Sin and Retribution: A Comparative Analysis of the Ancient Mariner and Raskolnikov

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100900732

Received: 03 October 2026; Accepted: 08 October 2026; Published: 22 October 2026

ABSTRACT

Sin and retribution are two contradictory but intricately and naturally related to each other. These terms got activated from the day when sin was committed and sinner was chased for punishment. Sin and retribution are etymologically related to Hubris, Hamartia, Nemesis and catastrophe. Sin is doing or thinking anything against the set rules of Divine power or society or country or any other agent. Retribution is the after effect of sin; that is punishment or purgation. Sin originates from Hubris and it is followed by Nemesis. Human beings are judged by sin and retribution. Wild justice is mysterious and out of consideration. Sin and retribution are not equally treated in this world. But the deed that goes directly against the set law of God or Divine power or interest of human beings or animals that is tagged as sin and we demand punishment or retribution for that. A person who has the guts to violate the established rules and shake off all such bondages is a criminal or sinner. The Ancient Mariner in the poem *"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Raskolnikov in Feodor Dostoevsky's *"Crime and Punishment"* are sinners because their deeds stand against the set rules of God or Divine power or state. The Ancient Mariner shoots and kills the bird albatross, an innocent, helpful agent of Nature. On the other hand, Raskolnikov kills the pawnbroker Alena Ivanovna and her sister Lizaveta, an innocent lady. The killing of the albatross by the Ancient Mariner is considered to be killing of a Christian soul; while killing the pawnbroker and her sister is a sheer whim of Raskolnikov. So, retribution is must and it happens according to the Divine law of Christianity. This study is directed to compare and analyse the causes of the sin of the two protagonists- the Ancient Mariner and Raskolnikov and justify the magnitude of their retribution or punishment.

Keywords: sin, retribution, hubris, Nemesis, purgation, set rule of God, whim.

INTRODUCTION

All the religious books define sin as lawlessness or disobeying Almighty or supreme God. Sin is disobedience to God and wrongdoing towards His creation. According to Tripitaka- wrongdoing creates harmful karma and sufferings. According to Vedas/Hinduism – wrongdoing violates dharma and has moral or spiritual consequences. Adultery, killing, consuming an orphan's wealth, arrogance, and other wrongdoings are prohibited in Islam (Qur'an 17:32–38), According to Bible- the Ten Commandments, including prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting are sin.(Exodus 20:1–17). According to Tripitaka- unwholesome bodily, verbal, and mental conduct, including killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and harmful mental attitudes are sin.**(**AN 10.176, Cunda Kammāraputta Sutta**)** and the Vedas / Hindu scriptures- identifies desire, anger, and greed as destructive paths. (Bhagavad Gita 16.21). So, sin is an act, thought or condition that violates divine or supreme law or separates a person from the blessings of God. In Biblical point of view- Sin is disobedience to God that needs repentance and reconciliation to get redemption. On the other hand, retribution is the principle that a wrongdoer deserves punishment proportionate to the wrong committed by him or her. Retribution is God's/ divine power's judgment that ensures punishment of the sinner and salvation is attained through penance or expiation. Retribution is the result of anybody's sin or consequences of his /her wrong doing. Guilt, on the other hand, is the recognition that one's action has violated a moral or religious obligation or harmed another person or animal. Repentance stands for acknowledging wrongdoing, accepting responsibility, regretting the action and attempting to correct its consequences. Redemption is the process of salvation through acknowledgement of wrongdoing and spiritual regeneration. All the religious books including

Qur'an, Bible, Vedas and Tripitaka assert that retribution is must if any sin is committed. *"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"*, by S T Coleridge and *"Crime and Punishment"* by Feodor Dostoevsky are very popular and widely read texts for the instances of sin and retribution. These two works are the best examples for moral lessons for all type of readers. The two protagonists are not presented as equally culpable; instead, the nature of each protagonist's sin and the corresponding retribution are presented in relation to the gravity of his transgression. A comparative evaluation of the characters, their attitudes, magnitude of their respective sins, and the nature of their punishments helps illuminate the central theme of this study, "Sin and Retribution: A Comparative Analysis of the Ancient Mariner and Raskolnikov."

