Dickens and Dostoevsky:

Imaginary Parricide in Martin Chuzzlewit and The Brothers Karamazov

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Introduction

Parricide has been said to be the central and primal crime both of humankind and of the individual.[1] Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoevsky attempted to describe this theme in Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-44) and The Brothers Karamazov (1880). They did so in order to insist that guilt did not always relate to outward crime, but to something in the mind of human beings. In other words, the authors wrote of spiritual guilt and redemption as well as that of the criminal. They both have a deep concern with crime and its punishment. And both of them had strange relationships with their own fathers. The interest in crime and the uniqueness of those relationships caused the imaginary parricides in their novels.

Many studies have discussed parricide in The Brothers Karamazov.[2] They have revealed Dostoevsky's feelings for his murdered father and discussed it in relation to his father's death. That incident left him with a trauma. The Brothers Karamazov seems to imply the trauma lasts all his life. In fact, Dostoevsky was able to present only imaginary parricides in the novel. Dickens, like Dostoevsky, described an imaginary parricide emerging from a traumatic memory in his childhood.

1. Imaginary Parricide in Martin Chuzzlewit

The central theme of Martin Chuzzlewit, is selfishness in various aspects. Old Martin is rich and unable to believe others, even his beloved grandson young Martin, and the novel begins after their serious quarrel about Martin's choice of a wife. Their family quarrel over Old Martin's property plays an important role in this novel. Dickens was trying to reveal what Raymond Baubles described when he said, "[t]he nineteenth-century British novelists were well aware of the terrific power of money and of [its] insidious effects" (246).

Jonas Chuzzlewit is a murderer who failed to commit parricide. C. P. Snow remarks that "Jonas Chuzzlewit is the supreme example of Dickens's Gothic vision, and some of the criminal psychology there anticipates Dostoevsky" (68). He embodies Dickens's hidden or unconscious intention. Jonas committed a terrible deliberate murder of Tigg Montague. But about his father's death, readers and the murderer himself wonder for a long time whether it is parricide or not. Hoping to kill his father, Jonas gave his father poison. Jonas tries to commit parricide even if his attempt ends in failure. Anthony is Old Martin's younger brother and Jonas's father; he is rich himself, and selfish and greedy like his brother. They embody the soul of the Chuzzlewits, which causes family quarrels and a tragedy. In their first appearance, Anthony and Jonas together attended the family conference so as not to miss their chance to get Old Martin's huge property. They are depicted as one pair, a

father and his son without any sign of tragedy.

But Jonas shows his brutality gradually. His selfishness and greed are ascribable both to heredity and to education, as Dickens mentioned in a preface.[3] Dickens's strategy of suggesting his brutality and criminality reveals his true character in the early part of the novel. He never hides his hatred of his father. He learned a lot from his father and then he longed for his father's death. His father, Anthony, thinks of Jonas as a dangerous fellow. Indeed, Anthony knew the brutality of his son well. When Anthony fell from his chair in a fit, the biggest question occurred. Readers are not taught the cause of Anthony's death in detail, so it is natural to wonder whether he was murdered or not. Jonas was afraid of being suspected of killing his father. Dickens lets us know everything near the end of the novel; at that time readers can know what happened exactly that night. After all, Dickens strictly gave him a death penalty by suicide with the same poison he uses in his attempt. He shows that Jonas would be guilty of attempting his father's murder even if he had not committed Montague's murder. When Jonas became acquainted with Tigg Montague, Montague's blackmail of Jonas started and that caused his final crime. Being cornered by Montague, at last Jonas resolved to kill him in order to keep his putative parricide secret. "Murder begets murder," Monod asserts (99). To keep his secret, Jonas had to commit a murder perfectly. But not knowing that Nadgett, who watching him at Montague's request, Jonas put his plan into practice.

The murder occurred in the darkness and is depicted ambiguously. Dickens intends to heighten tension by not explaining enough and then reveals all of the things clearly in the end. Jonas does not repent his deed but is only frightened. As a result, although Jonas did not kill his father, still he was guilty. Dickens never forgives him. Nadgett's complaint brought his murder of Tigg Montague to light. Jonas was completely cornered. Finally he said he was guilty and asked to be alone in the room. It is the end of Jonas. He kills himself by taking poison to escape from everything.

Dickens was passionately interested in crime and its punishment through his whole life.[4] Dickens also had complex feelings for his parents because they gave him unforgettable humiliation. He had to work in a blacking factory at the age of twelve because his family was faced with financial disaster. Dickens would not tell this humiliating memory even to his family. But he was a good son indeed. And he wrote about a good daughter in Little Dorrit. This novel treats his ideal of a good child and his memory of a Debtors' Prison.

In Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens concluded that Jonas was never forgiven not only because of his real murder, but also because of his attempted parricide. As has been pointed out, Dickens was the only great British novelist whose father had been put in jail and whose family had lived there.[5] This childhood experience left him with a traumatic memory. He could never forget that memory but he loved his father very much. These conflicts made him write imperfect

parricides. Jonas intended and carried out his plan to kill his father only to fail. Although Anthony died of a heart attack, Jonas is morally guilty of parricide (Welsh 34). By projecting his feeling for his father to Jonas's crime and punishment, Dickens can move on as a human being and as a novelist.

2. Imaginary Parricide in The Brothers Karamazov

Dostoevsky treated parricide in the novel that questioned the existence of God in his full maturity as a writer. His narrator said that the nine hundred pages The Brothers Karamazov was the introduction to a main novel that would take place thirteen years later (xvii; From the Author).[6] Thus he gave a protagonist, Alyosha, a role as an observer in this novel. Alyosha only listens to others and talks with them. He is an only son who has no guilt for parricide.

Fyodor Karamazov had three legitimate sons and an illegitimate one and his children, Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha, and Smerdyakov grew up separately. When they gathered together in the town where Fyodor lived, the story began. Harvey Mindess associates the characters of the Karamazovs with Dostoevsky's character: Fyodor stands for Dostoevsky's sensuality, Ivan for intellectual brilliance and cynicism, Dmitri for the proud, declamatory lust and passion, Alyosha for devotion, kind-hearted altruism, and Smerdyakov for smugness, stupid treachery and maliciousness (451). This idea seems to be accurate and helps to think about this family.

Fyodor got rid of the eldest son, Dmitri, and did not care about

his child's existence at all. So a faithful servant of the family Grigory played a role as a father for Dmitri during his stay in Fyodor's house. This fact became one of the important reasons that Dmitri thought himself guilty of parricide. Anyway, Grigory was his substitute father. And he believed that he had property his mother left him, but Fyodor deceived him about his real property. It became one cause of discord between Dmitri and Fyodor. Another cause is the fight about Grushenka. The dispute about money and jealousy made them quarrel. As Vladiv-Glover noted, "Mitya [Dmitri] is the only one of the four brothers, who is in an explicit relationship of open rivalry with the father"(19). Dmitri and Fyodor expressed their hatred for each other openly through the novel. Near the beginning, Fyodor suggests the word "parricide" because he was afraid to be killed by Dmitri. Fyodor knew well that Dmitri hated him and wanted to kill him. Dmitri never tried to hide his hatred for Fyodor and his parricidal intention.

On knowing of his father's death, Dmitri thought wrongly that he was guilty in spite of his innocence. He thought that he had murdered the old man---not Fyodor but his substitute father Grigory. When the police captain, the deputy prosecutor, district attorney, and the inspector of police came to arrest him, Dmitri cried aloud:

> "I un---der---stand!" . . . "The old man!" cried Mitya frantically. "The old man and his blood! . . . I understand."
>
> And he sank, almost fell, on a chair close by. . . . (419;

pt. 3, bk. 8, ch. 8)

He was in deep anguish over beating Grigory.[7] And although Dmitri did not commit parricide, he accepted punishment because of his hope for his father's death and of his violence to Grigory.[8] He meant to suffer for his own sin; that is, he saw guilt not in actual behaviour but in his own sprit.

As far as Ivan is concerned, he asked for punishment by revealing Smerdyakov's crime and confessing his own criminal intention in Dmitri's trial. Ivan resolved to ask for suffering because of his evil wish to hope for his father's death. He found and admitted his own guilt for unconsciously consenting to Smerdyakov's murder of his father. Certainly he hated his father and hoped for his death; at the same time it is possible to say he had a motive to destroy his elder brother's life. In fact, Ivan would not hide his feeling for his father and elder brother. When Dmitri burst into the room and laid violent hands on Fyodor, Ivan calls Dmitri a snake: "One viper will devour the other. . . . Of course I won't let him be murdered as I didn't just now . . ." (128-29; pt. 1, bk. 3, ch. 9). For Ivan, Dmitri and Fyodor had the same meaning---as objects of hatred. If Dmitri killed Fyodor, he and Alyosha would get more money. But that is not the prime reason. When he hoped Dmitri would kill his father, he must have held two hatreds; one for his father who had abandoned him in childhood, the other for Dmitri who was connected with Katerina through complicated passion. Katerina and Dmitri loved each other as well

as hated each other. They could not be separated even if each of them began to love another person. As Ivan loved her desperately, it could be true that he hoped for Dmitri's destruction.[9] But Ironically, Katerina, whom he loves, destroyed Dmitri's life, while Ivan hoped to save Dmitri from the guilty sentence. She tried to save Ivan and sent innocent Dmitri to jail; therefore, Ivan had to atone for his sin against Dmitri, too.

