

Fyodor Dostoevsky and Flannery O'Connor as Totalizing Authors of the Polyphonic Narrative: The Failure of Dialectic and Self Dispossession

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Comparative Literature Senior Thesis
Colorado College
May 2012

"She saw him grab the leg, and then saw it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase... he turned and regarded her with a look that no longer had any admiration in it. "I've gotten a lot of interesting things," he said. "One time I got a woman's glass eye this way...And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga," he said using the name as if he didn't think much of it. "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" ("Good Country People," 290)

"Then I grabbed that same cast-iron paperweight, the one on his desk – remember sir? ... and I swung and hit him from behind on the top of the head with the corner of it. He didn't even cry out. He just sank down suddenly, and I hit him one more time , and then a third time. The third time I felt I smashed his skull. He suddenly fell on his back, face up, all bloody. I looked myself over; there was no blood on me, it didn't splatter, I wiped the paperweight off, put it back..." (*Brothers Karamazov*, 629)

"The dialectic of good," Dostoevsky believed, "is set into motion through suffering – and often through sin" the same, I think can be said of Flannery O'Connor. Her vision as a writer, which bears a striking resemblance to that of Dostoevsky, is founded upon a similar dialectic; just as Hazel Motes proclaims that "the only way to the truth is through blasphemy," Miss O'Connor seems to say that, in an age so well adjusted to its own tawdry norms that the very idea of Good becomes precarious, the only way to the holy is through evil." (Preston M. Browning Jr "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy," 161)

Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Flannery O'Connor's short story "Good Country People" both depict violent scenes where certain characters commit premeditated acts of evil. Despite these gruesome depictions, though, many scholars agree that the overarching impulse in their narratives is toward a "dialectic of good." In his book *Return to Good and Evil: Flannery O'Connor's Response to Nihilism*, Henry T. Edmundson astutely observes that most readers of O'Connor's texts will "find her descriptions of evil far more conspicuous than her discussions of good," but that the deeper reason for this is not because she is caught up in the idea of evil in and of itself, but because good is a "natural and divine grace intervening in human affairs [and]

occurs where it is most needed – in the midst of evil” (4). Similar comments have been made that despite all of his “negative types” Dostoevsky’s “true heroes are creators of new ideas and bearers of human warmth” (*Dostoevsky: A Biography* 592).

Furthermore, their personal journals often depict a positive and uplifting picture of humanity that would seem at odds with the characters of their fiction. While enslaved in a gulag in Siberia, Dostoevsky wrote to his brother Mikhail, “There are very many noble people in the world, brother!” (*Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky* 60). This is a stark contrast to characters like his bitter Underground Man, who famously begins *Notes From the Underground* with “I am a sick man... I am a spiteful man. I am an unpleasant man.” After Flannery O’Connor was diagnosed with Lupus, she writes to a friend “I believe that all creation is good...but that what has free choice is more completely in God’s image than what does not have it” (104, *The Habit of Being*). How is it then, that these authors who so frequently depict morally debased characters can simultaneously be so concerned with the ‘noble people’ in the world made in “God’s image”?

What makes O’Connor and Dostoevsky particularly striking is that very often their depictions of “evil,” like merciless killing and cruelty, are discrepant with their ultimate philosophical messages about the redemptive power of God. Both Dostoevsky and Flannery O’Connor have been called “polyphonous” writers – a term that Mikhail Bakhtin coined in his book *The Problems Of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. A polyphonic narrative is one that depicts “a number of fully realized and independent individuals, each with his or her own system of values and beliefs,” (*The Art and Vision of Flannery O’Connor* 14)

who may be murderers like Smerdyakov, but also saints like Alyosha, the youngest Karamazov brother who aspires to be a monk.

The idea of polyphony is more than a difference in character traits; in the polyphonic narrative, drastically opposing characters that enact good or evil deeds contribute to the "unity of the philosophical plan," that is the narrative itself. (*Problems Dostoevsky's Poetics* 11). The polyphonic narrative becomes, in a sense, a *system* by which certain authors can elaborate philosophical ideas. As such, the polyphonic authors create varying viewpoints and characters that when taken alone may seem to represent only evil, but when placed alongside other characters who have an opposing ideology, serve to add to the "higher unity" of the narrative as an internally consistent philosophical system. Bakhtin says,

Если бы многопланность и противоречивость была дана Достоевскому или воспринималась им только как факт личной жизни, как многопланность и противоречивость духа - своего и чужого, - то Достоевский был бы романиком и создал бы монологический роман о противоречивом становлении человеческого духа, действительно, отвечающий гегелианской концепции. Но на самом деле многопланность и противоречивость Достоевский находил и умел воспринять не в духе, а в объективном социальном мире.