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are sin and moral transgression represented through the Ancient Mariner and Raskolnikov?
2. How do guilt and conscience affect the psychological experiences of the two protagonists?
3. How do Coleridge and Dostoevsky represent retribution and punishment?
4. What similarities and differences exist between the Mariner's and Raskolnikov's experiences of suffering?
5. How do repentance and confession contribute to their respective moral transformations?
6. How is the possibility of redemption presented in the two works?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To examine the nature and causes of the transgressions committed by the Ancient Mariner and Raskolnikov.
2. To analyse the psychological and moral consequences of their actions.
3. To compare the forms of guilt, suffering, and punishment experienced by the two protagonists.
4. To examine the relationship between sin, conscience, and moral responsibility in the two works.
5. To analyse the roles of repentance, confession, and suffering in the protagonists' moral transformation.
6. To compare the representation of redemption in Coleridge and Dostoevsky.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The ancient Mariner and Raskolnikov are the two mostly discussed characters in world literature for their sin and retribution. The ancient mariner, in *"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"* committed a sin by killing a sea bird albatross in the South Sea and consequently faced untold sufferings along with his two hundred innocent sailors in the Pacific Ocean. On the other hand, Raskolnikov, the hero of the novel, *"Crime and Punishment",* murdered a pawnbroker lady namely- Alena Ivanovna, and her sister Lizaveta. He is a university graduate and considers himself to be a superman and thinks that he has right to commit sin as punishment is not applicable for a superman like him. His notion of life is to commit a perfect crime and for this, he was waiting for long since to get an opportunity. This is his sense of freedom in the field of committing sin. According to V.V. Zenkovsky, an author and philosopher, once wrote, *"The theme of freedom, as man's ultimate essence, attains equal acuteness and unsurpassed profundity of expression in Dostoevsky." (Knight 42).* Ref. Ryan P. Fink, *"Dostoevsky, Raskolnikov, and Freedom in Crime and Punishment."* This mentality led him to commit a perfect crime and according to his long awaited desire, he killed the pawnbroker and her sister in the same house. This

study aims to examine the sin and retribution of ancient mariner and Raskolnikov with a comparative study and evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a comparative literary approach to analysis the representation of sin, guilt, retribution, repentance, and redemption in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The *Rime of the Ancient Mariner"* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel "*Crime and Punishment"*. The study comparatively examines the two protagonists' transgressions, psychological and physical suffering, types of punishment, spiritual and moral regeneration, and the possibilities of redemption from sin. The main focus is given on the event of killing the innocent bird albatross and the eventual sufferings of the Ancient Mariner after that. It next focuses on Raskolnikov's murder plan, execution of his plan, concealing the deed from the administration and the ultimate revelation and retribution and redemption.

Primary Sources

The primary sources for this study are the text of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" 1798. The Norton Anthology of English Literature, edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 10th ed., vol. D, W. W. Norton, 2018, pp. 438–458, and "*Crime and Punishment*", translated by Jessie Coulson, Oxford UP, 1998.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources include scholarly articles and critical studies dealing with guilt, punishment, moral responsibility, penitence, and redemption in the two works. These include Marina Francisco Martins' A *Study of the Conscience in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment*, Richard Gill's-*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Crime and Punishment: Existential Parables,* Ryan P. Fink's -*Dostoevsky, Raskolnikov, and Freedom in Crime and Punishment,* David S. Miall's -*Study of guilt and death,* Lee Sung-Won's- *Discussion of guilt in Coleridge, and scholarship examining the metaphysical and moral dimensions of Dostoevsky's novel.* Mandal Sarani Ghosal's, *"Image of "Justice" in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment",* Beebe Maurice's *"The Three Motives of Raskolnikov: A Reinterpretation of Crime and Punishment"* McDonald Daniel's *"Too much reality: A Discussion of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner",* BOSTETTER E. EDWARD's *"The Nightmare World of the Ancient Mariner"* Gurhan Ethem's *"Between Crime, Sin and Salvation: The Function of the Value of Mercy in Dostoevsky's Novels"* , Breitman Paulo's *"Clashes of Pride and Humility in Dostoevsky's Principal Novels",* Worthen John's *" The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Taylor Coleridge",* Aristotle's *" Poetics",* Seneca's *' Phaedra',* Euripides' *"Medea",* Aeschylus' *"Agamemnon"* and other critical works on *' The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'* and *' Crime and Punishment".*

