

**The Mystery of the Crime in Skotoprigonyevsk**  
**Plot Analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov* from the Perspective of Literature Studies,**  
**Psychology and Psychiatry**

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**Abstract**

In this article, by focusing on the two main protagonists, Mitya Karamazov and Pavel Smerdyakov, we would like to analyze the murder of Fyodor Karamazov, which is the crucial event in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. We have conducted analysis of these two characters from the perspective of literature studies, psychology and psychiatry. Although we agree with Freud's opinion (1) that it is not important who killed the father, but who wanted to kill him, we hope that our findings will allow us to formulate conclusions that will be helpful in new interpretations of this masterpiece.

**Keywords**

"The Brothers Karamazov", psychology, psychiatry, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, interdisciplinary studies

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Dostoyevsky's last novel could be compared to a big fresco which depicts the Russia of its times. This work represents the decay of the old ideas and the rise of new ones under the influence of the Western culture coming into Russia. It is also an image of a decaying aristocracy, the so-called 'father's generation' and their 'lost sons', who feel rootless amongst old social and cultural schemes. Furthermore, it shows an encounter between the old faith and religious skepticism. In Dostoyevsky's polyphonic work, different voices appear and each of them deserves attention. These voices are a reflection of the social, economic, legal, and medical issues of the time, as represented by the three doctors: old doctor Herzenstube, the young doctor Warwinski, and the (unnamed) 'prestigious doctor' from Moscow. The multiplicity of themes that appear in the novel and the characterization of the protagonists depicted through the description of physical features given by the author make this work a novel that is open to various interpretations, not only in relation to the themes mentioned by Dostoyevsky, but also other more specific motives. The book is filled with tensions and contradictions in both the way it is constructed and in the depiction of the characters. Significant plot developments are covered up through misinterpretation by different protagonists or are even hidden from the reader, as is the case in the most important event that happens in the novel, the murder of Fyodor Karamazov. It is vital to remember that according to Bakhtin, *The Brothers Karamazov* is the only novel by Dostoyevsky that has a truly polyphonic ending (2). Therefore, it cannot be interpreted as finished.

To begin with, we would like to recap some well-known facts from the novel. Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov is a landowner who has three sons: Dmitri (also known as Mitya) from his first marriage, and Ivan and Alexey from his second marriage. He is probably also the father of the butler, Pavel Smerdyakov. Pavel Smerdyakov is the son of Lisaveta Smerdyakova, the local mad lady who wanders aimlessly around the city and is commonly considered 'yuródivyya', or 'mad in Christ'. Old Karamazov, the archetypical 'bad father', is murdered. All clues lead to the oldest son, Dmitri (also known as Mitya), who is identified as a potential killer, although the murder itself is not depicted in the novel. At the most important moment, when Mitya stands in front of the illuminated window and sees the detested profile of his father, the narration ends suddenly with an ellipsis. The reader is never told what events occurred between this moment and when the old servant Gregory catches Mitya fleeing away. The events of that night are shown to the reader from four different perspectives. Mitya claims that at the moment of his father's death, God was protecting him: he just ran away from the window and

did not kill his father. Another witness, Gregory, a servant that followed Mitya, was seriously injured when hit on the head by him. During the trial, Gregory gives evidence that he saw that the front door of Fyodor's house was open. This confession will be used against Mitya. A couple of minutes later, the open door was also seen by Marfa, Gregory's wife, who was woken by her husband's scream. The fourth person in the house of the old Karamazov on the night when Fyodor was killed is Pavel Smerdyakov, who (as Gregory and Marfa confirm) had a very severe epileptic attack at that moment. During his epileptic seizure, Smerdyakov tells Ivan Karamazov in private that he killed Fyodor. However, we have to emphasize that this revelation was made to Ivan when Smerdyakov was already very sick, and this response could have been influenced by the ambiguous relationship between Ivan and Smerdyakov. When making his confession, Smerdyakov blames Ivan, claiming that he was merely the executor of Ivan's will. According to Smerdyakov, Ivan is the actual killer. He states that Ivan desired his father's death and left the city, counting on Smerdyakov to kill Fyodor. This confession by Smerdyakov leads to various consequences. Ivan goes mad and Pavel Smerdyakov commits suicide. The judges do not believe Ivan's statement regarding Smerdyakov's involvement in the murder, as Ivan comes to the trial in a state of extreme agitation. Finally, Mitya is condemned to ten years of penal servitude for having killed his father whilst attempting to steal money from him. The decision of the jury leaves the observers in the courtroom split. The decision is accepted by most of the male observers, whilst women express their skepticism and consider this decision to be a mistake. "They seemed to fancy that it might be at once reconsidered and reversed" (3). To sum up, the scene of the murder is never described objectively in the novel. We only get to hear Smerdyakov's version when he tells Ivan how he killed his master. Nevertheless, there is an inconsistency in his story (when compared to Gregory's and his wife's testimony). However, as proof of his guilt Smerdyakov shows Ivan three thousand rubles taken from his master, but the mere fact that he has this money is not deemed sufficient evidence that he killed Fyodor. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no solid evidence supporting either Mitya's or Smerdyakov's involvement in Fyodor's death. Meanwhile, almost all previous researchers have identified Smerdyakov as the killer. We could say that previous literary interpretations found the final verdict a mistake, as did the ladies in the courtroom. This reading of criminal motif influences Smerdyakov's negative characterization by literary critics and the final interpretation of the novel (4-8).

