

The Polyphonic Portrayal of Guilt in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*



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Spring 2026

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A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Humanities

University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

BA in English

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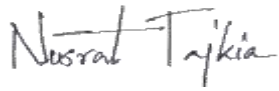
222013047

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Spring 2026

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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Abstract

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is a work of literature that comprises a wide range of distinct philosophies, ideologies, and worldviews embodied by the central characters. This thesis explores the different facets of guilt portrayed in the novel in order to unravel their moral and psychological implications for the relevant characters. It draws a parallel between the different manifestations of guilt across the characters and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of Polyphony from his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. A wealth of literature exists on the novel's classification as a polyphonic text, yet there remains a room for discussion on the multifarious nature of guilt in the novel and how it mirrors the distinct ideological planes and worldviews of its characters. Thus, scaffolded by the investigation of each of the major characters' unique ways of confronting and coming to terms with guilt, this paper propounds the argument that guilt acts as a polyphonically articulated element in the novel. This study operates on two analytical tiers, the first is a cross-character analysis where one character's response to guilt has been juxtaposed with others to accentuate the tension between their conflicting worldviews, the second is an intra-character analysis that delves into the coexistence of conflicting voices within the individual character's identity, and recognizes that inner contestation as a polyphonic element.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Can a heart lacerated by guilt be equated with repentance? Can crippling self-resentment rooted in remorse ever mend one's ways? Is anyone ever responsible for the sinful desires harbored in secret- never acted upon or articulated? These questions haunt the narrative of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, some contradict each other and some are left unresolved. These questions shape the trajectory of the characters' lives. This paper explores all the different facets and functions of guilt and remorse and how they are capable of engendering contrasting emotions across the characters. This one feeling eliciting different responses in the relevant characters speaks volumes about their ideological planes and moral values.

This paper has been segmented into three sub chapters where the first one probes into how Ivan's guilt is rooted in his inaction and apathy. This chapter also situates Ivan's eventual descent into madness into the framework of polyphony, since his hallucination of the devil, an incarnation of his guilt, is an indication of how even his atheism lacks conviction. Ivan rejects theodicy and espouses the notion that without the existence of a benevolent God, all definitions of right and wrong are man-made constructs, yet he is unable to withstand the agony of guilt when Smerdyakov implicates him in the murder of Fyodor Karamazov. The second sub chapter examines guilt as a destructive force in Dmitry's life, which is in sharp contrast with the guilt that steered Zossima and his visitor towards redemption. These two polar opposite functions of guilt juxtaposed against one another have been anchored to the idea of polyphony, since there is no authorial voice interfering to endorse either of the said functions of guilt. The third sub chapter is in stark contrast with its preceding chapter as it represents guilt as a redemptive force

with textual evidence from Zossima's anecdotes of his youth. Guilt in both Zossima and his visitor's lives prove to pave the way for redemption.

Additionally, this paper also puts forth the argument that polyphony is so intricately stitched into the narrative of the novel that it persists even within each character's psyche, hence all their moral dilemmas. For instance, in Dmitry's case, despite being a raging sensualist, he has a strong moral compass that causes him to vacillate between the person he wants to be and the person he inherently is. The coexistence of these two selves has been construed as a polyphonic element since different sets of values vie for control over one character's identity. Furthermore, similar to sub-chapter two, drawing evidence from how the visitor was torn between the desire to attain salvation and the desire to take his secrets to his grave, this chapter also buttresses the claim that the reach of polyphony in this novel is so pervasive that it explains even the inner-contestations of some of the characters.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is a psychological theological fiction that revolves around the Karamazov family's long-standing dispute over inheritance. However, that is simply the tip of the iceberg. The murder of Fyodor Pavlovich, the head of the family swings the novel into motion as his eldest son Dmitry becomes the prime suspect and the actual perpetrator, Smerdyakov, Fyodor's illegitimate son, commits suicide after insinuating that it was Ivan's nihilistic philosophy that prompted him to commit the murder. The family grapples with the aftermath of the tragedy as each other confront their situations in their own unique ways, Dmitry stands at the crossroads of the prospect of his incarceration redeeming him and the impulse to leave everything behind to live his life with Grushenka, Ivan loses his grip on reality from his guilt of facilitating his father's murder, while Alyosha does not let the tragedy snuff out his faith and remains as a beacon of hope for the family.

Bakhtin's theory of Polyphony from his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* has been implemented in this research to interpret the different manifestations of guilt and what it reveals about each of the characters. The crux of Bakhtin's theory of polyphony is that the characters in Dostoyevsky's novels are carriers of their own worlds and philosophies and each of them are introduced to their antithesis so the plot progresses in a dialogic manner. Another salient aspect of polyphony is that there is no authorial voice drowning out any of the characters' ideology, meaning no character functions as a mouthpiece for the author.

To clarify, this study is founded upon two analytical layers: a cross-character analysis where different characters' contrasting responses to guilt has been juxtaposed to accentuate the polyphonic undertone of the novel, and an intra-character analysis where conflicting values and impulses- engendered by guilt- within individual characters has also been recognized as a polyphonic element.

Research Question

How does the manifestation of guilt vary across Ivan, Dmitry, Zossima, and the mysterious visitor in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*? How do these differences contribute to the novel's polyphonic structure?