Literary Framework

The principal framework is comparative ethical literary criticism, supported by concepts of guilt, transgression, retribution, repentance, and redemption. The study gives emphasis on the psychology of the two protagonists and their nature of committing sin. It ultimately focuses on the consequences of the sins committed by the two characters. Here guilt is treated not simply as an emotion or mistake but as a character instinct force that changes the protagonist's relationship with himself, other people, nature, society, and the possibility of spiritual restoration. Special attention is given to four analytical categories: (i) nature of sin, (ii) experience of guilt, (iii) forms of punishment and suffering, and (iv) possibility of redemption.

Procedure

The procedure follows four stages. First, the act of committing the sin or the transgression of divine law. Second, the immediate and long term psychological and physical punishment. Third, the protagonists' realization of guilt, isolation, suffering, and the consequent confession of guilt are compared. Finally, the two protagonists' repentance, penance and ultimate redemption from the guilt are analyzed. A close reading of the entire poem "*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"* and Part I, Chapters 5–7; Part II, Chapters 1–7; Part IV, Chapter 4; Part V, Chapter 4; Part VI, Chapters 2 and 8; and Epilogue, Chapters 1–2 of "*Crime and Punishment"* is conducted to

examine the major aspects of the present study. Analysis of the symbols, narrative developments, and character transformations are also scrutinized to reach the goal of this study.

The Ancient Mariner and his Sin

The Ancient Mariner started for a fresh journey with two hundred sailors to the South Sea. Their starting was cozy and favourable. Their ship was driven by strong wind and it went to the secluded icy place where there was no man or animal to trace except themselves. Suddenly, an albatross, a huge sea bird came to them with the blessing of mist and favourable wind. It shared food and drink with the sailors. Every day, the albatross would play with them till vesper nine and later went away. Everything was quite right and the ship was going accordingly because of the favour of the bird albatross. The ancient mariner describes the situation as-

"In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,

It perched for vespers nine;

Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke

Glimmered the white Moon shine." (Lines- 75-78)

But the ancient mariner, with his cross bow, shot the albatross and killed this innocent bird without any apparent reason or any kind of animosity. The killing of this bird was treated by the sailors as killing a Christian soul. He had obviously done a hellish thing and he must have to suffer like a tragic hero. About a tragic hero Aristotle tells-*"This (tragic character) is the sort of man who is not conspicuous for virtue and justice, and whose fall into misery is not due to vice and depravity, but rather to some error," (Poetics, Chapter-13).* The Ancient Mariner after killing the bird becomes a sinner and punishment becomes due to him. He bluntly confesses his sin to the marriage guest in the following way-

"With my cross-bow

I shot the Albatross." (Lines-81-82)

The tragic flaw (Hamartia) of the Ancient Mariner brings about his own sufferings. In this poem, the ancient mariner alone does not suffer; rather two hundred sailors faced the disaster. Though the Ancient Mariner does not die, his suffering becomes untold and unbearable.