(<http://www.vehi.net/dostoevsky/bakhtin/index.html>)

This means,

“The utterly incompatible elements of Dostoevsky’s material are distributed among several worlds and among several full-fledged consciousnesses...these worlds and these consciousnesses with their field of vision are joined in *a higher unity of a second order, the unity of the polyphonic novel*” (emphasis mine, 12).

Even without using Bakhtin’s vocabulary of “polyphony” many scholars have emphasized a similar point about Dostoevsky and O’Connor’s texts. Scholars praise their heterogeneous characterizations that give voice to differing philosophies. Dostoevsky’s biographer Leonard Grossman says, “by combining all these techniques Dostoevsky has imparted to his last novel [*The Brothers Karamazov*] an undeniable sense of vitality in presentation” (*Dostoevsky: A Biography* 590). O’Connor scholars praise her for a “dynamic interplay between visions” that “in part explains the stark power, reverberating in any number of tensions, of [her] fiction” (*Return to Good and Evil: Flannery O’Connor’s Response to Nihilism* 59).

Perhaps this interplay between “good” and “evil” that helps define the tension at work in the polyphonic novel is what led Preston M. Browning to comment about the “dialectic of good,” in Dostoevsky’s and O’Connor’s fiction. Dialectic is a Hegelian concept meaning a “process of thought by which [two] contradictions are seen to merge themselves in a higher truth that comprehends them” (OED). This definition of dialectic resembles Bakhtin’s definition of the polyphonic narrative as a “philosophical plan” where contradictory ideas and characterizations are joined in “higher unity.” The Hegelian elements of the polyphonic novel are not lost on Bakhtin, who often mentions

Dostoevsky in relation to Hegelian dialectic. However, he disagrees that they are completely similar, and points out the main difference between Hegel and Dostoevsky is that "Dostoevsky found and perceived multileveledness and contradictoriness not in the spirit [like Hegel] but in the objective social world. In that social world the various planes were not stages, but opposing camps" (22-23).

Perhaps what Bakhtin means when he discusses Dostoevsky's "social world" is how very often in Dostoevsky's narratives people commit random acts of violence that do not appear a step toward a "higher unity," but simply a bad deed. If the characters were to dramatize Hegel's ideas directly, than they would all arrive at a place of intersubjective harmony at the end. This is very different than the trajectory of say, Fyodor and Smerdyakov who both end up dead.

Despite Bakhtin's observation about the discrepancy between Hegel's system, and the depictions of humanity in Dostoevsky and O'Connor's narrative where people seem arbitrarily violent, I argue that Dostoevsky and O'Connor are still authors in line with a Hegelian conception. Hegel is concerned with large overarching "systems," or, totalities. The reason is not because their characters themselves enact Hegelian truths, but because the authors contextualize their characters' evil deeds inside the polyphonic narrative, something that resembles a Hegelian system. The "higher unity that comprehends" the characters is not the action of the characters to one another, but instead the polyphonous narrative itself, which is both a *depiction* of opposing characters and ideas, and a *synthesis* that makes meaning out of their differences. The fact that Dostoevsky's and O'Connor's characters enact evil and cannot come to a

dialectical understanding of the self shows Hegel's system at work, paradoxically because the character's misunderstanding of a dialectical identity is itself part of the polyphonous system. The way the characters fail to come to a "higher unity" themselves supports the "philosophical system" that is the polyphonic narrative itself.

Much of my literary analysis will focus on the question of *identity* and what it means to define one's own self-conception against another's. In his chapter in the book *The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor* Robert Brinkmeyer analyzes the place of O'Connor's characters in her narratives as she employs an idea of the "decentralized self," a concept that applies Hegel's dialectical understanding of identity that "...other is self"" ("Master Slave Dialectic" 630). Brinkmeyer says,

Crucial to one's development as a person...are several steps that call for a radical repositioning of the self. Most fundamental is the necessity of the self to decentralize— that is, detach the self from itself. This self-dispossession shatters that person's isolating egocentrism, thereby placing the person in a position open to interaction and communication with others. (42)

My whole literary analysis rests on the idea that this "self-dispossession," – which I will explain as a "dialectical" conception of identity—is exactly what the characters I analyze *fail* to achieve. In the way that these characters fail to do so, however, Dostoevsky and O'Connor uphold the necessity for dialectic; the narratives themselves are examples of how dialectical conceptions function. Similar to Hazel Motes' claim that, "The only way to the holy is through blasphemy" perhaps the only way to truly understand a dialectical system, and, consequently, what is at stake in the polyphonic novel, is through a

process that depicts its opposite—namely, the failure of characters to “self-dispossess” and the failure of characters to recognize their true identity as tied to another’s. The fact is, the characters who fail to “decentralize” themselves in these two narratives—Fyodor, Mrs. Hopewell, Ivan and Hulga—all suffer in tangible and graphic ways; Fyodor is beaten to death, Mrs. Hopewell is humiliated and proved a buffoon, Ivan goes insane, and Hulga is left, quite literally “without a leg to stand on.” By remembering that these characters are part of a system that is the polyphonous narrative itself, we can interpret the trajectory they go through, as a kind of cautionary tale and warning about the consequences in failing to reach a dialectical conception of identity. The characters are, essentially, “punished” by their authors, for the sake of the polyphonic novel’s unity and cohesion. The narratives, as a polyphonic system, comment on the success and value of totalizing systems like Hegel’s dialectic.¹