Methodology

The research has been conducted qualitatively, incorporating several journal articles and employing Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of polyphony from the book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, which will scaffold the overarching aim of this research, which is to unravel how the multifarious nature of guilt contributes to the classification of the novel as a paragon of a polyphonic text. Moral questions, unassuaged guilt, and unrealized hope that haunt the narrative, robbing it of closure, reiterate Bakhtin's notion of the unfinalizability of a polyphonic text, where

even fully gestated ideas, embodied by autonomous characters whose voices are not drowned out by that of the author, cannot bring about a resolution; no single truth can prevail. Dostoevsky's deft representation of the conflicting ideological planes of the characters, as corroborated by Bakhtin, corresponds with the multifaceted nature of guilt and how it has been internalized and negotiated with by the different characters. According to Bakhtin, Ivan's hallucination of the devil is the height of Dostoevsky's employment of polyphony since it demonstrates the coexistence of discordant ideological planes even within the individual character's identity. Furthermore, what the complex and guilt-ridden relationship between Dmitry and Katerina reveals about Dmitry's response to guilt is also one of the prominent points discussed in this thesis, along with Dmitry's investigation and the reduction of the complexity of legal innocence fused with moral guilt. How the investigation's error in judgement ensues from the monologic treatment of a polyphonic character speaks to the dialogic nature of the novel has also been examined, bolstered by the findings from some relevant studies. Lastly, through the juxtaposition of guilt's depiction as both a destructive and a redeeming force in the novel, as observed in Dmitry, Zossima and the mysterious visitor's cases, this paper likens guilt's representation as a polyphonically articulated element in the novel. The open-ended nature of this polyphonic text, as theorized by Bakhtin, has shed light on the disparate facets of guilt, some preceding crimes or actions, some shrouded in abject self-loathing, some born from inaction, and some from an elevated moral sentiment of collective guilt inherited from Adam and Eve's primordial sin.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A multidimensional portrayal of guilt, remorse, and a sense of shared moral responsibility has been stitched into the narrative of the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Guilt dictates the

actions and choices of the Karamazov brothers, sealing their fates. It manifests differently in each of the characters and they all have their own way of confronting it. Organized thematically and around each character, the works reviewed in this study shed light upon all the nuanced facets of guilt. For instance, Joyce Carol Oates' article dissects Dostoevsky's deft employment of antitheses for all his characters, which is indispensable for this study's theoretical reading of the novel. Oates' work is given credence by Marina Kanevskaya's article where he proposes the hypothesis that Smerdyakov is the architect behind Ivan's pitiful destiny, as he acted as Ivan's shadow-self and carried out the crime Ivan could only hope to in his wildest dreams. This hypothesis is further substantiated by Stephen Barnes' thought-provoking take on Ivan's rational rebellion against theodicy. On another note, Benjamin Jens and Harry Schlower, in their respective articles, probe into the covert mechanisms of guilt in Dimitry's psyche. Neve Sugars-Keen and Harvey Mindess' studies converge on Freud's take on the detrimental effects of guilt on one's morality. Dennis Vanden Auweele's article juxtaposes Alyosha's saintly sense of moral responsibility for others' sins with Ivan's attempt to elude guilt, bringing the two characters' ideological planes into sharp relief. Furthermore, Robert Louis Jackson's article on Fyodor's paranoia-inducing guilt from desecrating an icon of a deity broadens the scope for discussion in this study.

In his article "The Double Vision of *The Brothers Karamazov*", Joyce Carol Oates expounds on the argument that the major characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* are complemented by their doubles, who function more or less as their alter-egos. He underpins the argument with a reference to the fact that Smerdyakov makes Ivan's unmaterialized desire, more specifically of patricide, come true, thereby acting as his shadow-self. The gist of the article is that Dostoevsky pairs his characters and their ideologies with their "mocking antitheses" (Oates

205). All ideas, philosophies, and doctrines are firmly established and yet somewhere down the line turned on their heads. This article's elucidation of this idea of doubles is pertinent to the employment of Bakhtin's polyphony to the exploration of guilt in this thesis, since these characters do not act as a mouthpiece for the author; they contradict each other's (occasionally their own) philosophies, thereby stepping beyond the realm of authorial intervention. Oates lauds Dostoevsky's literary prowess since the latter never anchored his characters' ideologies with his own, or never gave precedence to one over the other, which essentially mirrors Bakhtin's theorization of *The Brothers Karamazov* as a polyphonic text.

On that note, the article "Smerdiakov and Ivan: Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*" by Marina Kanevskaya raises the following question: why is it that Smerdyakov tacitly shifts the blame of murdering Fyodor onto Ivan, when he had no intention of avoiding prosecution since he had made up his mind to commit suicide? Through careful perusal of Smerdyakov's last conversation with Ivan, Kanevskaya establishes that Smerdyakov is a representation of evil lurking beneath the semblance of normalcy, and essentially a symbol of the devil that Ivan later hallucinates in a delirium. She validates her claim by probing into the backstory of Smerdyakov's birth, and how mentally deranged he was growing up, which was all chalked up to the fact that he was a child born out of sexual violence, the vilest form of depravity. The author sheds light upon how cunning Smerdyakov truly is, how he deliberately engendered the sense of guilt in Ivan that sent him descending into madness, as he laid the groundwork for this ploy the moment he called Ivan a clever man since he knew he could twist Ivan's words to make it seem as if he had been the one pulling the strings.

