

Narratology Triggered by A Hat — An Analysis of Raskolnikov's Criminal Attire

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Abstract

Within the narrative framework of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the meaningful details of criminal costumes have long been treated as ordinary scene props without in-depth interpretation. Supported by narratology theory and close textual reading, this paper focuses on core clothing symbols including the round hat and worn overcoat worn by the protagonist on the day of the crime, and analyzes the functional transformation of costumes from disguise tools to psychological narrative devices. The study finds that the full set of criminal clothing is more than simple environmental background. It actively participates in narration, externalizes the protagonist's subconscious, and deconstructs his superhuman fantasy. Through the complete ritual of wearing clothes, committing murder and washing blood stains, the text internally criticizes Raskolnikov's radical individualism and interprets the grand humanistic theme of the novel via tiny material images.

Keywords

Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov, Narratology, Clothing Symbols, Superhuman Theory.

1. Introduction

1.1. Re-examining Narrative Details in *Crime and Punishment* under the Blank Space of Physical Images

As a representative classic work of Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* is famous for its profound depiction of human predicaments, moral paradoxes and social realities. Existing research mostly concentrates on macro topics such as Raskolnikov's superhuman philosophy, schizophrenic personality and alienation of the underclass, while ignoring the close reading of micro textual details. Academic circles have long overlooked a large number of concrete object narrative details in the novel. In particular, the full description of the protagonist's clothing on the day of the crime has always been simply classified as auxiliary props for shaping the image of grassroots figures, ignoring its independent narrative value and ideological connotation.

Dostoevsky spends far more space than scene layout to carefully depict Raskolnikov's clothing selection, weapon hiding and blood cleaning. These deliberately laid-out details are by no means redundant literary modifications. In the narrative logic, clothing elements such as the round hat and old overcoat have broken away from passive background attributes and become "narrative actors" that promote plot development, expose the protagonist's inner psychological conflicts and carry thematic criticism. On this basis, this paper takes clothing images as the entry point to fill the blank of detailed analysis in existing research and interpret the novel's theme from a brand-new micro perspective[1-3].

1.2. Exploring the Protagonist's Hidden Spiritual World through Clothing Images

The core viewpoint of this paper is that the round hat and worn overcoat deliberately chosen by Raskolnikov before the crime are superficially disguise tools to avoid investigation, and fundamentally core narrative devices that externalize psychology, carry fantasies and witness spiritual collapse. The whole clothing system completely connects the whole process of the protagonist's rehearsal, practice, breakdown and collapse of superhuman fantasy, and becomes a material mirror reflecting his spiritual predicament.

Raskolnikov attempts to break the moral shackles with a Napoleon-like superhuman identity, yet he is always restricted by shabby and humble grassroots clothing. The sharp contradiction between grand philosophical fantasy and humble realistic carrier forms a sharp contrast. Without straightforward moral preaching, the falsity of superhuman theory is deeply deconstructed only through the contrast of clothing images, which becomes Dostoevsky's unique artistic technique to criticize radical individualism[4-6].

2. The Round Hat: "Badge of Shame" and Materialization of Self-Cognition

2.1. Inner Interrogation and Choice Triggered by the Symbol of the Round Hat

In Raskolnikov's crime preparation plan, the round hat is the first major object that triggers his intense psychological struggle. This round hat specially purchased for the crime has a striking style and high recognizability, which is obviously different from the simple and low-key clothes of the underclass in St. Petersburg. When trying it on, Raskolnikov maintains absolute rationality and clearly predicts the fatal hidden danger of this accessory: "I knew it! ... This hat is too eye-catching, unforgettable, and it will become the most important criminal evidence."

From the conventional criminal logic, the only way to avoid risks is to replace low-key accessories to eliminate the hidden dangers of witnesses and evidence collection. Here lies the core narrative contradiction of the novel: under the premise of fully knowing the risks and having rational judgment, why does the protagonist still insist on wearing this highly flawed round hat to commit the crime? This counterintuitive behavior proves that the value of the round hat far exceeds the disguise function, and it hides the subconscious psychological appeal that the protagonist cannot control.