Furthermore, looking at the negative trajectory these characters go through brings to light an understanding of how narratives can actually work alongside and enhance a totalizing system like Hegel’s. In so doing, we can see how totalizing philosophies like Hegel’s dialectic might be brought down to comment on the existential crises of the individuals in O’Connor and Dostoevsky’s narratives. Dostoevsky and O’Connor are considered “existentialist” writers because of their focus on an individual’s experience and an individual’s suffering. Hegel is considered an “Idealist” because of his focus on totalizing systems in favor of individual choices. Given the competing goals of

¹ Although they do not mention Hegel or Dostoevsky, I have run across a similar interpretation of Asbury and Julian from O’Connor’s *The Violent Bear it Away* as functioning as a “cautionary tale.” Both characters in the course of the narrative “Suffer...in large part because their monologic worship of self – which closes them off from meaningful contact with others and in turn denies them a realistic means of appraising the self and the world...” as such they are “doomed to failure.” (Robert Brinkmeyer) This is not the narrative I chose to use, but as such I think it reflects on O’Connor’s general tendency towards this kind of “cautionary tale.”

these two philosophical movements, I feel this analysis also adds to a larger point about the place and meaning of an individual within a certain system.

Overview of Paper

First, I will do a section about the ways I am using the term 'dialectic' to discuss how this idea helps us to understand the narratives of Dostoevsky and O'Connor. I will show how pairing *Phenomenology of Spirit*, against these two polyphonous narratives can help us to better understand Hegel's formulation of dialectic in that text.

Next, I will go through the two narratives in detail and discuss how certain characters fail to achieve a dialectical understanding of their self-identity, and discuss the different ways the two authors "punish" them for this egocentrism. The characters who fail to view their identity in a dialectical manner are the ones I've mentioned above—Fyodor and Ivan from *The Brothers Karamazov* and Mrs. Hopewell and Hulga from "Good Country People."

The first character I will look at is the character of Fyodor from *The Brothers Karamazov*. I will analyze his relationship with the servant Smerdyakov in a Hegelian manner that focuses mostly on their opposing social roles of master and slave.

Secondly, I will look at Ivan Karamazov from *The Brothers Karamazov*, and analyze his relationship to the same character Smerdyakov. Ivan does not quite see himself as "master" in the most literal sense over Smerdyakov as Fyodor does, but he sees himself

as 'master' in the sense that he is more intelligent. Ivan fails to recognize Smerdyakov as an equal because he does not consider Smerdyakov an intellectual like himself.

Next I will look at the character of Hulga, from O'Connor's story "Good Country People." Hulga is a crippled girl whose health problems and wooden leg have prevented her from moving outside her small town, despite the fact that she has a Ph.D in philosophy and considers herself smarter than the people she lives with. I will look at how she relates to her mother, Mrs. Hopewell, and Manly Pointer, an uneducated bible salesman. Like Ivan's relationship with Smerdyakov, Hulga regards Hopewell and Pointer as intellectually inferior because she has had more schooling. Both Ivan and Hulga share an outlook that their identity is superior to the social positions of Smerdyakov and Manly Pointer as uneducated simpletons.

Finally I will look at the character of Mrs. Hopewell from "Good Country People" as she relates to her servant, Mrs. Freeman. Both Fyodor and Mrs. Hopewell, in their respective contexts, see themselves as a superior 'master' to their hired help.

Each of the characters' situations differs on the severity of which they are punished – For Dostoevsky, who tends toward tragedy, the consequences for these "non-dialectical" characters are severe. For O'Connor, who tends to write in a comedic tone, the punishments are not as literally harsh, but constitute a punishment in that the characters are humiliated and shown how their self-identity is incomplete and flawed.

