

Vol. 8, Issue-II (April 2017)

ISSN: 0976-8165

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access eJournal



UGC Approved Journal [Arts and Humanities, Sr. No. 40]

Editor-In-Chief - Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

The Hero Meets His Other Self: Recurring Conflict in Dostoevsky's *The Double* and *The Brothers Karamazov*

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Article History: Submitted-01/04/2017, Revised-09/04/2017, Accepted-12/04/2017, Published-30/04/2017.

Abstract:

The article makes an analysis of the two characters from the two novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky. It scrutinises the presence of the dual selves of the heroes and the roles played by these mysterious characters in the exposition of the latter's thoughts and ideals. In *The Double*, this 'other self' contradicts the hero and tries to oust him. His ultimate success marks the perishing of the hero.

The dual character assumes the role of the Devil in *The Brothers Karamazov*. He acts as an agent to torture the hero, Ivan Karamazov. He is even capable of throwing him into deep anguish. Dmitry, his elder brother, accepts the physical sufferings, yet the young philosopher suffers much in his heart and ultimately falls ill. His desperate confession before the 'other self', who laughs at him mercilessly, makes the situation more pathetic.

So, the presence of 'the other self' serves two purposes in these novels. First, it exposes to the reader an intimate view of the hero's feelings and second, it chastises the hero by acting as his confidante.

Keywords: dual self, confession, mystery, crime, evil, the other.

Introduction

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky is often hailed as the novelist of the deep human interactions. He writes about the unusual dealings of the human minds with much precision in his novels. The presence of this kind of an internal penetration keeps his works a class apart from his contemporaries. Actually, it is this quality which provides his writings with the prophetic nature. The fame of his novels lies mainly with the expertise shown in its character portrayals. A sense of reality pervades throughout their delineation. Mikhail Bakhtin, the greatest theorist on Dostoevsky, comments about the self-conscious heroes of the novelist. (Bakhtin, Mikhail Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics "The Hero in Dostoevsky's Art", 51) They are flexible beings adapting themselves to their fluctuating circumstances and varying roles. This necessitates the creation of life-like characters in Dostoevsky's novels which leads to the unconventionalization or the defamiliarization of the typical roles of the hero and the villain.

The first part of his literary career shows a gradual increase in the complexity of his characters. *The Double* belongs to this period and it can be treated as the prototype of the psychological novels of Dostoevsky. The hero, Golyadkin undergoes a psychological conflict which leads him towards the invention of a second-self to compensate the shortcomings of the first. This leads to further complications and finally, the hero gets replaced by his own creation. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the self-reliant philosopher, Ivan Karamazov, moves a step further. He uses this other self to chastise his wrong moves. Still, this attempt fails initially and he begins to treat his alter-personality as the Devil himself.

The analysis is conducted here in two stages. The novels are dealt within their chronological order. So, the first part deals with *The Double* (1846). The roles of the other self, both as the confidante and as the agent for chastisement, are investigated in detail. Then, the role played by the other-self of Ivan Karamazov is examined. As the novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879) belongs to the latter part of his career, the portrayal of the alter-individual turns out to be more complicated in it. The role of chastisement gains upper hand here. Though the novels share certain aspects in the portrayal of the mysterious dual characters, they do not seem to possess much in common with the other aspects.

Golyadkin: the Hero vs the Villain

The introduction of the hero, Golyadkin Sr., is intended to create an impression on his weak, sensitive character. He is a permanent victim of human ill-feelings. He misbehaves naturally and apologizes ridiculously. All his attempts to claim kinship with his fellow beings misfire and the man is always left alone to lament about the injustices done on him. Dostoevsky narrates an incident, in which the hero consults with a doctor to find a plausible remedy for his odd behaviour. Instead of relating his real problem, he merely gossips and escapes from the scene, leaving the doctor dumbfounded. His conversation with the doctor “foreshadows Golyadkin’s split into the anxious, socially dysfunctional Golyadkin and the well-poised, socially successful Golyadkin junior” (Hoenisch, Steve “The Construction of the Double as Social Object” www.Criticism.Com)

Then he attempts to gain the recognition of the upper crest of men. He visits luxurious restaurant. This too ends up in a disaster. He plans to visit the birthday party of Miss Klara Olsufyevna, the lady of his dreams and the daughter of his major officer. He cuts a sorry figure there and finally, the other guests throw him out. All this while, he is trying to prove others that he is “alright” and is “like everyone else” (Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Double* Chapter 4, 37). Having lost all his hopes, Golyadkin rushes through the streets in the heavy rain.