As for further scrutiny of Ivan's character, in the first segment of his article "Sins and Sensibility: Hope, Injustice and Significant Names in *The Brothers Karamazov*", Stephen Barnes

analyzes Dimitry and Ivan's namesakes and how the two characters' actions and destinies are reminiscent of the said namesakes. Following a discourse analysis of the chapter "Mutiny", the author surmises that Ivan's blatant rejection of God's world stems from the fact that he has a predilection for all things visible and tangible, he cannot think beyond the realm of corporeality. This, according to the author, is an allusion to the Biblical story of Jesus' disciple Thomas and the teaching that the essence of faith lies in believing in what cannot be seen. He concludes with the assertion that Ivan's adamance on making sense of the world with his "Euclidean understanding" (Barnes 197), despite knowing his approach is flawed, is telling of his religious orientation, which is germane to the critical analysis of his character in general.

Moving onto Dimitry, in the article "Silence and Confession in *The Brothers Karamazov*", Benjamin Jens propounds the idea that silence in the novel conveys ineffable messages and emotions, especially in Dimitry's case. He claims that Dostoevsky's characters resort to *molchanie* (silence) either to insinuate something, or to harbour secrets. He cites the chapter "Confessions of an Ardent Heart" to bolster the argument that silence is of paramount importance to a penitent, drawing on how Alyosha's silence in that chapter, renouncing the opportunity to make a judgement, allowed Dimitry to pour his heart out to him. Similarly, in "The Grand Inquisitor", despite detesting Ivan's ideologies, and not being able to see eye to eye with him, Alyosha played a receptive role by observing kenotic silence. Jens therefore concludes that when characters choose to remain silent, they facilitate communication between characters and allow the reader to glimpse into their souls. The crux of the author's hypothesis can be buttressed by the following interpretation of the chapter "Mitya's Great Secret. Hissed off the Stage": Dimitry's initial resolve to prevaricate when asked about the source of the three thousand roubles during the investigation can be construed as his pitiful attempt to not sully Katerina's

honour any more than he already had. The vestige of his shame and guilt from being unfaithful to Katerina manifested in the way he refused to even utter her name during the questioning.

On a slightly different note, the article “Incest In *The Brothers Karamazov*” by Harry Slochower explores Katerina’s existence in the novel as the primary reason behind Dimitry’s undoing, as the prospect of turning his life around hinged on returning her three thousand roubles. While his relationship with Grushenka, the author explains, was overtly sexual and edged towards incest at a certain point, Dimitry’s relationship with Katerina was much more complex, as the latter was inextricable from Dimitry’s life. Slochower likens Katerina’s character to a maternal figure, whose all-consuming love manifests in her attempts to reform Dimitry’s ways, smothering him with her love, and self-immolating at the trial. Dimitry playing the role of an unruly son towards Katerina, who has an abundance of her love at his disposal, is, according to the author, the premise of their relationship. Thus, the author establishes that his relationship with Katerina is inherently more incestuous than with Grushenka. Therefore, Slochower claims, holding himself back from sleeping with Katerina was Dimitry’s way of abstaining from incest. This article adds an interesting spin to this study’s exploration of the origin of Dimitry’s guilt.

In his article “The Martyr and the Upright Philistine: Freud’s Morality and *The Brothers Karamazov*”, Neve Sugars-Keen raises the question of whether self-inflicted torment and guilt promise redemption. The author takes into account Dimitry’s conviction that his guilt will purify him and confutes it. He claims that in Dimitry’s case, guilt and self-deprecation have only paved the way for unbridled acts of baseness instead of encouraging him to turn over a new leaf. The author suggests that this is where Freud and Dostoevsky’s notion on repentance converge, albeit with nuance. Only Dimitry’s desire to start anew with Grushenka spurs him into action (perhaps his resolve to return the three thousand roubles to Katerina). The author reiterates Freud’s take

on self-inflicted torment by reframing the concept of guilt with the assertion that it may not always have a bearing on moral redemption. The author then touches upon the flipside of the coin- how Zossima's remorse after smiting his servant on the face was so grave that he never relapsed into his old, morally degenerate self, and strived to become a better person. The author then solidifies his stance by referring to Zossima's friend who, upon committing a murder, was plagued by a guilt so potent that the torment alone was his penance. Therefore, the author both avers and confutes Freud's take on Dostoevsky's fixation on suffering.

The essay "Freud on Dostoevsky" by Harvey Mindess echoes that of Neve Sugars-Keen, especially in terms of debunking Freud's notion that crippling guilt always leads to a cycle of sin since once an individual makes peace with the sins they have committed, they no longer feel any qualms about perpetuating that sin. Mindess then brings up *The Brothers Karamazov*, and counters Freud's take on the matter with the claim that with guilt comes awareness, and once awareness intercepts transgression, the individual cannot help but teeter between the edge of conscience and urges, and that vacillation is exactly what makes the characters dynamic. The author then forays into taking apart Freud's conjecture that *The Brothers Karamazov*, being Dostoevsky's last novel, was his poetic confession, perhaps indicating that he indulged his patricidal impulses vicariously through his characters. The author's final refutation to such a deduction is that since Dostoevsky had deliberately named Fyodor Pavlovich after himself, Freud's speculation could be partially true at best, because Dostoevsky is a mosaic of all the characters he has created, and patricidal impulse is perhaps from only a fragment of the whole person. Although this article is more of a diatribe against Freud's partial scrutiny of Dostoevsky and his novel, it sets the ground for further discussion of the guilt and suffering's mechanism in the novel.