In doing analysis, I attempt to bring together, in its own dialectical manner, the writings of Dostoevsky and O'Connor, who are very often seen as drastically different writers. O'Connor is known for her short stories, whereas Dostoevsky is known for his

large tomes. This difference in style changes the narrative techniques they use. O'Connor uses literary devices like symbols, metaphors and synecdoche to communicate meaning in a short space, and Dostoevsky communicates meaning by use of long character soliloquies, dialogues between characters and gradual plot movements. Others differences between the authors are also apparent; O'Connor was a middle class woman living in Southern Georgia during the twentieth century and Dostoevsky an upper-class man living in nineteenth century Russia. Despite these surface details, however the core philosophical ideas they grapple with, like the nature of good and evil actions, are related. Although I've found a few articles that compare Dostoevsky with Southern writing in general ("Dostoevsky and America's Southern Women Writers: Parallels and Confluences" by Temira Pachmuss, and "Dostoevsky and the Literature of the American South" by Maria Bloshteyn), and still a few other that conclude their essays or book chapters on O'Connor by alluding to Dostoevsky, ("The Short Story in English" by Walter Allen, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy," Preston M. Browning Jr.) However, I found very little that compared O'Connor's and Dostoevsky's actual *texts* to one another. Given that many of Bakhtin's core ideas on Dostoevsky's texts have been used to understand O'Connor – like the idea of polyphonic narratives, but also dialogism, and the carnivalesque – I would be curious to see what other comparisons a substantive textual analysis could unearth. I hope that this essay can help to instigate more literary analyses of these authors' works.

Hegel and The Polyphonic Narrative

Dialectic and Polyphony

Although 'dialectic' in philosophy can alternatively mean "The art of critical examination" or simply, "the investigation of truth by discussion" (OED), I use dialectic in a Hegelian manner, meaning, a "process of thought by which [two] contradictions are seen to merge themselves in a higher truth that comprehends them" (OED). As Bakhtin correctly observed, Hegel is primarily concerned with differing "contradictions" as they exist on a theoretical or abstract plane. Dialectic is a system which "synthesizes" these contradictions in such a way that they no longer are diametrically opposed to one another, and instead are necessary to the other's existence. In Hegelian rhetoric, totalizing terms like "thesis" "antithesis" "sublation," and "geist" are far more common than the existential, self-willed, choices of one person that is crucial to narrative development.

Dostoevsky and O'Connor employ their own "totalizing system," that is similar to Hegel's system in the polyphonic narrative. As existentialists, Dostoevsky and O'Connor are not typically characterized as "totalizing" or "systematizing" authors. Hegel's dialectic is a useful model to keep in mind, given that the polyphonic narrative functions in a related manner in the way that it attempts to overcome contradictions.

In Hegel's system, two oppositions initially "Must on one hand be held strictly apart" (631) but this opposition is only one step in a larger movement whereupon the oppositions recognize common similarity and definition. Similarly, Dostoevsky and O'Connor set up a system that initially delineates characters with opposing viewpoints and self-identities. When characters fail to overcome their difference in identity, they

are punished. These punishments are one step in the larger “philosophical system” of the polyphonic narrative.

The social positions of characters do not constitute any kind of “contradiction” in reality – a ‘servant’ as a purely vocational position which is not a contradiction to the one he serves. Similarly, being an academic intellectual does not inherently come with an attitude that one is “above” uneducated people. However, in the polyphonic narrative system that Dostoevsky and O’Connor create, social roles constitute a social hierarchy of “oppositions.” This social hierarchy makes the act of “self-dispossession” difficult, and prevents certain characters from obtaining a stronger sense of self. While in reality a weak sense of self does not necessarily result in negative consequences, in a polyphonic system, the weak sense of self results in punishment. Dostoevsky and O’Connor, creators of the polyphonic system, set up a situation whereby certain characters see themselves as “superior” to others, and then are explicitly punished for it. This punishment reinforces the power of the two polyphonic authors as creators of a totalizing system. Thus, the characters’ seemingly erratic and unexplainable evil deeds actually constitute a stage toward a “higher unity,” only the “higher unity” does not occur within the terms of the narrative, but instead outside of it. The higher unity is the polyphonic narrative itself.

Phenomenology and Polyphony

While the main point of this essay is to show how Hegel’s system deepens our understanding of Dostoevsky’s and O’Connor’s texts, I think it worthwhile to mention that Dostoevsky and O’Connor’s narratives can perhaps shed light on the main text of

Hegel's that I look to, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and thus enact a dynamic conversation between theory and narrative.

The Phenomenology of Spirit has been alternatively praised and criticized for its quality of relating to abstract philosophical ideas in a "literary" manner. Josiah Royce, in his "Lectures on Modern Idealism" makes the point that *Phenomenology* has "very close and important relations to the literary movement of the time" (136), the most important of which was the German *bildungsroman*, the precursor the modern coming of age novel. Although it would be difficult to characterize either *Brothers Karamazov* or "Good Country People" as working in the same tradition as *bildungsroman*, the broader idea to be taken away is that systematizing notions in *The Phenomenology* may not be so discrepant with the individual existential crises of the characters in the two narratives. Hegel often uses metaphors that represent dialectic in an anthropomorphic manner that is akin to a literary characterization. He talks about abstract oppositions as the "Lord" and "Bondsman" consciousnesses as a way to concretize and ground the idea of dialectic in an easily identifiable metaphor. In the "Lord and Bondsman" section of *Phenomenology* that,