### **Smerdyakov – why (not) him?**

In Dostoyevsky's novels, due to his technique it is difficult to define the characters as black or white. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, in Dostoevsky's works every character has their own voice and their own interpretations that are not subjected to the viewpoint of the author nor subjected to judgement as better or worse. Meanwhile, Smerdyakov was almost always interpreted as a very negative character who is both physically and morally repulsive. He is portrayed as a coward and a primitive commoner with overwhelming ambitions, a 'flunky' who hates Russia, and as the embodiment of evil (9–10). Moreover, the insulting term 'smerdykovshchyzna', which refers to disdain and hatred for one's own country, is derived from his surname.

Even those investigators who try to advocate in favor of the 'flunkey' – pointing to his difficult childhood and the general reluctance of his environment toward him – normally summarize their thoughts related to the fourth brother in a negative way (5,11). Olga Meerson says that this derives from the lack of access to Smerdyakov's consciousness, which leads to the ostracizing of this protagonist. On the other hand, while analyzing theoretical aspects of the novel's reception, she also confirms that everything depends on the initiative of the reader: does the reader interpret Smerdyakov as a separate entity – an individual with characteristic traits – or only as an object of the author's creation. "Depending on what the reader selects, he can decide – in relation to Dostoyevsky's poetic – whether he wants Smerdyakov to be an outright, dialoging subject or a rhetorical object of poetic manipulation built on subtle psychological schemes" (11).

Let us try not to follow the manipulations of writers and interpreters, but instead let us treat Smerdyakov as an autonomous and gifted individual with consciousness. We would also like to question the possibility of Smerdyakov having committed a murder, especially from psychological and medical perspectives. Moreover, in our opinion Smerdyakov had no motive to kill Fyodor as he was the only person who showed Smerdyakov humane treatment.

First, Smerdyakov's social status was decided at birth, not only because of his deranged mother but also the lack of a known father. Although old Karamazov was probably his biological father, this was never actually confirmed. Both the status of bastard and the lack of acceptance from his other brothers, the sons of Fyodor Karamazov, would have had an influence on his low self-confidence. This was compensated for by his bumptiousness and inclination to express his personal views on various matters, which were normally shocking or irritating to other people. In the chapter 'Smerdyakov', which is totally dedicated to this character,

Dostoyevsky underlines the fact that Pavel's character is a fool of contradictions: "Balaam's ass, it appeared, was the valet, Smerdyakov. He was a young man of about four and twenty, remarkably unsociable and taciturn. Not that he was shy or bashful. On the contrary, he was conceited and seemed to despise everybody" (3).

Smerdyakov is full of resentment towards Russians who were, in his opinion, gauche and old-fashioned, and he was full of appreciation for foreigners, especially the French. As he says to his neighbor, Marya Kondratyevna: "In 1812 there was a great invasion of Russia by Napoleon, the first Emperor of France, father of the present one, and it would have been a good thing if they had conquered us. A clever nation would have conquered a very stupid one and annexed it. We should have had quite different institutions" (3). It is statements such as this that led to many of the negative interpretations of Smerdyakov's character, especially those of Russian critics. Meanwhile, what many critics forget is that Smerdyakov is only showing off in front of his neighbor, who is fond of him. A few paragraphs on, he expresses another controversial point of view which shows him as a rather comic protagonist: "If you care to know, the folks there and ours here are just alike in their vice. They are swindlers, only there the scoundrel wears polished boots and here he grovels in filth and sees no harm in it" (3). Smerdyakov also shows his self-confidence in conversations in old Karamazov's house, when he talks to the servant Gregory or his (suspected) brother Ivan.