It is in this moment that the man reaches the heights of his emotional conflict. His thoughts are narrated by the novelist in the most intimate manner. He concludes, “(...) agony upon agony, terror upon terror...a feverish tremor ran through his veins. The moment was insufferably unpleasant!” (*The Double* Chapter 5, 43) Suddenly, he notices another man walking past him. To his great surprise, he realises that this man holds a close resemblance to him. The unexpected discovery unsettles him for a few moments. When he comes to himself,

he tries to forget the strange incident and to treat it as a wild fantasy. Anyway, this other man walks towards the Golyadkin Sr.'s flat and very quietly establishes himself there. Even the servant does not seem to notice anything odd in the incident. Slowly, the visitor looks at his face and to his utter dismay, the Sr. admits the existence of his double.

The other Golyadkin becomes more popular in the office, and this urges the Sr. to check his own decisions. The two Golyadkins agree to stay as friends. Golyadkin Jr. manipulates their friendship to worm into the secret thoughts of the Sr. who remains loud-mouthed to reveal his private feelings to the imposter. After gathering enough information, the latter clears off hurriedly. From the next day onwards, he begins to blackmail the Sr., using the pilfered secrets. He even attempts to disgrace him in the office.

The attitudes of the two characters seem to be contrastive in the first look. But, on close observation, they prove to be a complimentary couple. Where the first one lacks, the second gains. This antagonistic relation between them proves an innate necessity for their existence. The mysterious introduction of the latter Golyadkin on the eve of the disgrace of Golyadkin Sr. proves this argument. The hero finds it too difficult to survive in his social stratum. He rushes out of the party hall and seeks shelter under the cover of heavy rain. He stays in the deserted fringe of the city, reluctant to return to his former ignominy.

The emergence of the second self takes place in the moment. Like an apparition, he makes his appearance and moves past his bereaved counterpart. Later, this complimentary pair assumes the identity of the former and behaves like an imposter in every sphere of his life. He taunts the hero and makes him jealous. All these incidents illustrate the physical existence of this second self. Still, there are certain instances and coincidences which may put this argument under suspicion. Anyway, the other self establishes himself in the social circle, partly by using the identity of the hero and partly by his own capability.

The hero, in his utter dismay, challenges the other one for a duel. As the bifurcation of the identity is now complete, he finds it too difficult to remain in this divided self. He wants to reduce himself into one. Unknowingly, he commits some mistakes, and the imposter makes it public in the most ridiculous manner. His colleague, Anton Antonovich explicates, "Everything will be explained in due time, (...). You will soon know about it. You will be officially informed about everything today." (The Double "Chapter 10" 14/18 <http://ebooks.adeaide.edu.au/>) These words fill the hero with fear about an impending punishment and he begins to behave more oddly. He feels almost certain about his doom and acts rather submissively to his other self. Thus, Golyadkin Sr. faces extinction while the Jr. claims superiority over him.

The separation between the two selves is now complete and the latter kicks away the Sr. However, they make a final attempt to reconcile. It fails and the Jr. pursues his journey, dragging the Sr. along with him. They reach Olsufy's flat where the Jr. enters the apartment, leaving the bewildered Sr. in the street. Being discarded by everyone, the poor hero makes up wild fantasies to survive. He assumes that he has received a love letter from Klara, urging him to elope with her. He returns home and seeks the help of his servant to pack things ready

for the journey. Then, a letter reaches him from the office asking him to hand his duties over to a colleague.

The actual reception of the letter affects his preconceived ideas. He wants to get his job back. As a way to comply with the society, he decides to return the girl to her family. But, once he fails to meet his major officer, he reconsiders the possibility of the elopement. Accordingly, he waits in the heavy snow fall, under her flat. At last, he takes his refuge in their wood stack, feeling so ashamed to present himself before his friends. Very pathetically, he realises the truth about the non-existent letter.