...the lord achieves his recognition [anerkennenn] through [the bondsman consciousness]; for in them that other consciousness is expressly something unessential, both by its working on the thing and by its dependence on a specific existence... Here therefore is present this moment of recognition, [anerkennen] viz. that the other consciousness sets aside its own being-for-self, and in so doing itself does what the first does to it. Similarly, the other moment too is

present, that this action of the second is the first's own action; for what the bondsman does is really the action of the lord (634)

Given that his choice in metaphors clearly relates to a certain social hierarchy, it is not difficult to see how we may use this metaphor of dialectic to look at social hierarchies within the system of the polyphonic narrative.

Character Analyses

Fyodor Karamazov and Smerdyakov.

Fyodor Karamazov is the master of the house and main patriarch in *The Brothers Karamazov*. He is immediately characterized as a selfish person who lives primarily for his own impulses. Selfishness is far from what Hegel refers to when he uses the phrase "Being for self." However, if conceived in an certain anthropomorphic context, this phrase could easily be extrapolated to embody a kind of self-absorbed and self-centered person like Fyodor.

The most crucial aspect of Fyodor's character is how he relates to Smerdyakov, his servant whose identity opposes Fyodor's place as master. Hegel used the "lord" and "Bondsman" as a metaphor for his larger idea of dialectic and not because it only applied to literal lords and bondsman like Fyodor and Smerdyakov. That said, these two characters both enact Hegel's larger point in the "Lord and Bondsman" section of *Phenomenology*, but also literally occupy those social roles.

I think it important to briefly describe the way he takes advantage of people, because in doing so Dostoevsky emphasizes how Fyodor propagates certain mindset

that separates his self-identity from others, instead of enacting dialectical interchange that understands the necessity for "self-dispossession."

Early in the novel Fyodor is described as a man who "ran around having dinner at other men's tables, [and] tried to foist himself off as a sponger (Pevear/Volokhonsky Translation 7). Fyodor marries his first wife, Adelaida, because she is rich and he wanted to "squeeze into a good family and get a dowry" (8). His second wife, Sofia, is sixteen years old when they marry, and still incredibly naïve. Fyodor, took "advantage...of her phenomenal humility and meekness, he even...trampled the ordinary decencies of marriage. Loose women would gather in the house right in front of his wife, and orgies took place" (13). The fact that Fyodor treats people with such blatant lack of respect reveals that he has not fully realized Hegel's main point in the "Lord and Bondsman" section of *Phenomenology* where Hegel claims that "other is self."

Most important to the plot is the fact that Fyodor is too preoccupied with his own needs to raise any of his children. When speaking about Fyodor's son Dmitri, the narrator points out, "a child would have gotten in the way of his debaucheries" (10). Fyodor's second two sons, Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov are similarly treated with disrespect. Their mother's friend takes the children away, much to Fyodor's delight. Fyodor's bad parenting becomes an important plot point when Fyodor is found murdered in his bedroom and his sons are implicated in the case. The question of "who killed Fyodor?" serves as an intriguing plot point for the remainder of the novel, and it is

only after Fyodor's son Ivan extensively inquires about the murder that we learn it is Smerdyakov, Fyodor's cook and servant, who committed the crime.

Although there are many people in the novel whom Fyodor has wronged, Dostoevsky shows how Fyodor's and Smerdyakov's relationship is one particularly fraught with dialectical tension – not so much in the moral sense that one is “good” and one is “evil,” but instead in the form of an imbalance of power, where the contradictions at play are akin to the Hegelian conceptions of a “Being for self” (Fyodor) and “being for other” (being for other). One way Dostoevsky punctuates this gap in the characters' social roles and identities, is in the way that Fyodor frequently calls Smerdyakov epithets of servitude, like “The Lackey” or “Balaam's Ass.”²

Although Fyodor has other servants in the house, only Smerdyakov gets called these names. These names acknowledge and highlight the difference between the two characters' social positions. Dostoevsky also creates dialectical strain between Fyodor and Smerdyakov by the fact that Smerdyakov might be Fyodor's unacknowledged bastard child. Although we never find out exactly if this rumor is true, the resentment this causes leads to a heightened tension between the two men. Dostoevsky creates this tension so that Smerdyakov and Fyodor relate to one another as opposites, and within those roles of master and slave, and father and son, an amounting animosity emerges. Although it may seem like Dostoevsky's only intentions were to show two individuals who despise one another, this actually presents a powerful opportunity for

² According to the myth, Balaam was a diviner from Babylon who supposedly predicted the star of Bethlehem, and became famous for his ability to curse or bless someone for money. In one episode while he traveled to Israel to pronounce a curse on it, Balaam's donkey began to speak to him, telling him he should not go to Israel. Balaam is associated with asses because Balaam was “so debased” as to listen to the word of a donkey – donkeys being a symbol of servitude and bondage.

mutual understanding leading to a higher truth that comprehends them, namely a self-identity that accounts for another person and strengthens their own sense of self. What happens instead, though, is a failure of dialectical understanding, and Fyodor's murder.