At the same time, he is anxious. This is underlined many times in the novel. Smerdyakov is afraid of the physical violence with which Mitya threatens him. When Mitya is interrogated after his father's death, he is asked whether Smerdyakov could have killed, and Mitya describes him in the following manner: "Because Smerdyakov is a man of the most abject character and a coward [...]. When he talked to me, he was always trembling for fear I should kill him, though I never raised my hand against him. [...] He's a puling chicken – sickly, epileptic, weak-minded – a child of eight could thrash him" (3).

The peculiar or even eccentric behavior of Smerdyakov often led to his degradation, especially at the hands of Gregory, Mitya and, later on, Ivan. Nevertheless, in our opinion, his behavior is not an indicator of an antisocial personality disorder, but rather a reaction to his rejection by society. Besides the aforementioned psychological abnormalities, Smerdyakov's behavior does not resemble any kind of mental disorder.

Prejudice towards Smerdyakov is also caused by his physical appearance. He is tall and slim with thin, meticulously combed hair, and he appears older than he actually is (2). Negative feelings are also provoked by his exacerbated, almost pathological inclination to tidiness and

carefulness in selecting his food: “The squeamish youth never answered, but he did the same with his bread, his meat, and everything he ate. He would hold a piece on his fork to the light, scrutinize it microscopically, and only after long deliberation decide to put it in his mouth” (3). These behaviors could be interpreted as being on the spectrum of obsessive-compulsive disorder. This tendency to exaggerated cleanliness in conjunction with an aversion to women (Smerdyakov reacts furiously to his master’s comments about marrying) and presumed asexuality have led to assumptions that he actually belonged to a sect, known as The Skopts (12).

While characterizing Smerdyakov we cannot forget his predilection to hurt animals, which was particularly present during his childhood: “In his childhood he was very fond of hanging cats and burying them with great ceremony. He used to dress up in a sheet as though it were a surplice, and he sang and waved some object over the dead cat as though it were a censor” (3). This type of aggressive behavior is typical of psychopathic personality disorder (13), but is not supported in any of Pavel’s other behaviors.

Furthermore, Dostoyevsky’s works were interpreted using medical, psychological and psychiatric approaches, mostly because of the topic of epilepsy. Not only was it claimed that Dostoyevsky had epileptic or non-epileptic seizures, but protagonists in several of his novels also suffer from epilepsy, the most paradigmatic examples being Prince Myshkin and Smerdyakov (14–16). It is worth mentioning that in Smerdyakov’s case the onset of seizures is related to the physical violence he experienced in childhood. It is not clear whether Smerdyakov suffered from epilepsy of a neurological origin, which would explain the seizure that appeared suddenly after the head injury caused by Gregory, or if his seizures could be psychogenic and part of a dissociative disorder. It is also plausible that he found his low social status and the contempt shown towards him so unbearable that through his seizures he was reacting subconsciously to the traumatic events that took place around him.

A medical diagnosis supporting the assumption that Smerdyakov did not kill Fyodor is that of ‘status epilepticus’, which Smerdyakov was possibly experiencing. This preceded the events, maybe even the murder:

Smerdyakov went to the cellar for something and fell down from the top of the steps. Fortunately, Marfa Ignatyevna was in the yard and heard him in time. She did not see the fall, but heard his scream – the strange, peculiar scream, long familiar to her – the scream of the epileptic falling in a fit. They could not tell whether the fit had come on him at the moment he was descending the steps, so that he must have fallen unconscious, or whether it was the fall and the shock that had caused the fit in Smerdyakov, who was known to be liable to them. They found him at the bottom of the cellar steps, writhing in convulsions and foaming at the mouth (2).

This description could indicate epileptic status, which is defined as any epileptic seizure lasting longer than 30 minutes or when the patient does not regain consciousness between attacks (13). One of the characteristic features of status epilepticus is the paroxysmal character and semiology of the attacks: seizures, sight fixation and respiratory problems, as described in the novel:

But, all of a sudden she woke up, no doubt roused by a fearful epileptic scream from Smerdyakov, who was lying in the next room unconscious. That scream always preceded his fits, and always terrified and upset Marfa Ignatyevna. She could never get accustomed to it. She jumped up and ran half-awake to Smerdyakov's room. But it was dark there, and she could only hear the invalid beginning to gasp and struggle. Then Marfa Ignatyevna herself screamed out and was going to call her husband, but suddenly realized that when she had got up, he was not beside her in bed (3).