After the murder occurred, Ivan was shocked not because he knew that Smerdyakov had murdered Fyodor but because he realised his repressed desire to kill his father and destroy his brother's life. On that fatal night, he stood on the staircase and listened to his father walking with strange curiosity. That "action" all his life afterwards he called "infamous," and at the bottom of his heart, he thought of it as the basest action of his life (255; pt. 2, bk. 5, ch. 7). At the end of the novel, however, Ivan admitted his guilt and tried to prove Dmitri's innocence by sacrificing himself. Having failed to save Dmitri from the guilty sentence, he intended to help Dmitri escape from prison. Each of the brothers resolved to be punished so as to atone for his imaginary parricide in his own way.

On the other hand, Smerdyakov, an illegitimate son and cook, would not admit any guilt in spite of his crime. Smerdyakov may be their brother, but none of the brothers seem to notice that fact, even Alyosha.[10] All the Karamazov brothers regard Smerdyakov as a servant, which had some effect on Smerdyakov's mind. He disliked

everybody, yet he was interested in Ivan, who was intellectual and proud. He wanted to be recognised as a companion by Ivan. Ivan's intelligence fascinated this misanthrope. It is possible to say Ivan's unconsciousness made Smerdyakov murder Fyodor. Ivan's boldness fascinated him, but Ivan was only a person who suffered from his devil. Smerdyakov's suicide is a kind of punishment for a murderer. Smerdyakov understood what he had done and what he should do. On the day of Dmitri's trial, Smerdyakov was no longer alive. He killed himself not because he regretted his crime, but because he found reality---what Ivan was. If Ivan could have understood Smerdyakov's dark heart, Smerdyakov would never have chosen to kill himself. He felt that from the beginning Ivan had betrayed him.

According to Sigmund Freud's analysis, "it is a matter of indifference who actually committed the crime; psychology is only concerned to know who desired it emotionally and who welcomed it when it was done" (189). The three brothers decided to take responsibility in various ways for wishing for their father's death. All three suffer great misfortunes, a sentence to prison, a case of brain fever, and suicide. Is Dostoevsky punishing these brothers for their desires? However, the sentence of guilty will never hurt Dmitri, for he is able to live on with Grushenka. Even if it is uncertain that Ivan will recover from his brain fever, Katerina will stay with him. But Smerdyakov, who completed his crime, has lost Ivan and is alone.[11]

Dostoevsky's traumatic memory of his father's death might, as Freud suggested, reflect a parricidal intention. His second wife Anna gave him gentle family life in his last fifteen years. Anna gave him lots of things he had sought for throughout his life. Although Dostoevsky could not complete this parricide even in his novels, he punished those who hoped for their father's death. That is his answer for the problem of imaginary parricide.

3. The Way of Revealing Parricide

Dickens and Dostoevsky show a similarity in revealing the fact of parricide in Martin Chuzzlewit and The Brothers Karamazov. Both of them left the murder secret and wrote complicated plots to make clear what happened. In each novel, one character confesses to the murder and kills himself. In Martin Chuzzlewit, the man who gave poison to Jonas tells all the secrets to Martin and John Westlock. The murderer himself reveals all his secrets to Ivan, whom he respects in The Brothers Karamazov.

A man who appeared and remained at John's hand in chapter 25 played a role as a prosecutor of Jonas. This surgeon explained his own behaviour and worried about it:

> 'I fear he [Anthony] was made away with. Murdered!' . . .
>
> The young man, Lewsome, looked up in his face, and casting down his eyes again, replied:
>
> 'I fear, by me . . . Not by my act, but I fear by my means.' . . . 'He [Jonas] said, immediately, that he wanted

> me to get him some of two sorts of drugs . . . I only know that the poor old father died soon afterwards, just as he would have died from this cause. . . .” (818-20; pt.18 ch.48)

Lewsome had been troubled by his deed and been ill for a long time. He had sold drugs to Jonas while worrying about the effect of the drugs. Although he reported the fact, he did not know the truth about the death of Anthony. A friend of the deceased, Chuffey disclosed the secret. He said that Anthony found out his son’s intention and forgave him because he loved his son. Old Martin, Young Martin, and other people confirmed the truth of Anthony’s death for the readers. Jonas’s parricide ended as an imaginary one. Jonas---who did not succeed in committing parricide, but intended and attempted it---was not able to escape and killed himself.