Then Golyadkin Jr. comes to him and invites him into the room. All those who gathered there, seem to sympathise with him for his ill fate. They all crowd around him. Very submissively, the hero enters the carriage brought by the doctor and his friends bid him a tearful farewell. Suddenly, the truth dawns on him that he is being taken away by a fiery eyed stranger, not by his doctor. Thus, the journey of Mr Golyadkin Sr. towards the safe destiny begins.

The ultimate removal of the inferior identity of the hero is indicated through this journey. Of the two complimentary ones, the weaker, negligible one is destroyed forever. The intruder, who seems to be comparatively adapted to the circumstances, survives. The destruction of the dual-self ensures the stability of the second identity. The other-self outgrows the first one, engulfs it gradually and replaces it finally. This transformation takes several steps and the novelist seems to dwell more on the emotional conflicts of the hero than on the psychological assumptions of the onlookers. So, the narration keeps its sympathy with the Golyadkin Sr. throughout.

The novel thus offers the complete disintegration of the heroic image. The conflict ends up in the most unexpected manner. The total annihilation of the less competent character puts an end to the conflicts and issues raised throughout the work. Peace is restored, even if through a ridiculous incident. The end of the novel suggests the end of all dual feelings and suspicions, both for the hero and for his complimentary pair.

Ivan Karamazov- The Philosopher vs. The Devil

The Brothers Karamazov is the swansong of Dostoevsky. This work is acclaimed as the masterpiece of this Great Russian novelist. The characters seem to be livelier and realistic. The story of the house of Karamazovs catches the readers' attention due to its great variety and ambience. The epic style is retained throughout the narration. The stories of the three legitimate sons of the greedy man, Fyodor Karamazov, unfold their miserable childhood and orphaned bringing up. Born from two mothers, they share almost the same fate. Still, their temperaments vary extremely from that of a womaniser to a celibate.

The eldest, Dmitry Karamazov, is a spendthrift and a romantic. He is extravagant in his financial as well as emotional dealings. This sensitive character is often in contrast with his cunning brother, Ivan. They often contradict each other and Ivan proves his strength of will very often. This man is a budding philosopher, and the publisher of certain philosophical

treatise. He claims that he is not susceptible to emotional outbursts and does not believe in the existence of supernatural powers. He stands at an equal distance from his sensual elder brother, Dmitry and his chaste, yet uncommunicative younger brother, Alyosha. This declared atheist seems to scorn all kinds of debauchery and cruelties at home. Even as a young boy, he craves for financial independence. Later, he comes to better terms with his father who even begins to treat his scholarly son with respect.

The portrayal of this sincere young man can be treated as the novelist's most direct representation of a Russian youngster. He is cunning and independent. His intellect claims superiority over his brothers'. Yet, he stays with his wayward father and helps him. He gains reputation as a promising literary man. His article on the ecclesiastical courts gains him popularity and people used to wonder about the young man's growing attachment with his notorious father. For some mysterious reasons, he begins to stay with Fyodor Karamazov and to act as the mediator between Dmitry and the latter.

The family assembles in Father Zosima's chamber in order to settle the disputes related to the inheritance. Ivan is present on the occasion, but he behaves as a disinterested partner and gives out certain opinions about society and religion in general. The growing conflict inside the man is reflected very well through his words. He comments,

“Destroy a man's belief in immortality and not only will his ability to love wither away within him but, along with it, the force that impels him to continue his existence on earth. Moreover, nothing will be immoral then, everything would be permitted, even cannibalism. (...), for every individual-people like us now, for instance- who do not believe in God or immortality, the natural moral law immediately becomes the opposite of the religious law and that absolute egotism, even carried to the extent of crime, must not only be tolerated, but even recognised as the wisest and perhaps the noblest course.” (Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov* “Book 2, Chapter VIII, Why Should Such a man Live?” 88)

This is the initial state of the growing conflict in the man. His contemplative character answers for the deeply philosophical nature of his arguments. He begins to depend on his theory too much and strives really hard to develop it into a way of life. At home, Smerdyakov, the supposed to be illegitimate son of his father, confronts him with his primitive ideas on physical torture. Actually, this uneducated cook is trying to impress the scholar with his vibrant views. Ivan gets tired of it soon and still, he notices the persistence and capability of this seemingly weak character.