This description is of Marfa, Gregory's wife. On the night of murder, she was woken up by Smerdyakov's epileptic seizures. In the novel, there are constant suggestions that Smerdyakov could have simulated an epileptic seizure on the night of murder. Even Smerdyakov himself, two days before the event, told Ivan that he suspected he might experience an epileptic seizure soon. Ivan does not believe these assumptions. Some patients who suffer from epilepsy feel what is known as an aura preceding an attack which manifests as paresthesia, with heightened senses, especially of smell and taste. At the same time, we suspect that during or just after the murder, Smerdyakov was conscious and able to get up from his bed, go to his master's room and take the three thousand rubles, which were supposed to have been stolen by Mitya and which were actually taken by Pavel. This is the only argument that supports the hypothesis that Smerdyakov was the one to kill Fyodor Karamazov. Yet, when Smerdyakov was taken to hospital in the morning, the doctor who saw him ascertained that "Such violent and protracted epileptic fits, recurring continually for twenty-four hours, are rarely to be met with, and are of interest to science" (3). When Ivan visited Smerdyakov a few days after the incident, Smerdyakov seemed to be very sick: "He was very weak; he spoke slowly, seeming to move his tongue with difficulty; he was much thinner and sallow" (3). When Ivan was asked whether Smerdyakov could simulate the attack he had during 'the day of catastrophe', two doctors, Herzenstube and Warwinski, claimed that "Smerdyakov's epileptic attack was unmistakably genuine, and was surprised indeed at Ivan asking whether he might not have been shamming on the day of the catastrophe. They gave him to understand that the attack was an exceptional one, the fits persisting and recurring several times, so that the patient's life was positively in danger" (3).

All these arguments point against Smerdyakov being the potential killer of Fyodor Karamazov. As mentioned, old Karamazov was probably Pavel's father, although he had never confirmed his paternity. Moreover, old Karamazov was the only person supporting him. He was sent to Moscow to study and later was employed in the position of cook and lackey. Even though Smerdyakov occasionally made vulgar comments regarding Fyodor, he also trusted him. When Smerdyakov himself admits that he killed Fyodor (and his confession is the only proof that he committed the murder), he also suggests that Ivan desired his father's death and that he was the only beneficiary of Ivan's will. He also mentions potential benefits that Ivan could have gained thanks to this murder: the whole inheritance would be transferred to the sons. However, Smerdyakov calculates that if Mitya is considered the killer (because he had a motive that was known by everyone, and he repeated several times that he would kill his father), the fortune would be divided between the two brothers, Ivan and Alosa. Moreover, Ivan, in line with Smerdyakov's considerations, loves money, loves being honored, loves women and wants to live in a calm and wealthy environment in which he would not be subordinated to social conventions:

You are very clever. You are fond of money, I know that. You like to be respected, too, for you're very proud; you are far too fond of female charms, too, and you mind most of all about living in undisturbed comfort, without having to depend on any one — that's what you care most about. You won't want to spoil your life forever by taking such a disgrace on yourself. You are like Fyodor Pavlovitch, you are more like him than any of his children; you've the same soul as he had (3).

Could Smerdyakov have actually killed old Karamazov, his supposed father and employer, just to make Ivan happy? When Smerdyakov described Ivan, he had known Ivan for only a couple of weeks, therefore he did not mean that Ivan was similar to his father for his whole life. Smerdyakov is full of resentment because, as we mentioned before, when Ivan came to town he encouraged conversation between himself and Smerdyakov. They discussed philosophical matters, for example the creation of the world. Nevertheless, Ivan very quickly got discouraged because of the increased familiarity shown by Pavel towards him; aversion gradually turned into repulsion and finally hatred. This change is felt by Smerdyakov, and when the neighbor Maria Kondratievna says that he previously respected Ivan Fyodorovich, he replies: "But he said I was a stinking lackey" (3).