Fyodor's fate acts as a cautionary tale about the dangers of "isolating egocentrism" which does not leave room for a dialectical understanding of oneself as inherently connected to another." I find it no coincidence that, of all the people who hated Fyodor—his sons, his ex-wife and lovers - it is Smerdyakov who kills Fyodor. The nature of Fyodor's insults to Smerdyakov were ones that particularly accentuated his superiority and sense of self as the 'master' over Smerdyakov. By making Smerdyakov Fyodor's murderer instead of Ivan or Dmitry, or any one else who despised Fyodor, Dostoevsky creates a cautionary tale that warns particularly about the offense that Fyodor committed to Smerdyakov of treating someone as an inferior. In the context of the broader novel, this becomes a "lesson" about the necessity for dialectic. So, even though Dostoevsky depicts a self-absorbed, debauched and ultimately vile person in the character of Fyodor, the meaning of these events is one that calls for actions that are quite the opposite. This blend of brutal narrative depiction seems vastly different from the idealist philosophical lesson, but actually the dynamic interplay between the two is what helps define, as Bakhtin put it, a "higher unity of a second order, the unity of the polyphonic novel."

Although Hegel never intended his "Lord and Bondsman" section in *Phenomenology* to explicitly refer to masters and slaves like Fyodor and Smerdyakov they dramatize the philosophical moves that Hegel makes more so than any other set of

characters I look at in this essay. A good example is how Hegel claims that “The relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and death struggle” (633). While Hegel is clearly speaks about a life and death struggle as a metaphor for abstract contradictions, Fyodor and Smerdyakov literally enact a similar moment in the novel’s plot. Smerdyakov kills Fyodor, and later in the plot commits suicide. The fact that they both perish seems directly in line with Hegel’s statement that the Lord and Bondsman consciousnesses “sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other” (631). It is unclear how much Dostoevsky used Hegel’s ideas to guide his texts. We know he wanted to do a translation of Hegel’s works into Russian, but never did. Also, Dostoevsky read and loved Schelling, Hegel’s roommate who definitely had an influence on young Hegel’s philosophy. Even more likely is that “The intellectual atmosphere in Russia at the time was so saturated with [Hegel’s] philosophy, that Dostoevsky could not but have absorbed some of it” (*The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* 177).

I think the manner in which Fyodor and Smerdyakov enact the philosophical moves of Hegel’s “lord” and “bondsman” consciousnesses further shows the value of Josiah Royce’s research about the narrative qualities of dialectic, and again serves to show that narratives are in conversation with totalizing philosophical systems like Hegel’s.

Ivan and Smerdyakov

Ivan Karamazov's self-identity is intimately tied up with an idea of the intellectual class.³ The most important events in Ivan's life include the time he spent in Moscow secondary schools where he met famous pedagogues and published articles in magazines and journals. He flourished academically despite lacking monetary or familial support. Some of Dostoevsky's most famous theoretical arguments about the nature of good and evil are presented from Ivan's perspective.

Readers get sense of Ivan's intellectuality and internal dialectical tension in the chapter "So be it, So be it!" when he discusses an article he recently wrote that garnered much attention in academic circles about the place of ecclesiastical courts in a secular state, and concerned religious morality in relation to secular moral codes. Ivan's main conclusion in the essay is that "every earthly state must eventually be wholly transformed into the Church" (62), and concludes about the necessity for a conception of God. His argument in the essay is mostly an excuse to flex his intellectual muscles. The monk Zosima says to Ivan, "This idea [of spirituality in a secular world] is not quite resolved in your heart as it torments it....for the time being you, too, are toying out of despair, with your magazine articles and drawing room discussions, without believing in your own dialectics and smirking at them with your heart aching inside you..." (70) Ivan alternatively tells contradictory arguments about God's existence or nonexistence depending on how it sustains a better logical argument.

³ For a general definition of the intellectual, see Antonio Gramsci's essay "The Formation of Intellectuals." Gramsci says that intellectuals "can be defined as the expression of that social utopia by which the intellectuals think of themselves as "independent" autonomous, endowed with a character of their own, etc" (Norton 1139). He differentiates between "intellectual activity" and the "intellectual" whereby the first is an action that all men have the possibility to participate in, and the second is a specific social class. The formation of this class is most articulated in the academic institution of schooling whereby a person goes through 'vertical levels' of academia. This is his initial definition of "intellectual" Gramsci continues to break down in the course of the essay. Regardless, it still serves a good starting definition of the idea of an "intellectual."