On the other hand, Smerdyakov, a murderer, told Ivan the truth about the death of Fyodor. He pulled out money that he had stolen from Fyodor in front of Ivan and said to him:

> “Can you really, can you really not have known till now? . . . It was only with you, with your help, sir, I killed him, and Dmitri Fyodorovich is quite innocent . . . And so I want to prove to your face this evening that you are the only real murderer in the whole affair, and sir, and I am not the real murderer, though I did kill him . . .” (593-94; pt. 4, bk. 11, ch. 8)

Only Ivan hears this confession; he reports it, admits that he was

an accomplice, and collapses with brain fever. His illness leads the court to ignore his revelations even though the reader knows they are true. In both novels, an unknowing accomplice confesses, but only in Dickens is the confession widely accepted.

Conclusion

In their novels, Dickens and Dostoevsky both recognised their hope for their father's death as an imaginary parricide. They punish their characters for this psychological crime in similar ways, but Dickens simplified his characters and Dostoevsky complicated them.

Dickens could never forget the unforgettable humiliation in his childhood. He wrote that Jonas Chuzzlewit attempted to murder his father in order to get money as soon as possible. And Jonas believes he is guilty of killing his father in spite of the failure of his intention. Dickens ended Jonas's life with poison. By doing so, Dickens shows his hope for his father's death is a crime in itself. Dostoevsky also deals with parricide in The Brothers Karamazov. Like Jonas, Smerdyakov commits suicide in despair. He has no regret or pain as a real human being. On the other hand, Dmitri and Ivan decided to be punished as persons, who hoped for their father's death, more accurately, who hoped to kill their fathers. Punishment is not always a legal matter. Dickens and Dostoevsky treated punishment as a problem of psychology. Guilty feelings are always in a human being's mind, so characters that find guilt in their minds ask for punishment even if no one blames them. Dickens and Dostoevsky strictly punish the hope for a

father's death. This conclusion suggests their complex feelings for their fathers and their similar peculiarity as novelists.

Notes

[1] Based upon Vladiv-Gloves's summary of Freud's article, as "according to a well-known view" ("Dostoevsky, Freud and Parricide" 9).

[2] Freud challenged to psychoanalyse Dostoevsky with using a problem of parricide in The Brothers Karamazov. Some people discuss it based upon his analysis. And of course, others argue it with taking opposite positions.

[3] All references and quotations from Martin Chuzzlewit are from The Oxford Illustrated Dickens.

[4] There are many studies that discuss his interest in crime and its punishment. See Collins and Monod.

[5] Monod declares that "for a novelist who was became the apostle of the home and its values, this early experience must have been intensely traumatic"(92).

[6] All the references and quotations from The Brothers Karamazov are from A Norton Critical Edition.

[7] Dmitri believed that he had murdered Grigory. Later when he knew that Grigory was alive; he was very glad and said:
"Oh, thank you, gentlemen! Oh, in one minute you have given me new life, new heart! . . . That old man used to carry me in his arms,

gentlemen. He used to wash me in the tub when I was a baby three years old, abandoned by everyone, he was like a father to me! . . .” (433; Pt. 3, Bk. 9, Ch.3).

[8] He has insisted on his innocence of parricide, which was revealed by Smerdyakov to Ivan, but he was sentenced as guilty. After that, he told Alyosha, “I shall condemn myself, and I will pray for my sin forever” (724; Epilogue, 2).

[9] On the contrary, Dmitri loves Ivan throughout the novel. “His brother Dmitri Fyodorovich used to speak of Ivan with the deepest respect and with a peculiar earnestness” (25; pt. 1, bk. 1, ch. 5).

[10] Dmitri was referring to that fact in his interrogation. “. . . Besides, what motive had he [Smerdyakov] for murdering the old man? Why, he’s very likely his son, you know---his natural son . . .” (449; pt. 3, bk. 9, ch. 5).

[11] Father Zosima defines hell in his exhortations. “Fathers and teachers, I ponder “What is hell?” I maintain that it is the suffering of no longer being able to love. . . . [T]hat is just his torment, to rise up to the Lord without ever having loved, to be brought close to those who have loved when he has despised their love.” (301; pt. 2, bk. 6, ch. 3)

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