Retribution of the Ancient Mariner

The sailors of the ship blamed the Ancient Mariner for killing the bird and as a symbol of punishment, they hung the dead albatross round the neck of ancient mariner. Actually, the Ancient Mariner killed the albatross that belonged to a water spirit of the South Sea and that spirit as an agent of Nemesis led the ship of the ancient mariner to an isolated place of the Pacific Ocean. The weather of that place was horrible and beyond imagination. The old mariner describes the situation in the following way-

"Day after day, day after day,

We stuck, nor breath nor motion:

As idle as a painted ship,

Upon a painted ocean." (Lines- 115-118)

The drinking water for the sailors also finished and they could not drink the sea water around them. All these things happened due to the sin of the ancient mariner and all of them were suffering for his crime. The Ancient Mariner again narrates the marriage guest about the magnitude of their suffering for want of water. He tells-

"Water, water, everywhere,

And all the boards did shrink:

Water, water, everywhere,

Nor any drop to drink." (Lines-119-122)

Every tongue for utter drought of drinking water, could not speak. Their throats withered at the root and they could not speak and it seemed as if they had been choked with soot. After this, there came a phantom ship to the ship of the ancient mariner. It was a dreadful ship. There were only two crew on the board and one was Death and the other was Life in Death. At night, the sea became more horrible because different colours of fire were burning in the sea at an interval. The sun was heating overhead. There was no wind to blow, no current in the sea to flow and in the sky, there was no cloud. The situation was beyond description. The suffering of the Ancient Mariner and his companions came from supernatural agents and the Death took the souls of the two hundred sailors to the island of death and the ancient mariner alone remained alive in the ship for punishment. The situation described by the Ancient Mariner was like-

"The souls did from their bodies fly-

They fled to bliss or woe!

And every soul, it passed me by,

Like the whizz of my cross-bow!" (Lines- 220-223)

The appearance of the old mariner because of his retribution became ghastly and the marriage guest looking at him felt afraid. He was skinny, long, lank and brown skinned like a ghost. The eyes of the Ancient Mariner were glittering and his beard was long. After the death of all two hundred sailors, the Ancient Mariner had to stay alone. Isolation is very dangerous. Except it. two hundred dead sailors were gazing at the Ancient Mariner and he could not avoid them. It seemed that, the Nemesis being very serious made the Ancient Mariner isolated to punish. The old mariner shared the experience of his seclusion in the following way-

"Alone, alone, all, all, alone,

Alone on a wide wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony." (Lines-232-235)

Redemption of Sin through True Love

The Ancient Mariner could understand his mistake or error in judgment but he had nothing to do except expiation. He became repented and tried to pray to God but failed because he was not forgiven. He suddenly looked at the sea and saw some water snakes swimming round his ship and blessed them from his heart unaware and God instantly took pity on him. The dead albatross fell from his neck at once and he felt sleep and when he woke up, he could feel fresh as he drank rain water in his sleep. Thus the mercy of God is established and he got redemption.

Continuation of Penance

God kindly helped the Ancient Mariner come back to his country but he is even now in penance. He moves always like the day or night and often feels pain in his heart and does not get released of it till he can tell the story of his last journey to anyone. He is blessed with strange power of speaking and he can understand who will listen to his story. He tells the marriage guest-

"I pass like night, from land to land;

I have strange power of speech;

That moment that his face I see,

I know the man that must hear me:

To him my tale I teach." (Lines-586-590)

The Ancient Mariner does not face corporal punishment or physical destruction. He is rather condemned to continual wandering and storytelling on moral lesson that he learnt from his last journey to the sea. His retribution therefore becomes a lifelong spiritual burden. But he is blessed with a divine knowledge by God and he is a messenger of God to impart human being the moral lesson-

"He prayeth best, who loveth best

All things both great and small;

For the dear God who loveth us,

He made and loveth all." (Lines-614-617)