Ivan's contradictory character is important because it is his very ability to toy with opposing beliefs that he takes pride in, and makes him believe that he has achieved a dialectical ideal of identity. In point of fact, though it is within these philosophical arguments for or against God, that he seems to test people's intellectual capacity against his own. According to their responses about religion as a subject in particular, Ivan judges people as more or less intelligent, and consequently as more or less in line with his own self-conception. His conversations with people are as much about affirming his own ego as they are about reaching a truly dialectical understanding of identity.

It is in these arguments concerning God that Ivan begins to see Smerdyakov as intellectually inferior and incapable of higher thought processes like his own, despite Smerdyakov's attempts to engage Ivan in conversation. In the chapter "Disputation" Fyodor, Ivan, Alyosha, and Smerdyakov gather to drink and end up speaking about religion. During the conversation someone brings up a news story of a soldier who had refused to renounce his Christian faith to religious enemies, and preferred to be killed than renounce Christ. In a manner that offends most people in the room, Smerdyakov defends the man's right to renounce his religion. He says,

А коли я уж не христианин, то значит я и не солгал мучителям, когда они спрашивали: "Христианин я или не христианин", ибо я уже был самим богом совлечен моего христианства, по причине одного лишь замысла и прежде чем даже слово успел мое молвить мучителям. А коли я уже разжалован, то каким же манером и по какой справедливости станут спрашивать с меня на том свете, как

с христианина, за то, что я отрекся Христа, тогда как я за помышление только одно, еще до отречения, был уже крещения моего совлечен? Коли я уж не христианин, значит я и не могу от Христа отречься, ибо не от чего тогда мне и отречься будет (http://az.lib.ru/d/dostoewskij_f_m/text_0100.shtml)

this means,

"...As soon as I say to my tormentors 'No, I'm not a Christian and I curse my true God' then at once, by the highest divine judgement, I immediately and specifically become anathema, I'm cursed and completely excommunicated from the Holy Church like a heathener...and since I am no longer a Christian, it follows that I'm not lying to my tormentors when they ask am I a Christian or not, since God himself has already deprived me of my Christianity" (128).

Smerdyakov then uses this story to open the discussion to the other logical discrepancies in Christianity. He takes issue with the bible verse about how having "faith even as little as the smallest seed" has the power to move mountains (130), claiming that this is an absurdity, and he has never seen a mountain move even amidst people who have lots of faith. While Smerdyakov's examples about discrepancies in Christianity focus on the most literal portions of the bible instead of the larger abstractions about morality and free will (like might be found in Ivan's publications), Smerdyakov clearly exhibits a tendency towards "intellectual activity." He does not use academic rhetoric or have an academic sensibility, but given that he has not gone through the "vertical levels of schooling" this is to be expected. Smerdyakov's

arguments are cruder than Ivan's but essentially concerned with similar issues about religion's place in a world containing evil.

Instead of seeing a similarity with Smerdyakov, or encouraging him in intellectual pursuits, Ivan writes him off as an inferior intellect, and becomes offended when Smerdyakov expresses his admiration for Ivan. He says, «Прочь, негодяй, какая я тебе компания, дурак!» — полетело было с языка его, но, к величайшему его удивлению, слетело с языка совсем другое: Что батюшка, спит или проснулся? — тихо и смиренно проговорил он, себе самому неожиданно, и вдруг, тоже совсем неожиданно, сел на скамейку." This means, "It so happened that Ivan...had recently begun taking an intense dislike to [Smerdyakov]...He had even begun to notice his growing feeling of almost hatred toward this creature" (266). However, this does not stop Ivan from interacting with Smerdyakov. During one conversation with Smerdyakov Ivan is about to scream "Get away scoundrel! I'm not friend of yours, you fool!"...but to his great amazement what did fly out of his mouth was something quite different. "How is papa, asleep or awake? He said softly and humbly..." (267)

The reason for Ivan's paradoxical behavior towards Smerdyakov is tied up with his self identity and egocentrism. Smerdyakov clearly flatters Ivan's intellectual sense of himself by constantly referring to intellectual ideas when around Ivan. At one point he blatantly compliments Ivan and says, "It is always interesting to talk with an intelligent man," (279) This line (С умным человеком и поговорить любопытно) is the title of the chapter where it appears, and is repeated multiple times throughout the novel. It is directly after Smerdyakov makes this statement that clearly appeals to Ivan's self-

identity, that Ivan decides he will leave his father's house, which enables Smerdyakov time with Fyodor so that he can murder him.