Smerdyakov taunts Ivan by unravelling the rivalry between his father and Dmitry, to which the latter replies, “If one wild beast devours another, it's good riddance for both of them”. (*The Brothers Karamazov* “Book 2, Chapter IX, The Sensualists” 186). This comment denotes the considerable change that occurs in the humanitarian philosopher. These changes in his scholarly son frighten Fyodor Karamazov too. Alyosha notices the great commotion brewing inside his brother, tries to alleviate the tension, but to no avail. While the other

characters are engaged in physical struggles, Ivan fights with the contradictory emotions surfacing in his mind. The young man is desperately in love with Katerina, his brother's betrothed and this makes the situation more complicated. Dmitry wants to leave the girl to marry Grushenka. Still, Katerina declares that she is obliged to marry him. So, there is no hope for Ivan.

The confusions of Ivan Karamazov remain unanswered and it differentiates the character from his brothers who begin to treat him as an enigma. When he seeks the help of his religious brother, Alyosha, he seems to grow into such a state as to disbelieve both the world and its creator. He fails to find an explanation for the endless human sufferings, especially that of children. He finds that man is a combination of the God and the Devil. He negates the Russian Orthodox teachings about the sufferings and its reward in heaven. The serious discussion gives way to the outpouring of the inner most thoughts of Ivan. He gives vent to his ideals and philosophy in the form of an impassioned treatise, titled, "The Grand inquisitor". This is an in-depth study on the relation between power and suffering. The re-enacting of the Crucifixion raises several questions both in the believer and in the atheist. Anyway, the brothers take leave of each other in a friendly manner. Ivan's doubts remain unsolved and he plans to escape from the dilemma by quitting the place and the persons who cause it.

On his return home, he cleverly evades the hints laid by Smerdyakov about the impending murder. He explains to them his plan to leave the dismal place. Then, he takes the opinion of the vile cook who comments, "...that its' always rewarding to talk to a clever man" (*The Brothers Karamazov* "Book 5, Chapter VII, Its' Always Rewarding to Talk to a Clever Man" 372). His doom is complete now and on his way he decides to bury his past forever. He considers himself as a despicable beast.

The murder takes place in his absence, as he expected and Ivan feels an innate sense of guilt and responsibility afterwards. His self-torture begins and he accuses himself as the murderer of his father. "Ivan's reaction to the death of his father is ambivalent and indeed illustrates what conflicting emotions were present in Dostoevsky with the death of his father" (Cantrell, Dan "Dostoevsky and Psychology" www.fyodordostoevsky.com) Meanwhile, he exerts a considerable influence on Lise, whose cheerful disposition undergoes a drastic change, after her brief friendship with this confused philosopher. Ivan grows confused and pale and begins to complain about "his visits" to his room in Moscow (*The Brothers Karamazov* "Book 11, Chapter V Not you, Not You" 805). He is obviously shaken and puzzled.

Ivan begins to run to and fro, visiting either Dmitry or Smerdyakov each time. If Smerdyakov is the murderer, he knows very well that he cannot evade his own moral responsibility for the crime. The offhand comments made by the former cook almost confirm his doubt. To his great dismay, Smerdyakov blurts out, "it is you who are the principal murderer, and I am only your accomplice, your faithful servant, who just carried out what you ordered me to do" (*The Brothers Karamazov* "Book 11, Chapter VIII, The Third and Last Meeting with Smerdyakov" 834).

The revelation made by the cunning villain totally unhinges the confused philosopher. The role played by his theory in the crime shocks him. He wants to acknowledge his role in the murder by bringing Smerdyakov before the court. Still, Smerdyakov is convinced about the impossibility of such a plan and he declares to the stunned Ivan, “of all his sons, you’re the one who is most like the late Mr Karamazov- your soul and his, they’re just the same” (847). These words shatter Ivan who returns to his room as a completely defeated person. He turns delirious at night and phantoms begin to appear before him, just as it did in the case of Golyadkin Sr.