As for Alyosha, Dennis Vanden Auweele in his article “Existential Struggles in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*”, dissects the onion analogy from the chapter “The Onion”, propounding the three prerequisites to an “authentic existence” (281). To define the third prerequisite, the author juxtaposes Ivan’s negotiation with collective guilt with Alyosha’s undiluted acceptance of it, despite having no hand in the actual crime. In other words, the stark difference between how the two brothers confront guilt is pertinent to the exploration of the different facets of guilt. Ivan’s remorse for indirectly facilitating the murder of Fyodor culminates in his hallucination of the devil, which can be read as a form of moral bargaining with guilt, a subconscious effort to absolve himself of his share of the blame. This inner contestation stems from using casuistry to rationalize faith, like a vain attempt to encapsulate the existence of God within the realm of logic, which the Elder Zossima had warned against. On the other hand, Alyosha readily embraces the burden of others’ sins, upholding Zossima’s teaching that if one cannot bring others to the path of redemption, they are just as guilty as the transgressors.

Lastly, Robert Louis Jackson in his article “The Sentencing of Fyodor Karamazov”, ascribes aesthetic values to crime and retribution, he likens violence against man to *bezobrazie*, or the act of tarnishing the divine beauty or the iconographic image of God. He refers to Dimitry’s inner monologue, from the first chapter, on how the mere appearance of his father repulsed him to an extent where he wished Fyodor would perish. The article builds on the chapter “Over the Brandy” where Fyodor dishonours his deceased wife, who was seared into Alyosha’s memories in the act of praying to Madonna, the epitome of piety and virtue, whose icon Fyodor had callously marred. This literal desecration of a sacred icon by someone as despicable as Fyodor, reinforces the conflict between spiritual beauty (*obraz*) and its violation (*bezobrazie*). This interpretation allows the reader to peer into Fyodor’s psyche, how he so

boastfully and blithely announced that the action would cost him nothing. However, years later, the guilt and fear concerning what he had done comes back to haunt him, which is why he brings it up in front of Alyosha. The author then fleshes out the origin of Ivan's guilt- his inaction, his reluctance to defuse the hostility between Fyodor and Dimitry, which eventually spiralled out of control. This accentuates the difference in how guilt manifests in each of the brothers and how they come to terms with it, buttressing the argument that guilt is multifarious.

These works support the overarching aim of this research- to explore the different articulations of guilt, as experienced by each of the brothers and other characters like Zossima and the mysterious visitor. Although not all of these articles are anchored in the exploration of guilt, they provide ample evidence and insights that have scaffolded the interpretive approach of this thesis.

Chapter 3.1

Analysis

Abstract Love vs. Active Love: Ivan's Inaction

Every character, every ideology, every argument in the novel has its antithesis, Ivan's rational rejection of theodicy is no exception. In the chapter "The Rebellion," Ivan engages in a moral debate with Alyosha. The crux of his argument is that long-standing parameters of good and evil only exist because people believe in the immortality of their souls. According to him, heaven is a man-made construct that was invented as an incentive for people to do good, and the idea of hell is the only thing deterring them from indulging in evil. As a rational skeptic, he blatantly rejects the notion of a benevolent God's existence in a world where evil runs rampant. Therefore, in a world bereft of a higher power, humankind may exercise their free will since souls are mortal and divine justice is a mirage. However, he turns a blind eye to the banal nature

of evil, which does not exist as a separate entity or force but is rather embedded in the very existence of human consciousness and their choices. This is where his hallucination of the Devil in a feverish delirium begins to generate meaning. The tattered clothes, the levity in the devil's tone shatters the idea of evil being a mighty entity that actively warps people's conscience. While this devil is a figment of Ivan's imagination, born from the inability to come to terms with the fact that he might have enabled the murder of his father, this devil also mocks the aspect of moral vacuum in Ivan's philosophy and how ironically Ivan is having to pay the price of someone else's enactment of his philosophy. The very root of Ivan's guilt is a testament to this idea of evil being a byproduct of free will, since despite not being actively involved in the murder, he has to suffer the consequences of Smerdyakov's actions and becomes fraught with guilt for having unknowingly manifested it. The devil is, in all likelihood, an incarnation of the intense guilt that Ivan struggles to cope with; the guilt of being indirectly complicit in his father's murder.

The devil's existence has also been interpreted by some scholars as Ivan's double, a personification of the dubiousness he subconsciously has about his own philosophy. This is where Bakhtin's idea of "second voice" (217) takes effect. Even within a character's own psyche, there is a discord of ideologies and worldviews that remain unfinalized and unresolved.

Ivan's skepticism, or rational rejection of theodicy stems from his inability to reconcile himself with the notion of a God allowing evil to persist despite the gratuitous torture and suffering innocent children have to endure. Ivan's philosophy, on a subjective level, is founded upon his love for humanity as he admits to Alyosha that the existence of good does not compensate for the rampant evil and wickedness, from which even innocent children are not

spared. He renounces the world where evil is allowed to prosper solely because people count on divine harmony to ensure justice for all in the afterlife.

In that sense, his rational rebellion against God's world can be construed as the love he fosters for the idea of humanity, but not necessarily humans themselves. Because unlike Alyosha, whose love for those around him shows up in his actions, Ivan's inaction is his tragic flaw, it is the root cause of all his guilt. Ivan's inaction is closely linked to all the pivotal moments in his life. There are a multitude of incidents that can corroborate this claim; the most pronounced example being his indifference towards the rivalry and dispute between Dimitry and Fyodor, which has been scrupulously analyzed by Robert Louis Jackson in his article "The Sentencing of Fyodor Karamazov".

Fyodor's words, then, point to the main area of Ivan's evil: his inaction, his unwillingness to mediate the struggle between Dmitry and Fyodor, his insistence on playing the observer.