Why is Smerdyakov so eager to persuade Ivan to travel? Moreover, if Smerdyakov suspects that the old Karamazov will be attacked by Mitya, why does he not try to stop him? Maybe he still believes that Ivan, who will only benefit thanks to this crime, will treat him as a brother, which is what Smerdyakov most desires. After the crime, having met with Ivan, he

starts to understand that Ivan despises him and that he feels disgusted by him. Desperate and hopeless, Smerdyakov accuses Ivan, which leads to Ivan's madness. It can therefore be concluded that Smerdyakov takes revenge on Ivan for having rejected him.

### **Dimitri Karamazov – why him?**

We would like to carry out an analysis of the character of Mitya Karamazov, taking into account a psychological approach and showing the arguments in favor of the notion that he was the one that killed Fyodor Karamazov. The psychological portrait created by Dostoyevsky seems to be crucial. According to the well-known theory of Myers-Briggs, some psychosomatic features indicate an inclination to a short-temper and having a type A personality (Fairfield, 2012; Myers, 2014). This also reflects the theory of the four temperaments developed by Hippocrates (Margolis, 2012), especially the choleric personality, which is characterized by overwhelming ambitions and emotions that eventually lead to aggressive behavior, directed towards both oneself and others. Dostoyevsky describes Mitya's appearance beneath his 'sickness', which is especially visible in his facial expressions and his muscularity, which indicates his physical strength and tendency to aggression (Gatti and Verde, 2012). Dostoyevsky describes Mitya's face as yellow, and according to Hippocrates' theory of temperaments, this color is a consequence of the excess of bile that is typical of choleric persons (from the Greek word 'chole', meaning bile).

He was muscular and showed signs of considerable physical strength. Yet there was something not healthy in his face. It was rather thin, his cheeks were hollow, and there was an unhealthy sallowness in their color. His rather large, prominent, dark eyes had an expression of firm determination, and yet there was a vague look in them, too. Even when he was excited and talking irritably, his eyes somehow did not follow his mood, but betrayed something else, sometimes quite incongruous with what was passing. "It's hard to tell what he's thinking", those who talked to him sometimes declared. People who saw something pensive and sullen in his eyes were startled by his sudden laugh, which bore witness to mirthful and light-hearted thoughts at the very time when his eyes were so gloomy. A certain strained look in his face was easy to understand at this moment (3).

There is a certain emotional ambiguity in this description. Mitya is prone to experiencing sudden and unexpected changes of behavior, such as unpredictable decisions, and he has been short-tempered since childhood. In the novel, he is presented as being impulsive and overwhelmed with emotions that he is unable to control. It seems that impulsivity is the key aspect that defines this protagonist. Here, the psychological component, which is related to the impulse-evoked amnesia he suffered, is important, as is the somatic, physical arousal (speed and rigidity of movements) that he displays, which is often inappropriate for the situation.

Mitya's underlying resentment and even hatred towards his father, whom he considers repellent and even not worthy of existence, is often displayed in the novel:

"Why is such a man alive?" Dmitri, beside himself with rage, growled in a hollow voice, hunching up his shoulders till he looked almost deformed. "Tell me, can he be allowed to go on defiling the earth?" He looked round at every one and pointed at the old man. He spoke evenly and deliberately (3).

The mere mention of Fyodor Pavlovitch always evokes very strong and negative emotions. Initially, Mitya is mentally unstable, and the difficult situation he encounters makes the psychological problems even worse. His decisions are driven by a lack of money and his obsessive thoughts concerning Grushenka and her relationship with Fyodor, with whom he is constantly competing for her love. Therefore, Mitya presents the typical features of paranoid personality disorder. "He had spent those two days literally rushing in all directions, struggling with his destiny and trying to save himself as he expressed it himself afterwards, and for some hours he even made a dash out of the town on urgent business, terrible as it was to him to lose sight of Grushenka for a moment" (3).

The following features are typically found in a paranoid personality: enmity, exaggerated suspiciousness and sensitivity to criticism, and an inability to forgive the mistakes of others (16). At this point, we would like to mention two commonly used classifications in psychiatry: the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10 and 11) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV and 5) (17, 18). According to ICD-10 and DSM-5 classifications, paranoid personality is characterized by a sensitivity to failure and rejection, a tendency to prolonged concentration on the suffering, suspicion and interpretation of the neutral actions of others as being hostile and disdainful, a rigid sensation of superiority in comparison to other people, mistrust regarding faithfulness, overestimation of their own importance, and exaggerated engagement in negative situations. Similar criteria are also proposed in the DSM-5 classification. It seems that Mitya's behavior could be interpreted as typical of a paranoid personality that is aggravated under the influence of affect. It is certain that the trigger here was the culmination of the conflict with his father and his search for Grushenka and the money. In psychiatric terms, such a traumatic event is often described in psychosis and is a singular event leading to the psychological destabilization of the individual. As the plot develops further, we witness the progression of Mitya's madness, his actions becoming more and more chaotic and lead by emotion. Before the crime is committed, Mitya's psychological state is seen to be deteriorating. As the narrator says directly at one point, Mitya is planning to kill his father and is already experiencing remorse. It

