

Title: Pronouncing the "New Word": the Bronze Horseman Subtext of Crime and Punishment  
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Abstract:

It has become obligatory in Crime and Punishment scholarship to define Raskolnikov's "schism" (raskol), which readers generally attribute to the conflict between intellect/spirit or selfishness/suffering. Many read Part One of the novel as a chart of the hero's divided psyche; indeed, the schizoid path he cuts through Petersburg reads like a roadmap of the battle between rationality and compassion. A reading informed by the novel's position in the Petersburg literary tradition does not invalidate this interpretation, but rather helps to contextualize it: as I hope to demonstrate, the schism's roots are actually textual ones, extending back to the iconic roles established by Pushkin in the very earliest Petersburg tale.

In The Bronze Horseman, the world-building words of Peter the Great ("From here we will threaten the Swede, / Here a city will be founded") instantly take shape in cast-iron and granite, while those of the poor clerk Evgenii ("Somehow I will build for myself / A humble and simple refuge") remain forever unrealized. In contrast to Evgenii, the archetypal "inarticulate" little man of the Petersburg tradition, Raskolnikov strives to fully control language: he has actually taken up the pen, written what he terms a "new word" (novoe slovo) and then taken steps (730 of them, to be exact) to actualize that word through the murder of the pawnbroker, a crime explicitly likened to Peter's own "crime" of hacking a window through to the West. The zigzag course that Raskolnikov carves as he alternately steps toward and recoils from the idea of murder may be profitably interpreted in light of this primal split between Peter, controller of word and nature, and Evgenii, voiceless victim of the State. An analysis of Raskolnikov's impressions of and engagement with Peter's city in the moments immediately before the murder and in the days just following it highlights this struggle between the hero's two sides.