In the early scenes of the novel, Ivan is characterized almost exclusively through inaction and silence, and silence for Dostoevsky epitomizes the moral atrophy of the spirit. Ivan, almost unnoticed by the reader, silently watches the buffoonery of his father in the early monastery scenes but does nothing to stop him. (180)

Ivan's passivity and cynicism has never proven to fare well in his life. His obstinacy and adamance on steering clear of the dispute between his father and brother signifies the difference between himself and Alyosha. The root of this gnawing guilt in Ivan's conscience being his inaction has been affirmed by other scholars as well, for instance, Marina Kanevskaya in their article "Smerdiakov and Ivan: Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*" probes into Smerdyakov's true motive behind pinning the blame on Ivan and his philosophy despite not

having any intention of avoiding legal culpability. She also inspect Smerdyakov's role in actively stirring up this maddening remorse in Ivan's heart. She asserts that Ivan cannot be considered an actual accomplice in the murder regardless of how convincing Smerdyakov's rationale is, and that Ivan only walks into the trap laid out by Smerdyakov since he was already beset by guilt from not mediating the conflict between his father and brother out of sheer contempt towards his family.

Ivan's vulnerability to this accusation (his pangs of conscience) stems from his hatred for his father and wish for his father's death, as well as his general disgust with his family: Ivan tells Alesha "in a whisper, twisting his features in malice, 'One vile reptile may consume the other, and good riddance of [sic] them both'" ...These ignoble feelings are powerful enough to prompt him to flee his paternal home despite his awareness of the brewing dangers and his sense of familial responsibility. (Kanevskaya 360)

While Alyosha has love and affinity galore for everyone around him, Ivan is deeply disdainful of human beings as individuals and has a tendency to keep those who he considers below him at an arms length. This indifference towards the conflict between Dimitry and Fyodor eventually snowballs into irredeemable damage. This love for the abstract idea of humanity, his refusal to settle the dispute between his father and Dimitry, and the guilt that plagues his heart after Fyodor is murdered, are all tied to his inaction.

Another subtle yet telling incident of Ivan's lack of humility and reluctance to put his love into actions for other people is when he pushes Maximov off the carriage supposedly because he found the blabbering old man an inferior, parasitic individual.

In the microcosmic universe inhabited by Fyodor in "Over the Brandy," evil is rampant, evil is unpunished, evil prevails. There wells up in Ivan a nihilism of outrage, a

subconscious readiness to stand aside in the conflict between Dmitry and his father. “One reptile will devour another reptile,” Ivan will remark in the next scene, “The Sensualists,” “to hell with both of them!” (Jackson 178)

It is this nihilistic ideology that later paves the way for Smerdyakov to commit the murder as Ivan’s logic, of everything being permissible, boomerangs on him. Since he rejects the notion of divine justice and claims that there is no higher power distinguishing right from wrong, he believes that people are allowed to do whatever they please. In that sense, even in complicity, Ivan is tied to the murder through passivity. This is exactly what the devil ridiculed, that despite all his ravings about his denial of God’s existence, he could not bear the guilt of Smerdyakov exploiting his philosophy to kill Fyodor.

Zossima’s exhortation to Alyosha to assume guilt for the sins of others has shaped Alyosha’s outlook on life. This is so deeply etched into his mind that he deems himself just as depraved and wicked as his father solely because they are bound by blood. However, the purpose behind espousing this doctrine is not necessarily to blame oneself for other’s sins, but to engender an indelible sense of humility within oneself and to rid the heart of conceit. This doctrine goes hand in hand with the idea of active love in the novel. The pursuit of active love transcends the limitations of an ascetic life. This is why the elder advises Alyosha to experience life head on, in all its glory and work tirelessly for his loved ones, which Alyosha does without fail; he lends an ear to others’ woes often without even an iota of judgement, which has been parsed and considered as a form of observing “Kenotic silence” (64) by Benjamin Jens in his article “Silence and Confession in *The Brothers Karamazov*”. Alyosha also does not shy away from getting involved in others’ predicaments, he gives others the space to confide in him and strives to salvage their situations. His acts of active love sharply contrasts with Ivan’s aversion

towards getting roped into others' business, even if it concerns his own family. His disdain for humans collides with the grand love he has for the abstract idea of humanity, which does not serve a purpose in his interpersonal relationships or on a microcosmic level. This is why his inaction speaks volumes about the difference between him and Alyosha. Ivan's aloof, indifferent nature deters him from acting upon the love and empathy he nurtures in his heart; the same love that planted the seed of disbelief in God, or rational rejection of the notion of deliverance of divine justice in the afterlife. He is caught between this nihilistic outlook of the world and how his heart calls out for the innocent people and children that get caught up in the crossfire of others vying for power. For that reason he is stuck in this limbo that stirs up an inner conflict and contributes to the guilt he faces once Fyodor is killed. This inner turmoil is parallel to Bakhtin's idea of unfinalizability in Dostoevsky's work, where ideas are open-ended and no single truth prevails. As Bakhtin says,

The heroes' ideas lying at the base of this plane in the novel are as much the subject of representation, as much "idea-heroes," as the ideas of Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, or any of the others. In no way do they become principles of representation or construction for the entire novel as a whole, that is, principles of the author himself as the artist. (70)