2.2. Subconscious Degradation and Anchoring of Self-Identity

Raskolnikov's abnormal choice to wear the round hat is essentially a complete split between rational cognition and subconscious desire. He takes the initiative to accept this hat and regards it as a "badge of shame" symbolizing his own predicament. Long-term poverty, interrupted studies and heavy debts trap him in self-hatred and identity anxiety, and he inwardly recognizes his humbleness and failure.

His superhuman fantasy originates from the humiliating grassroots living environment, and the crime is an extreme experiment for him to break the identity shackles and prove self-worth. However, deep in his subconscious, he never truly believes that he can become a "superhuman" transcending the mortal world; instead, he indulges in his humble self-positioning. The eye-catching round hat perfectly matches his failed self-image, allowing him to rehearse a "crime committed by a nobody". This pathological self-matching exposes his hidden subconscious expectation of failure and determines the inevitable collapse of his superhuman practice.

2.3. Textual Value of Daily Objects Transformed into Spiritual Rituals

In traditional narrative interpretation, clothing is only a static background prop, while in the narrative system of Crime and Punishment, the round hat has evolved into an active spiritual device participating in narration with independent artistic value. The round hat materializes

the protagonist's hidden spiritual split, and makes the internal contradiction of "yearning for greatness but willing to be humble" clear and perceptible. The moment he puts on the round hat, the protagonist completes the passive confirmation of self-identity, voluntarily abandons the idealized imagination of superhuman, and admits that he is only a grassroots nobody trapped by poverty and humiliation.

At the same time, this object profoundly promotes the plot development. The conspicuous hat keeps the protagonist in a state of panic all the time, accelerates his mental breakdown, foreshadows the subsequent plots of criminal mistakes, self-interrogation and spiritual repentance, and completes the narrative leap from ordinary clothing to the carrier of spiritual rituals.

3. The Worn Overcoat and Axe: Rupture Between Illusory Fantasies and Humble Means

3.1. Discipline and Calculation Carried by Clothing in Crime Preparation

If the round hat carries the protagonist's spiritual shame and self-cognition, the worn overcoat and the rope loop inside it are elaborately designed criminal technical carriers, constructing a complete physical crime system. Dostoevsky devotes a lot of writing to describing the whole process of the protagonist transforming the overcoat, designing rope loops and hiding the axe, accurately showing the refinement and deliberation of his crime preparation. The protagonist specially sews rope loops to fix the murder weapon, relies on the concealment of the overcoat to complete the secret attack, and carries out repeated deduction and precise planning throughout the whole process.

However, the detailed description of clothing in a large space is not redundant writing, but a deliberate narrative arrangement by the author. The protagonist spends a lot of energy polishing the disguise technology of clothing, trying to support his superhuman criminal experiment with careful external planning. Shabby and bloated grassroots clothes are forcibly endowed with sophisticated criminal functions, forming a strong contrast between lofty philosophical ideals and vulgar practical tools, containing profound satire and criticism in the narrative.

3.2. Self-Construction and Exposure of the Illusory Superhuman Vision

Raskolnikov's complete set of criminal clothing is essentially a self-deceptive performance of superhuman identity. In his cognition, Napoleon-like superhumans have absolute power to break through secular rules and judge evil, without being restricted by secular morality and laws. To realize this fantasy, he regards the worn overcoat as the "costume" of superhuman, takes the rope loop as technical support and the axe as the tool of judgment. Through the disguise of external clothes, he tries to strip off his humble grassroots identity and shape a calm, rational and omnipotent superhuman image.

But this performance is absurd from beginning to end. A real superhuman does not need disguise and concealment, controls everything by absolute will, and fears no traces and accountability. Raskolnikov's superhuman practice completely depends on a shabby overcoat, hides the murder weapon with crude rope loops, avoids risks everywhere and fears accountability. The humble practical means completely shatters the lofty fantasy, and reduces his superhuman performance to ridiculous self-deception.

3.3. External Garments Exposing the Spiritual Essence of Empty Fantasies

The protagonist's extreme planning and over-reliance on the clothing system reversely expose his inner lack and cowardice, and completely eliminate the rationality of superhuman fantasy. The more carefully he polishes the disguise details and desires to control the overall situation

through external equipment, the more obvious his inner panic, lack of self-confidence and fear of failure become.

