves as a definitive indication of Rogojin's descent into savagery and his willingness to resort to violence in order to maintain his hold over Nastasya. Consequently, he received an 8-year prison sentence during which he remained in a state of unconsciousness.

Raskolnikov commits a horrific crime by murdering an elderly and impoverished woman named Alyona. This act of violence transforms Raskolnikov into a savagery and brutality. Raskolnikov's murder is a calculated and premeditated act. He justifies his crime by convincing himself that he is above the law and possesses the right to commit such a heinous act. This belief in his own superiority fuels his savagery and brutality. He firmly believes that he is exempt from the consequences of his actions, allowing him to carry out the murder with a detached and indifferent mindset, further intensifying his savagery. Furthermore, Raskolnikov's murder of Alyona is characterized by its brutality and savagery. He mercilessly beats her to death with an axe, leaving her body mutilated and disfigured. "Leaning over again and examining her at close quarters, he saw clearly that the skull had been crushed and was even slightly lop-sided. He was about to feel it with his finger, but drew back his hand. There was really no need. Meanwhile, a whole puddle of blood had now formed." (Dostoevsky. p. 95). This act of violence not only demonstrates his cruelty but also reveals the depths of his depravity. His actions go beyond being merely criminal; they showcase his innate savagery and brutality. The violence inflicted upon Alyona is not only physical but also psychological, as he leaves her body in a state of horror and terror. Moreover, Raskolnikov's murder of Alyona triggers a severe mental breakdown. Overwhelmed by guilt and remorse, his descent into savagery intensifies. The weight of his guilt pushes him to the brink

of insanity, fueling his increasing paranoia and delusions. He begins to experience haunting visions of Alyona's ghost, tormenting him day and night. This mental deterioration further contributes to his savagery, as he becomes increasingly unpredictable and dangerous with each passing day. Ultimately, his murder leads to his downfall, as he is eventually apprehended by the police and sentenced to eight years in prison.

To conclude, the metamorphosis of the characters Rogojin and Raskolnikov in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels "The Idiot" and "Crime and Punishment" respectively can be attributed to the societal, cultural, and patriarchal norms imposed on them as men. Both characters grapple with their identities and sense of self, resulting in a deterioration of their mental well-being. Rogojin's fixation on Nastasya and his fear of being replaced by Prince Muishkin leads him to lose control and ultimately murder Nastasya. Similarly, Raskolnikov's belief in the superiority of intellectuals drives him to commit a heinous crime. These transformations underscore the destructive influence of societal expectations on individuals, particularly men, and emphasize the importance of challenging these norms to foster personal growth and progress.

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