He makes one distinction very clear- that although intellectual, pensive characters like Ivan are carriers of their respective worldviews, none of those philosophies are given precedence over the other or treated as the absolute truth. And this very literary craftsmanship of Dostoevsky makes Ivan a conflicted, dynamic character whose commitment to his own nihilistic worldview (of everything being permissible) falters when it proves to be destructive in his own life. And the guilt that follows attests to the lack of conviction he had about his own ideology, since not only does his philosophy contrive to enable a murder, his refusal to translate his love into actions for

those around him eventually causes everything to fall apart around him. These repercussions, because of which he is dogged by guilt, are the manifestation of his failure to stick to the ideologies he claims to espouse. This guilt harks back to Zossima's teaching of shared responsibility – the notion that directly challenges the idea of evil being an external force. This pearl of wisdom imparted by Zossima indicates the intricacies of human causation; people's choices, actions and destinies are so interconnected and inextricable that no action or sin exists in vacuum, hence the notion of shared responsibility, which Alyosha wholeheartedly embraces and acts upon but Ivan is unable to get behind. However, after Smerdyakov justifies the murder using Ivan's fallacious philosophy of everything being permissible, Ivan comes face to face with the truth behind Zossima's teaching and sees how it actualizes in his life. The distance he had been building between himself and others closes in an instant as he gets lumped in with the person he abhors so much because he considers himself guilty for Smerdyakov's sin.

In another sense, the concept of universal guilt essentially foreshadows Ivan's fate as Ivan holding himself accountable despite no legal culpability in Fyodor's murder proves to be a materialization of Zossima's doctrine.

Chapter 3.2

Guilt as a Destructive Force: Dmitry's Undoing

In the chapter "Confessions of an Ardent Heart", gripped by apprehension regarding his betrothal with Katerina, Dmitry pours his heart out to Alyosha, explaining why he does not deem himself worthy of being Katerina's fiancé. His blatant refusal to settle down with Katerina can be interpreted as his inability to picture someone as noble and righteous as her with someone like himself, which instead of encouraging him to turn over a new leaf, only reinforces his self-loathing. He convinces himself that he is no longer encumbered by the betrothal since he cut ties

with Katerina by sleeping with Grushenka. However, guilt spills out of his words in the way his speech is marked by self-abasement. He requests Alyosha to relay just one message to Katerina, that he bows in front of her. Him repeating this same request time and time again shows how desperate he is to convey to her that his acts of baseness is his way of telling her that he is undeserving of the love she so unconditionally offers him.

After his malicious intentions of humbling Katerina by leveraging her vulnerability to diminish her worth blows up in his face when Katerina offers herself to him without even a hint of repulsion, he becomes aware of how he was about to sully a chaste woman's reputation simply for the diabolical pleasure he would get out of it. Once this realization dawns on him, he becomes even more despicable in his own eyes, the guilt and shame that begins to take root in his heart is not the redeeming or reformatory kind, it is one that only sends him spiralling further down the cycle of sins and self-hatred, never steering him towards repentance. As he himself admits that the only reason he purposefully squandered the money Katerina had given him was to prove himself unworthy and dishonorable in Katerina's eyes and to show that her efforts to change her reprobate fiancé were in vain.

To draw parallels between how the complex relationship between Dimitry and Katerina elicits the kind of guilt that erodes Dimitry's sense of honor and Bakhtin's take on each of the characters having their own truth, it is imperative to learn how this incident is in sharp contrast with the kind of guilt that once plagued Zossima's heart and turned his life around, which will be discussed in depth in the succeeding chapter. Bakhtin argues that "The consciousness of a character is given as someone else's consciousness, another consciousness, yet at the same time it is not turned into an object, is not closed, does not become a simple object of the author's consciousness." (7)

Nothing is set in stone when it comes to how the characters respond to guilt and shame. While Dimitry actively dodges all of Katerina's efforts to reform his ways with her love, because for him guilt is a rude awakening that eventually morphs into a crippling sense of inferiority that causes him to self-sabotage, and Zossima lets his guilt spur him to rectify his ways. These two characters have their own truths that collide and synthesize the argument that guilt does not function the same way or have the same impact on everyone.

Oscillating between a desire to redeem himself and relapsing into his impulses sums up Dimitry's character. In that sense he is quite similar to Zossima's mysterious visitor whose moral dilemma has been analyzed in the previous chapter. Dimitry's character undergoes a temporary transformation as the trial deciding his fate inches closer, he seemingly begins to come to terms with the fact that despite not being legally guilty of his father's murder, he was morally culpable of a multitude of other sins whose retribution would ultimately amount to the punishment he was sentenced with. He begins to see his imprisonment as a path towards spiritual redemption and braces himself to pay his dues by serving his time. This short-lived acceptance of his fate rekindles his love for humanity and life. He speaks with great fervour about life, joy and suffering. However, he has a complete change of heart the moment Alyosha presents the plan he devised with Katerina to help Dmitry escape from prison. He makes light of his situation and gets on board with Alyosha's plan, completely forsaking his earlier resolve to bear the punishment for a crime he did not commit just to make amends for all his other sins. However, it is important to note that even if one overpowers the other, neither of those opposing resolutions are ingenuine, and that is why it can be affirmed that even the characters live up to the novel's reputation of being thoroughly polyphonic. This idea of the cycle of sin and repentance has been encapsulated in Harvey Mindess' article "Freud on Dostoevsky" where he asserts that guilt gives

rise to self-awareness and once that awareness is met with conscience, the individual wavers between the desire to transgress and the desire to repent and redeem himself. Mindess argues that “The novelist, Freud suggests, was given to a pattern of sinning, repenting and sinning again; repenting copiously, too, in order to appease his conscience and deceive himself, precisely so that he could sin again” (446). Point to be noted, although this statement was made about Dostoevsky, it is still germane to the discussion on his characters since the article is heavily founded upon the claim that Dostoevsky has inserted his own personal traits into all his characters. That being said, Mindess claims that Dostoevsky’s characters are not insincere about repentance just because they relapse into sinning.