Dostoevsky and Raskolnikov's Psychology and Tendency

Dostoevsky, often reflected in Raskolnikov, along with some of his political activists was arrested by the police of Czar when he was 28 years old. They were declared death sentence by the authority- but before the execution, their verdict was changed and they were given four years imprisonment. This event changed the philosophy of Dostoevsky and this philosophy is reflected through the intellectual superman Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov was a dropout from the University for his Poverty. He was haughty, proud, gloomy and follower of Nietzsche, the German philosopher. He has already contributed a paper to a reputed journal attributing the criminal as a superman who is beyond the judgment of good and evil as is propounded by Nietzsche. Actually, Feodor Dostoevsky was a psychologist before Psychology subject was introduced, He is a precursor of Freud and Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov is a fine example of schizophrenia from the psychological point of view. He considers him as a superman and so, he is free in any kind of action. But, individual liberty cannot be unrestricted because a free man has a tendency to encroach upon the liberty of others. According to V.V. Zenkovsky, an author and philosopher, *"The theme of freedom, as man's ultimate essence, attains equal acuteness and unsurpassed profundity of expression in Dostoevsky." (Knight 42). (Ref.* Ryan P. F, "Dostoevsky, Raskolnikov, and Freedom in Crime and Punishment." Spring-2014). In this world, there is an unseen barrier between permissible and impermissible thing. As an intellectually free citizen, he has right to do something that will eradicate irregularities from the society. He wants to kill the money lender Alena Ivanovna who exploits the poor helpless people of that area financially. Raskolnikov's intension is to commit a perfect crime that goes with his status as a superman or an instinctual. He was musing and pondering over this and at last he made up his mind to kill this pawnbroker.

Causes behind Committing Sin

Raskolnikov is a university dropout for his utter poverty. He is starving for several days. The landlady Praskovya Pavlovna has already stopped supplying him meal. Besides, his house rent for last four months is due. His mother has sent a letter informing him that she will no more be able to send him money. His younger sister Avdotya Romanovna (Dunya) is going to marry an unworthy wealthy man for helping him financially. He needs to continue his studies. He wants to help his mother recover her debts and save his sister from a blackguard. All these problems can be solved if he can kill the pawnbroker lady Alena Ivanovna and steal her valuable things.

Sin by Raskolnikov

In Part-1, chapter-7, the author introduces the murder scene. Here Raskolnikov is determined to kill the pawnbroker lady. Before killing this lady, he justifies his crime in three angles-e.g.

- From economic point of view.
- From historical point of view (A superman does not have crime, he is above law),
- From the humanitarian point of view akin to Christian belief. (The lady is a blood sucker and she should be killed for humanitarian ground).

He starts for the pawnbroker Alena's house and on the way he collects an axe from a porter's room in absence of him and enters the house of the lady. He is very lucky because while he was entering through the gate of the pawnbroker, a huge wagon of hay hides him from other people's watch. He meets the lady and gives her a silver cigarette case as pledge and the lady turns to her room becoming little bit unmindful. Raskolnikov then hits the lady on her head thrice and she gets killed. The author describes the situation in the following way-*"She cried out, but very faintly and suddenly sank all of a heap on the floor, raising her hands to her head."* He then takes the bunch of keys and steals the valuable things from that house. But, unfortunately, Lizaveta Ivanovna, the half-sister of Alena Ivanovna enters the room and cries out in terror watching the blood and dead body of her sister. Raskolnikov getting no alternative way, kills this lady also with his axe. Thus he commits sin by killing two ladies. It is a fundamental crime and he has no escape from punishment.

Retribution of Raskolnikov's Sin:

According to Burnham. William *"Dostoevsky was not a lawyer, nor did he have a formal legal training. Still, law played a major role in his life."* Actually, he had a good relationship with lawyers and he dealt sin and punishment in many of his works. A sinner cannot go unpunished. The same thing happens with Raskolnikov. Retribution or punishment is ensured by Divine power or local law. Raskolnikov cannot take his crime as a normal thing and behaves irrationally. He tells in soliloquy- *"I'll go and fall on the knees and confess everything."(Part-2, Chapter-1)*. Raskolnikov faces the following ways to retribution one by one.

i) He is psychologically tortured.

ii) He collapses on the sofa after returning his room.

iii) Then, he becomes a victim of fear and psychosis.

iv) At night he jumps often in terror.

v) He paces ups and down in the room.

vi) He tries to conceal his stolen tinkers behind the wall paper.

vii) His human side urges him to confess his guilt to the police.

viii) His rational side forbids him to surrender.

