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 Porfiry 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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