seems he could have committed the crime, and that the decision to murder, although provoked by hatred towards his father, is made on impulse. Characteristically, when Mitya sees the metal pestle at Grushenka's house, he grasps it automatically, as if he intends this to be the murder weapon.

Confirmation of Mitya's heightened emotional state is that he cannot control his thoughts and loses contact with reality: "It all rushed whirling through his mind. He did not run to Marya Kondratyevna's. There was no need to go there ... not the slightest need ... he must raise no alarm ... they would run and tell directly.... Marya Kondratyevna was clearly in the plot, Smerdyakov too, he too, all had been bought over!" (3). Here we can see the aforementioned suspiciousness and interpretation of events only in relation to his own situation. Apart from the phenomena of mental acceleration, Mitya suffers from other symptoms typically found in mania and bipolar disorders, such as abnormal motor alertness (3, 19). Mitya is in a state of affective acceleration that overlaps with his pathological personality. His interpretation of reality is also totally distorted and abnormal.

Mitya's mental state immediately after the crime also indicates that he has experienced a trauma. The hero is still in a state of emotional instability; as if in trance, his contact with reality is very restricted and he is described as 'unconscious':

Dmitri Fyodorovitch, so he testified afterwards, seemed unlike himself, too; not drunk, but, as it were, exalted, lost to everything, but at the same time, as it were, absorbed, as though pondering and searching for something and unable to come to a decision. He was in great haste, answered abruptly and very strangely, and at moments seemed not at all dejected but quite cheerful (3).

His state of mind is related not only to the crime, but it is also related to remorse and the ethical dilemma of the situation. Mitya's aggression is externalized and transferred to the people that surround him, but it is also internalized, which leads to auto-aggressive tendencies. Mitya frequently experiences suicidal thoughts.

The important term that is used to describe Mitya's mental status is 'delusion', defined as "a belief that is clearly false and that indicates an abnormality in the affected person's content of thought – a false belief that is not accounted for by the person's cultural or religious background or his or her level of intelligence" (20). Polish psychiatrists Jan Jaroszynski and Jacek Wciorka (21, 22) enumerate the most important features of delusional thinking: falsity, the context of sickness, an extremely intense experience of reality, and an individual and socially awkward context. Although the most common form of delusions is delusional thoughts (convictions and judgements), they can also take the form of memories, interpretations and imaginary delusions (22). Delusions, along with hallucinations, are one of the components of

psychotic symptomatology. We refrain from describing Mitya's behavior as belonging to the spectrum of psychotic disorders; instead, we claim that his delusional apprehension was a consequence of a temporary psychological predisposition. Moreover, the onset of a temporary psychotic episode often occurs in conjunction with paranoid personality disorder (16). When Mitya's madness advances, the people who meet him try to name the changes they witness. Piotr Ilych describes Mitya as 'savage' (2). His illness is also underlined by the use of words that refer to pathology, such as 'maligna': "Mitya's wrath flared up. He looked intently at 'the boy' and smiled gloomily and malignantly. He was feeling more and more ashamed at having told 'such people' the story of his jealousy so sincerely and spontaneously" (2). Mitya is full of contradictory emotions of sorrow, but also happiness, which is typical of the ambivalence that is encountered with mental instability.

During the investigation and trial we see the contradictions in Mitya's confessions, and it is evident he himself feels lost and does not know what happened anymore. Before the crime is discovered, Mitya talks to Grushenka about Siberia as he suspects that he is going to be sentenced (2). However, it is difficult to understand whether his reactions are the effect of the arrest and process or whether, in a moment of emotional instability, he confesses to having committed the crime: "Then? Why, then I murdered him ... hit him on the head and cracked his skull.... I suppose that's your story. That's it!" (2). Several protagonists notice unusual changes in Mitya's behavior, among them Grushenka and Alosa (2). Both of them claim that Mitya is insane, and according to Grushenka's description the chaotic stream of consciousness that haunts Mitya is similar to the disorder of thoughts that occurs in schizophrenia (23).