Raskolnikov is later called by the police to the police station for not paying the house rent and when he comes to know this, he gets fainted. Actually, he recollects that he has kept the door of his room open where he has kept the stolen materials. Except it, he thought that the police would ask him about the murder event but they did not. If the stolen things are found, his attempts of escaping from the murder will be impossible. The author has superbly depicted the situation in the following way- *"But heavens! How could he have left all those things in the hole?"* The police suspects Raskolnikov and he is always on vigilance. Life becomes unbearable to him. Escaping is not so easy from self and the police. Sinner has to escape from God and local authority. If one is shrewd, he can escape from the state authority but he has no scope to go out of the realm of God. Raskolnikov ultimately confesses his crime and he is sentenced to eight years servitude in Siberia for the murder of Alena and Lizaveta. His sense of guilt, haunting fear, pangs of isolation, mental anxiety, and inner conflict made his life unbearable. The theory that an extraordinary person can transcend ordinary moral laws collapses under the weight of his conscience. He can then understand that, thought, deed and its effects are not equal.

Redemption

Raskolnikov's redemption is different from other criminals. A simple jail for eight years and physical labor cannot wipe out the sin of a triple murderer. He not only kills the two sisters, he also kills his own soul. He is an atheist but in the jail, he studies Bible and a regeneration is found in him. He accepts the prostitute Sonya, saves his sister Dunya's life from the blackguard, reads the history of Lazarus' regeneration and revives his faith in God and Christ. Thus an atheist is regenerated. The readers feel pity for him and the protagonist gets a scope of redemption.

Comparative Analysis of Sin and Retribution of the Ancient Mariner and Raskolnikov

This study comparatively examines the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's "*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"* and Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's "*Crime and Punishment"* through the interconnected dimensions of transgression, tragic flaw, immediate consequences, recognition, retribution, spiritual transformation, catharsis, and final salvation. The Ancient Mariner kills an innocent albatross and Raskolnikov kills Alena Ivanovna and Lizaveta Ivanovna. The former commits a sin by killing an innocent bird albatross and violates the natural order God. While the latter commits a crime by murdering a pawnbroker and her sister, two human beings, images of God. As tragic flaw or fault of the character, we get thoughtlessness and wanton attitude of the Ancient Mariner; because he kills the bird without any apparent reason. On the other hand, Raskolnikov harbors pride, intellectual arrogance and extraordinary belief about his superman quality. Both the characters in this respect are sinners and they face disaster and bad luck for their flaws of character. In the matter of immediate consequence of sin, the Ancient Mariner encounters punishment and sufferings from the supernatural agents. But Raskolnikov suffers from psychological torment and spiritual alienation. For redemption, the Ancient Mariner recognizes the beauty in God's creature and feels love for them; while Raskolnikov understands that his theory is invalid and the killing is violation of state as well as God's law. As retribution, the Ancient Mariner's ordeal is lifelong wandering and storytelling; while Raskolnikov faces legal punishment and imprisonment for eight years at Siberia. In spiritual dimension, the Ancient Mariner perceives reverence to God's creation and attains purity. Raskolnikov, at the same time, gets repented and develops spiritual regeneration. The Catharsis or purgation leads the Ancient Mariner to spiritual purification and it leads Raskolnikov to spiritual regeneration like Lazarus. Finally, the Ancient Mariner takes the task of preaching God's love to men around him and Raskolnikov gets back his faith in God and attains regeneration like Lazarus.

CONCLUSION

The Ancient Mariner and Raskolnikov both are widely referred as criminal characters who attain their purity through penance and retribution. The Ancient Mariner's shooting of the albatross was against the sanctity of God. God has created all creatures and He loves them all and equally. So, the Ancient Mariner's violation of divine law brings his sufferings and miseries. The Ancient Mariner got released of his sin just showing true love to water snakes of the sea. On the other hand, Raskolnikov, a young university dropout student, was proud and at the same time confident of his theory of superman idea, committed crime by murdering human beings and starts facing psychological torment and eight years servitude at Siberia jail. There his regenerative attempts become successful and he attains purity and redemption. So, the sin and retribution of ancient mariner and Raskolnikov are exemplary examples to be in right track.

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