His uniqueness, as exemplified in every one of his works from *Notes from Underground* through *The Brothers Karamazov*, resided in a quality the polar opposite of the one Freud describes; not in an unusual ability to deceive himself and through repentance derive license for further transgressions, but in an unusual inability to deceive himself, in an excruciating defenselessness against his conflicts...(446)

The parallel between this inner conflict and Bakhtin’s polyphony lies in the claim that a coexistence of distinct moral values and resolutions can be discerned even within the same character’s psyche, with guilt being the trigger factor behind this moral fluctuation. As Bakhtin describes Dimitry, he “is a man who stands, in essence throughout his entire life, on the threshold of great internal decisions and crises” (62). Bakhtin argues that Dimitry is the embodiment of his internal struggles, whose existence the investigators and prosecutors, through the application of “false psychology” (62) fail to do justice to and reduce to a mere victim of circumstantial evidence. Their monological investigation on Dimitry is antithetical to the dialogic style of the novel. In that sense, the verdict being erroneous makes all the more sense

since this monologic investigation is almost incongruent with the underlying polyphonic nature of the characters, especially Dimitry, who is constantly in a state of flux and an unfinalized, dynamic character to the core. Put simply, the error in judgement in this trial is a result of the investigator's monologic treatment towards a polyphonic character.

As already stated, even if one resolution overthrows the other, neither of those resolutions should be considered half-hearted. Therefore, it can be asserted that polyphony pervades all facets of the novel's construction.

Chapter 3.3

Guilt as a Catalyst for Redemption: Zossima and His Mysterious Visitor

From Zossima's anecdotes of his youth and the story about the mysterious visitor, it has been gleaned that guilt proved to be a redemptive force in both of their lives. Guilt acting as a catalyst for redemption brings its function as a destructive force to sharp relief. While the vehemence of Zossima's guilt prompted him to clean up his act once and for all, the visitor's path towards redemption was not so decided. His genuine yet faltering resolve to attain salvation and repent for his sins has been analyzed as a polyphonic element. A condensed account of their past has been provided below for elucidation.

In the chapter "From the Life of the Elder Zossima," Zossima recollects early days of his youth when he lived an unruly, brutish life, always immersed in debauchery. He reproaches his past self for his unwarranted arrogance, since despite living a deplorable life, he would look down upon common soldiers of his Corps. This very arrogance prevented him from being self-aware or mending his ways. Then when he became besotted with a young woman, he let his delusions cloud his judgment and was convinced that she returned his feelings, even though he himself admits that he never acted decisively upon them because his hedonistic lifestyle was too

precious for him to trade for marriage. However, upon finding out that she had been betrothed to the landowner all along, instead of acknowledging the fact that he himself mistook her kindness for romantic interest, he became convinced that she led him on just for sport. His persecution complex propels him to challenge her fiance to a duel. That fateful night before the duel, he recalls, in a malicious frame of mind he struck his batman Afanasy across the face. This action, out of all his misdeeds, shook him to the core. The guilt was so agonizing that it shattered his pride:

I struck him with all my might, directly in the face, while he kept his hands at his sides, his head held erect, his eyes staring as though he were standing to attention on the parade ground, quivering with each blow and not even daring to raise an arm to defend himself - and this was what a human being had been reduced to, this was one man beating another! (Dostoevsky 386)

Although this action pales in comparison to what he did in the past, it still made him realize how depraved he was, stooping as low as to hit someone who was not even in any position to defend himself. The remorse he felt the following morning changed the trajectory of the rest of his life. He recalled his brother's last words to his servants, when he implied that he was undeserving of being served by a fellow human being. It then dawned on him that his sins rendered him unworthy of being considered even equal to those whom he had once scorned, which was a huge blow to his conceit. This is where the notion of universal responsibility or shared guilt takes root in his mind, which Alyosha later inherits. This is one of the instances in the novel where guilt functions as a transformative force and paves the way for redemption for the character.

Zossima then begins the anecdote about his mysterious visitor, a philanthropist who was eager to learn about how Zossima had reformed himself because he was on the lookout for a way to absolve himself of the guilt he had been fostering for years, of murdering an innocent woman in a fit of passion. However, when Zossima suggested that he turn himself in, he comprehended the gravity of his sin and gradually began to lose touch with his sanity. He could not withstand the torment of the realization that he could never atone for his sins without owning up to them, and that all his philanthropic work could not be equated to true repentance. He attempted to alleviate some of the burden by bargaining with his guilt as he reasoned with Zossima, claiming it would not serve his children justice, as incarcerating their father would rob them of his love and they would have to bear the brunt of his tarnished reputation. Whats more, during one of his manic episodes, he even made up his mind to kill Zossima. This showcases how different characters cope with guilt differently. While Zossima embraced it as an opportunity to redeem himself, his unnamed acquaintance stayed in denial for a long time. Perhaps when the stakes are too high, like in the mysterious visitor's case, the price of confession can thwart even the sincerest resolve to receive salvation. And after he finally divulged the truth, everyone conveniently chalked it up to his mental derangement. Since things worked out almost miraculously in his favour, he revelled in the conviction that there was some kind of divine intervention at play behind it all.

