



*Crime and Punishment*  
and *Columbo*:  
The Inverted Mystery,  
the Everyman, and Investigation  
by Rhetoric of Inquiry

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**Abstract.** In their hit television series *Columbo*, Richard Levinson and William Link pay homage to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, showing the commission of the crime first and revealing the villains’ motivations and cover-ups. The brilliant St. Petersburg magistrate Porfiriy Petrovitch and LAPD’s Lieutenant Columbo present their personae with excessive displays of friendliness, self-deprecation, rhetorical questioning, and the false exit.

“Listen, Columbo, just for a minute, how about we stop pretending that I’m brilliant and you’re simple!”—Ward Fowler (William Shatner), “Fade in to Murder” *Columbo* (1976)

The development of *Columbo* by writers-producers-creators Richard Levinson and William Link started during their college years in English literature classes. In a retrospective interview with William Link in 2010, Susan King reports that the unusual detective Columbo character was introduced on television in the 1960 NBC anthology series *The Chevy Mystery Show*, via the episode “Enough Rope,” followed by the successful stage play *Prescription Murder*. Lieutenant Columbo progressed to becoming the lead detective of a made-for-television movie by the same name in 1968, starring the 40-year-old New Yorker

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