Disorder of thoughts is a state of being in which the stream of thought is totally degraded and chaotic. It could occur in psychotic disorders, but also in psychosomatic disorders, especially in relation to traumatic events. Dissociative or conversion disorders (24) are related to the disintegration of thoughts that are usually combined: consciousness, memory, identity and perception. Dissociation is related to the dislocation of the subject from oneself. If an individual loses their sense of identity, this process is known as depersonalization. In very rare cases, several identities can co-exist and then we speak about multiple personality disorder. Dissociation can be accompanied by the abnormal interpretation of reality that leads to hallucinations and the destruction of processes such as memory integration, leading to amnesia.

Dissociation is one of the strongest protective mechanisms known in psychology and psychiatry and is intended to neutralize traumatic events. Temporary loss of contact with people or the surrounding environment, a so-called dissociative experience, can take place in stressful situations with healthy individuals, and is a natural reaction to an extreme situation.

Dissociative disorder is considered a disease. According to the previously mentioned classifications ICD-10 and DSM-5 (17,18), among dissociative disorders we can enumerate the following: dissociative amnesia, dissociative fugue with a need to suddenly escape that is covered with a period of amnesia, dissociative stupor, possession and disorder of sensitivity, or any other somatic symptoms driven by stress. All these symptoms are generated by the organism in response to negative stimuli and situations and are directed to focus the attention away from negative thoughts and emotions. The term dissociation was introduced by the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet (25), who claimed that the solid and unconscious imagination is separate from the state of consciousness and can take control of a person's behavior.

When we analyze Mitya's behavior in the context of dissociative symptoms, it could be assumed that he has killed his father and that the whole event has been suppressed by the period of amnesia, which could be interpreted as a protective mechanism. It is therefore easy to understand why his confessions are contradictory. He is not certain of precisely what happened. One could interpret these events in relation to the possibility of Mitya's mental disorder at the time, specifically dissociation disorder, with associated fugue and dissociative amnesia. This could also partially explain the reactions and behaviors displayed by Mitya: "Mitya disliked this, but submitted; got angry, though still good-humoredly" (2).

If we were to propose a psychoanalytical interpretation and comparison between Mitya and his father, we would emphasize that, like his father, Mitya is irresponsible, arrogant and unreliable. At the same time, the person Mitya really hates is his father. Therefore, he tries to destroy himself and destroy the part of his personality that he despises most. The rollicking lifestyle and lack of consideration that he could not accept in his father are, at the same time, the personality traits that he hates in his own character. This dichotomous relationship is obvious from the very beginning. Dostoyevsky suggests that Mitya is a murderer and describes his conflict with his father as an incentive for crime.

Mitya is self-critical and, similarly to his proper father, he knows that his whole life has been full of mistakes and bad decisions. He physically destroys his father and later on, at a symbolical level, he does the same to himself. Nevertheless, he cannot understand the motivation for his behavior and he feels totally lost in his internal world: "Of disorderly conduct I am guilty, of violence on a poor old man I am guilty. And there is something else at the bottom of my heart, of which I am guilty, too – but that you need not write down" (2).

## Results

According to psychological and psychiatric approaches, and to suggestions that appear in the text, it seems that the most probable murderer was Mitya Karamazov. Dostoyevsky himself deceives the reader and does not give a direct answer to the question of who killed the old Karamazov. The narrator in the novel is no longer considered as the objective depositor of the truth. The witnesses' statements are contradictory, but when referring to Mitya's odium, Alosha and Grushenka are subjective in their arguments. The majority of the testimonies indicate that Mitya was the killer, and this is the evidence used by the prosecutor. The advocate, on the other hand, says that the evidence is somewhat vague and, most importantly, he is uncertain about Mitya's innocence. As an experienced defender, he realizes that not having conclusive proof of guilt does not necessarily mean that his client is innocent. Therefore, in concluding his case for the defense, he changes his line of defense and tries to prove that there was no murder at all, arguing that the old Karamazov was a bad father who did not fulfil his paternal responsibilities and even provoked Mitya to anger when they were competing for Grushenka's favor. Therefore, the advocate asks the jury to acquit the accused and show him mercy. A number of arguments from the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry support the thesis that Mitya was increasingly inclined to aggression and could therefore be capable of committing this crime. Moreover, it would seem that the status epilepticus experienced by Smerdyakov would have prevented him from having committed the murder.