The major difference between these two heroes is that, while one is left alone with totally indifferent onlookers, the other enjoys the compassion and care of his brothers and his beloved. Doctors enter and they identify his problem as brain fever. The sick man sleeps off and in a half-wake state, begins to have hallucinations. He feels that a gentleman, who has lost his fortunes, is sitting near his bed. The mysterious stranger is actually his own second-self, or his conscience, and it begins to talk to him. Ivan talks in an abusive language and the other one explicates his presence as the personification of the evils inside the philosopher. He considers himself as the devil and claims that he often encounters people in their nightmares.

The Devil now talks about crime sarcastically remarks that though the enlightened men do not believe in the God, they believe in him, the Devil. He informs Ivan that he is given the duty of negation. Then he quotes Ivan the story about the death of a philosopher, an anecdote, once narrated by Ivan to his friends. The reiteration of the story makes Ivan more confused about the identity of the Stranger. He begins to feel that the Devil does not exist and it is he who is talking to himself. Then the Devil finishes his speech by expressing his helplessness in doing the wrong. If he starts to do things in the right way, the order of the world will be lost. So, he has to retain his evil identity for the wellbeing of God’s earth.

These very thoughts belong to the scholarly days of Ivan. Unable to bear these words anymore, he throws a glass towards the Stranger. At the same moment, Alyosha knocks at his door and the apparition vanishes. Ivan finds the glass on the table and dismisses all the events as a nightmare. Still, the Devil has already told him about Smerdyakov’s suicide. He admits that the Devil has accused him of being so proud. Alyosha is astonished at this and tries to bring his sick brother to normalcy. The death of the murderer spoils the relevance of his confession and this makes the situation worse. Even Alyosha mistakes him that Ivan is suffering from “agony caused by proud resolution and deep-seated feeling of responsibility” (*The Brothers Karamazov* “Book11, Chapter 10, It was He Who Said That” 879).

The total derangement of Ivan is visible in the court scene. He is brought before the judge where admits his crime and brings out the evidence, the three thousand roubles, but to no avail. He begins to rave at the court and they take him out forcefully. No one seems to take the sick man’s words seriously and the evidences stand against Dmitry. Ivan suffers more, yet the suffering acts as a kind of purgation for his sick mind. Katerina stands with him throughout and her faithfulness brings him back to life. Unlike the hero of *The Double*, Ivan is brought back to a normal, ordinary life.

This shows the maturity attained by the novelist who has had too many experiences in his later life. The deeply psychological issues and confusions often lead his heroes to trials and tribulations. They may entangle and may lead them to their ultimate doom, like Golyadkin Sr., or it may very rarely lead to their chastisement, as in the case of Ivan Karamazov. Thus, the moral, as well as intellectual, dilemmas of the heroes prove to be a novelistic strategy to portray the emotional and psychological transformations occurring in the lives of the characters.

Conclusion

The study on the presence of the other-self of the two major characters of Dostoevsky reveals certain relevant information regarding his psychological representation of intense dilemmas in human life. The dual character of Golyadkin Sr. proves to be powerful enough to substitute the hero. He intrudes in a mysterious, unrealistic manner and establishes his influence over the familiar circle of the hero in the flash of a moment. He replaces the former hero and finally evicts him from the social group. They try to arrive at a compromise several times, but each time the attempt fails. The removal of the hero, in the most unbecoming manner, indicates the beginning of the days of his dual identity, who is sure to win in the social stratum.

The fate of Ivan is different. His hallucination is only a temporary one. He is placed in a more compassionate surrounding and this makes the diagnosis of the psychological aberration easier. He is filled with remorse, yet ready to change. Unlike the former hero, he is capable of making more judicious decisions. The dual identity appears before him and the sick man identifies it as the Devil. He recognises the role played by his liberal ideals in the creation of this monster. He fights to ward off the evil and the timely arrival of Alyosha proves to be of great help to him. The experience chastises him and makes him courageous enough to confess his role in the murder in front of the judges. The effort makes him sick for a while, yet he returns to life with the help of his dear and near ones.

So, in the final work, Dostoevsky portrays the ultimate success of humanity and declares the necessity of kinship and compassion among human beings. Human beings are liable to pitfalls. Yet, they are capable of renovation too, both in the soul and in the body.

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