But his conviction begs the question: could the agony he endured truly be equated to retribution, or did the chain of events coincidentally unfold in his favour and not being able to withstand the crushing weight of guilt, he perceived it as divine reassurance? This open-ended story of the mysterious visitor is yet another instance of Dostoevsky's implementation of polyphony in his novel. However, similar to how Ivan grappled with the knowledge that he

played a part in his father's murder, and could not suffer the implications, there can be discerned an inner contestation within the mysterious visitor's character as well. And in this very tension between what he ought to believe and what his heart told him to believe, lies Dostoevsky's meticulous employment of Polyphony. To elucidate, the mysterious visitor vacillated between denial and acceptance. He went from attempting to murder Zossima to making a clean breast of it and admitting to having murdered the woman, and finally ending up blissfully ignorant of the possibility that perhaps he was too eager to absolve himself of the guilt and the certainty that he was finally relieved of the burden was perhaps a lapse in judgement. Put simply, this polyphony of voices persists even within the individual character's psyche, not just between characters.

On another note, the aftermath of Ivan's frantic confession in the court after suffering a brain fever and hallucinating the devil sharply contrasts with the mysterious visitor's inner reconciliation after his confession got dismissed as the ramblings of a madman. The difference between how these two characters interpret the event of having their culpability ignored by others because of their unsound mental state yet again reflects how differently guilt is confronted by the characters, and how differently it changes the trajectory of their lives. Both of these characters' confessions fail to hold up as evidence, but that does not put Ivan's mind at ease. Unlike the mysterious visitor, he does not slip into the safe cocoon of ignorance and self-assurance, the guilt incessantly nips away at his sanity and remains unbudged as his condition deteriorates and Katerina takes him in, in the hopes of nursing him back to health.

Just because his confession gets dismissed by the court and Katerina's testimony steers the court's verdict towards Dimitry's imprisonment, Ivan does not let that assuage his guilt. His rational side does not allow him to be at peace with himself or be under the impression that this

course of events was orchestrated by the heavens simply because things worked out in his favour.

On the other hand, the mysterious visitor, upon seeing his confession get ignored by others, considered himself acquitted by the heavens since he had done what was incumbent upon him without having to face the consequences. The agony of his guilt wanes conspicuously-judging from his demeanor during his conversation with Zossima in his death bed.

Now I dare to love my children and to kiss them. I am not believed, and no one has believed me, neither my wife, nor my judges; never will my children believe me either. In this I see God's mercy towards my children. I shall die, and my name shall be unsullied for them. But now I sense the nearness of God, and my heart rejoices as in paradise... I have performed my duty...(Dostoevsky 404)

To put things into perspective, this glaring difference between how Ivan and the mysterious visitor are shown to interpret the same situation reveals Dostoevsky's meticulous implementation of polyphony, as theorized by Bakhtin. The notion of the plurality of consciousness propounded by Bakhtin blends in seamlessly with the multifaceted function of guilt, as gleaned through the juxtaposition of Ivan and the visitor's response to the dismissal of their confessions. It corresponds to the parallel drawn between Ivan and the visitor's interpretation of their respective situations which take a similar turn but elicit vastly different responses. This yet again echoes Joyce Carol Oates' claim that almost every idea or character at some point in the novel gets juxtaposed with its antithesis acting as its double, hence the idea of polyphony. The unrelenting deterioration of Ivan's sanity hints towards his refusal to consider himself absolved of sin, whereas the visitor passed away in content from being freed of legal culpability. Dostoevsky does not use any of these two characters' responses as a conduit for his

own idea about what ought to be the actual function of guilt. In Ivan's case it proves to be a destructive force until the very end, in the visitor's case it brings a sliver of hope for salvation, and in Zossima's case it actively works as a catalyst for redemption. The coexistence of such divergent representations of guilt is a case in point of *The Brothers Karamazov* as a polyphonic novel through and through.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The broader aim of this research was to anchor the novel's themes of psychological and moral moral guilt in Bakhtin's theory of Polyphony on two different dimensions. The first approach counterposes the different articulations and manifestations of guilt with one another to accentuate what they reveal about the characters' moral values and ideologies. Throughout the novel, characters like Ivan, Dimitry, Zossima and the mysterious visitor have been shown to cope with their guilt in distinct ways. On many occasions their interpretations of and negotiation with guilt have been noted to be in sharp contrast with one another. This diversity of these characters' responses to guilt has been construed as a polyphonic element. The second approach extends the analysis by delving into each of the characters' moral dilemmas and explaining them under the lens of polyphony that goes one step beyond the preceding approach. The paper has drawn evidence from instances in the novel that showcase Dmitry and the mysterious visitor's inner contestations that stem from the coexistence of their desire to make amends for their sins and the urge to turn a blind eye to said sins. Since this vacillation originates from different sets of values being at war with each other within the individual character's psyche, this paper propounds the argument that even the characters can be defined by polyphony.

The limitation of this research is that it has primarily discussed the psychological and moral implications of guilt. The paper has not analyzed guilt as legal culpability. To clarify, the court's erroneous conviction of Dimitry has been exempted from the discussion since the verdict is an external factor, incongruent with the exploration of the different facets of psychological guilt.

Among the plethora of studies on *The Brothers Karamazov* and Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, few of them have been dedicated to the exploration of the novel's multifarious representation of guilt but how this variegated portrayal of guilt corresponds with the novel's overarching polyphonic nature has not been examined yet. Some of the existing literature on this novel has scratched the surface of the distinct functions of guilt, but they have not studied its implications and what it reveals about the ideologies and principles lodged in the relevant characters' identities. Therefore, this paper aspires to add a new dimension to the study of *The Brothers Karamazov* as a polyphonic text in terms of its multilayered portrayal of psychological and moral guilt.

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