If he really firmly believes that he is a superhuman transcending the mortal world and believes that the crime is a righteous judgment, he will not waste energy disguising his figure and hiding criminal evidence. All clothing preparation reflects fear of secular rules, evasion of moral judgment and humble compromise of grassroots nobody. The clothing system composed of worn overcoat and axe seems to be a symbol of strength and planning, but in fact it is the materialized proof of powerlessness, completely exposing the empty spiritual essence of his fantasy.

4. Washing Blood: Shattering the Superhuman Mask and Awakening Original Sin

4.1. Crime Fear and Mental Shackles Attached to Garments

After the crime, the narrative function of clothing undergoes a thorough transformation, changing from disguise tools to concrete carriers of sin. Chapter 1 of Part Two of the novel accurately depicts the protagonist's state after the crime: after fleeing the murder scene and falling into a coma, the first thing Raskolnikov does after waking up is repeatedly check all his clothes and rinse the blood stains on his socks and overcoat over and over again.

This mechanical and obsessive behavior transforms abstract psychological fear into tangible physical movements. Before the crime, clothing strengthens fantasy; after the crime, clothing binds him to criminal evidence. Every tiny blood mark is an inescapable proof of his violent behavior and spiritual collapse. The process of repeated inspection and cleaning directly presents his inner fear, anxiety and guilt, and all calmness and certainty of superhuman disappear completely.

4.2. Shattering the Superhuman Mask and Return of the Id

The whole process of cleaning blood is a highly symbolic spiritual undressing ritual. Wearing the round hat and worn overcoat before the crime is the process in which the protagonist takes the initiative to put on superhuman costume and construct an ideal identity; repeated cleaning after the crime forces him to strip off the superhuman mask and return to mortal human nature. According to the presupposition of superhuman theory, a real superhuman should feel calm after completing righteous judgment, ignore the traces of sin and be free from secular moral constraints. However, Raskolnikov's cleaning behavior is full of guilt and cowardice of ordinary people. He fears sin, evades accountability and sinks into self-condemnation. This awkward undressing ritual completely collapses his previous theoretical self-confidence, proving that his superhuman philosophy is only a fantasy divorced from reality and cannot resist the inner interrogation of conscience.

4.3. Eternal Sin Traces: Unerasable Original Sin

The cleaning of blood stains has dual metaphorical meanings, forming profound narrative tension in the text. On the material level, Raskolnikov can wash away the visible blood stains on the surface of clothes through repeated rinsing to avoid immediate investigation risks, but tiny residual marks and cleaning traces on clothes can never be completely eliminated. On the spiritual level, he can never wash away inner sense of guilt and remorse, and the blood sin marks have been deeply branded in his spiritual world.

The external cleaning ritual is futile: physical traces can be erased, but spiritual original sin cannot be eliminated. This clothing system completes the whole narrative process: from initial identity rehearsal, mid-term fantasy collapse to final confirmation of original sin, it finally

announces the bankruptcy of superhuman theory, forces the protagonist to recognize himself and break away from illusory spiritual fantasy.

5. Conclusion: Putting On and Taking Off the “Costume” — Immanent Critique of Superhuman Theory in Crime and Punishment

5.1. Spiritual World Constructed by Object Narrative

From the perspective of narratology and elaborate close textual reading, this paper verifies the core narrative value of clothing images in Crime and Punishment. The complete clothing system composed of round hat, worn overcoat, rope loops and blood stains runs through the whole criminal process, carries the protagonist's spiritual changes and realizes social criticism. The round hat symbolizes identity shame and inner split; the worn overcoat highlights the paradox between fantasy and reality; blood cleaning completes the spiritual awakening of original sin. Layer upon layer, it shows the protagonist's complete spiritual track from arrogant fantasy and deliberate performance to thorough collapse and self-repentance.

5.2. Micro Objects, Grand Philosophy

Instead of criticizing superhuman theory through rigid philosophical debates and straightforward moral preaching, Dostoevsky demystifies radical individualism through tiny worldly objects such as a hat, an overcoat and blood stains. The grand superhuman philosophy seems noble and perfect, but it cannot adapt to real human nature and social rules, and collapses in front of simple realistic objects. This delicate and implicit critical technique makes the humanistic theme of the novel more appealing and persuasive, and enriches the research paradigm of object narrative in classic literature.

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