Our attempt to justify Mitya killing his father makes the final message of the novel even more pessimistic. We have to remember that Dostoyevsky's work has several motives but also religious references. This whole creation is constructed, as the title says, around the topic of brotherhood, understood both as a family bond and, from a universal perspective, as a brotherhood of all people. The idea of brotherhood transmitted by the Christian faith combines both lords and servants, as Zosima, the old monk and Alosha's mentor, says. Zosima is the personification of calmness, which stems from his strong Christian values. This is contrasted with "karamazovshchyzna", a term used by one of the protagonists, Rakitin, during the trial to describe (according to Ushakov's dictionary) "drastic moral irresponsibility, which is correlated with strong passion and constant changes between moral decline and grandeur" (26)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation of the article's authors.

The events presented in the novel, which start with the chapter entitled ‘Scandal’, begin with a scandalous family quarrel in the cell of the old Zosima and later in the dining room of the monastery, and continue as a sequence of scandals that eventually lead to the disintegration of the idea of the brotherhood. The irony depicted by Dostoyevsky is that the brothers are initially alien to one another and not interested at all in establishing any kind of relationship (except for Alosha, who at some point starts to search for contact with Ivan). However, they are united in tragedy: not the death of their father (none of the brothers, even Alosha, remembers their father in the final pages of the novel), but the possibility that Mitya could be sent to Siberia. The brothers are convinced that Mitya will not be found guilty – a manifestation of familiar environmental and class solidarity (as Marxist critics would argue). Mitya is an aristocrat – he belongs to the class of landowners. The best description was given by the advocate Fietukovitch, who reminded the court in his speech that although the accused was a known adventurer, he was eagerly received in the homes of all his neighbors. If, according to the opinion of the majority, he is indeed ‘one of us’, it is very difficult to accept such an awful punishment for him, to be condemned to hard labor, which would lead to dishonor. Neither of Mitya’s brothers wants to accept the fact that their brother is a convict. Ivan begins planning Mitya’s escape to America before the verdict is even announced and before Ivan gets sick. Alosha, a former monk who believes in obedience and truthfulness, decides to plan Mitya’s escape, although this would require the destruction of his moral principles. At the same time, none of the brothers mention Smerdyakov. Not only is he ignored during his lifetime and even more frequently treated badly, despised or even hated, but also no one has mercy for him, even after suicide. It is also worth mentioning that Smerdyakov’s suicide was, for some interpreters (especially those interpreting from the perspective of Christianity), another reason to blame him. Meanwhile, when preaching, old Zosima condemns those who commit suicide but, at the same time, shows mercy towards them. The words pronounced by Zosima are not heard: no one will pray for Smerdyakov, not even Alosha.

Therefore, the question raised was whether we should treat Smerdyakov as the personification of evil. If we assume that he was not the one to kill Fyodor Karamazov, then Smerdyakov’s profile stops being as negative as previous interpreters have made it. Even the Christian philosopher, Nikolay Bierdiayev, author of the work entitled *The Revelation about Man in the Creativity of Dostoyevsky* (27), refused Smerdyakov the right to humanity. Furthermore, in the work *Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky* (1900–1902), Dmitry Myeriazkovski called Smerdyakov ‘a monster’, ‘Christ’s monkey’, a pretender, and thought that he was the one that Ivan saw as a devil (28). We mention opinions here that are more than one

hundred years old because they lay the foundations for canonical interpretations of this character.

Nevertheless, we could see Smerdyakov from another perspective: as a man who was constantly rejected by those around him, who was never recognized as a brother, and who was a sick and devastated man. That is why he gives his money to Ivan and commits suicide and, according to Zosima, there is no man unhappier than a man who commits suicide.

It does not seem possible to reach a conclusion as to whether Smerdyakov is a killer or not. Nevertheless, the version set out in this paper is possible. Mitya killed Fyodor and subsequently suffered from conversion amnesia. This gives a new perspective to the novel. From this point of view, in contrast with the angelical Zosima, Smerdyakov does not seem the personification of infernal forces. He is, instead, an obstacle on the road to realization of the idea of brotherhood. The idea so eagerly transmitted by Zosima, but also the brotherhood encrypted in the Karamazov family, which was destroyed by the force of circumstances.

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