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| **Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*** | |  |
|  | Background  Though it is nominally a European country, Russia's cultural experience and evolution have followed quite a differnt trajectory from that of "the West." First, Russia was not privy to the Classical (pagan) tradition Greece or Rome, but was introduced to this tradition by way of Byzantium (which became the capital of the Roman Empire in 330 B.C.E.), when Russia converted to the Byzantine (Eastern Orthodox) form of Christianity in 988 C.E.). In other words, by the time Russia was exposed to Classical tradition, it was already through the lens of Christianity. Then, from the 12th to the 15th centuries, Russia was ruled by Mongol conquerors, and was thus completely isolated from Western Europe. The cultural consequences of this isolation were great: Russia experienced no Renaissance, no Reformation, no Counter-Reformation, and no Enlightenment (in the form recognized in the West).  Russia joined Europe in the 18th century, under Peter the Great, who was enamoured of the "modern" ways Europeans (particularly the Dutch and Germans) had of doing things, and resolved to modernize Russia on a European model. His efforts resulted in the grafting of Western European culture and technology (and even languages--the upper classes spoke German to each other in the 18th century, French in the 19th) onto an agrarian, deeply traditional (what fashionable globalists of today would call "backward"), Russian Orthodox state. Russian society became divided into the Westernized upper classes and the Orthodox peasants. (The schism--*Raskol*, in Russian--between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Roman-Catholic-derived denominations of the West cannot be overestimated; to believers on both sides, it is deep and irreconcilable.)  One of Peter's most audacious projects was the building of the city that is named for him, and that provides the setting for *Crime and Punishment*: St. Petersburg. (Note the German-sounding name; is the early 20th century, the last Tsar, Nicholas II, would rename the city "Petrograd," which means the same thing ["Peter's city"], but using the Slavic root for "city".) St. Petersburg was built on swampland conquered from Finland, using German and Dutch planners and technologies, but Russian manpower (and many of the people involved in its construction died). A symbol of Imperial power, of Peter's iron will, of Russia's new Westward-looking culture (it was built at the extreme western border of Russia, as well as using Western models), and of the triumph of rational order (it is a city of straight lines and right angles), Petersburg was dubbed the "Venice of the North"; partly because of its three conjoined rivers (the Neva, the Little Neva and the Nevka) and its canals (built to reduce the risk of flooding, since the underlying ground was a swamp), and partly because it was, like Venice, both beautiful and hazardous to the health (lots of water around, none of it particularly clean).  Peter the Great has always loomed over both Petersburg (where there is a huge, intimidating bronze statue of him on a horse overlooking the river, immortalized by Russia's most-beloved poet, [Alexander Pushkin](http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/p/pushkina.asp), in "The Bronze Horseman") and over Russian literature (from Pushkin on). Watch out for the name "Peter" (Pyotr, in Russian) in *C&P*: Luzhin's name is Pyotr Petrovich ("Peter son of Peter"), and several other characters have patronymics (the middle name, derived from the first name of the bearer's father) that indicate their descent from someone named Peter: Petrovich ("son of Peter") or Petrovna ("daughter of Peter | | |