The question of whether or not Ivan was aware that Smerdyakov intended to kill Fyodor is a complicated one, and one that the novel never fully answers. Smerdyakov never tells Ivan directly what he intends to do, but he makes veiled remarks about his plans so Ivan may have been nominally or unconsciously aware of it. Furthermore, Smerdyakov claims that his reasons for killing Fyodor originated with Ivan's ideologies. In Ivan's conversations with Smerdyakov, Ivan had claimed that "There is no virtue if there is no immortality" (71) and Smerdyakov took this to mean that there is no virtue, and thus murder is acceptable. Smerdyakov acts surprised when Ivan denies that he ever had intention for Fyodor's death, and that they were not complicit partners in the act.

Ivan failed to interact with Smerdyakov in a way that seriously considered Smerdyakov's intentions and viewpoints. Most importantly, though, Ivan let his conception of self as an "intellectual" get in the way of a true dialectical understanding he could have had with Smerdyakov as a fellow critical thinker. The result was that Ivan is implicated in Fyodor's murder. The guilt Ivan feels for possibly causing his father's death is the punishment he receives for his inability to "decentralize" himself. Unlike Dmitri who stated he wanted to kill Fyodor, Ivan had never exhibited violent feelings toward s his father, and the fact that he is implicated shows how Dostoevsky deliberately creates a punishment for Ivan's egocentrism.

Dostoevsky punctuates Ivan's punishment even more by making Ivan go insane with guilt; Ivan begins to have hallucinations about the devil, and when he interacts with other people he is utterly incoherent. At the trial for his father's murder, he is unable to articulate what Smerdyakov confessed to him in an intelligent and cohesive manner, and instead claims,

Получил от Смердякова, от убийцы, вчера. Был у него пред тем, как он повесился. Убил отца он, а не брат. Он убил, а я его научил убить... Кто не желает смерти отца?...То-то и есть, что в уме... и в подлом уме, в таком же, как и вы, как и все эти... р-рожи! — обернулся он вдруг на публику. — Убили отца, а притворяются, что испугались, — проскрежетал он с яростным презрением. — Друг пред другом кривляются. Лгуны! Все желают смерти отца. Один гад съедает другую гадину... Не будь отцеубийства — все бы они рассердились и разошлись злые... Зрелищ! «Хлеба и зрелищ!»

This means,

It was he [Smerdyakov] who killed father, not my brother [Dmitri]. He killed him, and killed him on my instructions...who doesn't wish for his father's death...?...Everyone wants his father dead. Viper devours viper...circuses! "Bread and circuses!" (686)
Ivan is deemed too insane to testify, and no one takes his statements seriously; Dmitri is convicted of his Fyodor's murder. Ultimately Ivan's pride in his intellectuality serves to make him completely unintelligible in the moment it is most needed. Had Ivan communicated with Smerdyakov effectively, he may have been able to stop Fyodor's

murder; given that chose to see Smerdyakov as an inferior intellect drastically different from himself, Ivan was punished. This tragedy of Ivan's fate actually serves to reinforce an ideal of the dialectical identity, the lesson being that any true understanding of self necessitates a recognition of another's identity.

Hulga, Mrs. Hopewell and Manly Pointer

The character Hulga from "Good Country People" is similar to Ivan in that she strongly identifies as an intellectual and believes herself socially superior because of her success in academia. Also like Ivan, she questions of religion and morality and discussions about it similarly serve as the arena through which she expresses her intellectuality. Whereas Ivan's ideas about morality are connected more to a Manichean conception that recognizes "Good and Evil" Hulga's ideas about morality are more connected to an existential texts like those of Heidegger (who Dostoevsky couldn't have commented on given that he was born nearly a decade after Dostoevsky's death).

Hulga is an avowed atheist, and thus stands out in her family. This aspect of her character seems to be a source of pride. However, unlike Ivan who seems unattached to his arguments either way, Hulga identifies strongly as an atheist, as well as a nihilist and refuses to try and understand religious arguments. She cryptically claims that she can "See through to nothing" (287), and lectures to Manly Pointer that "We are all damned...but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation" (287). Hulga is punished for her isolating egocentrism, that fails to dialectically partake in viewpoints other than her own. Similar to Ivan who allows himself to be flattered when Smerdyakov claims that "It is always interesting to

talk to an intelligent man," Hulga allows herself to be seduced when Manly Pointer complements her on having "serious thoughts" (284). In both narratives the result is a catastrophe that neither the "intellectual" characters could have foreseen.

Hulga is immediately presented as awkwardly out of place in the world of her mother, Mrs. Hopewell, with whom she lives. This is partially because she is crippled with a wooden leg, but also because her personality as an intellectual does not match the personalities of those around her. O'Connor's narrator takes on Mrs. Hopewell's viewpoint when describing Hulga and says:

The girl [Hulga] had taken a Ph.D. and philosophy and this left Mrs. Hopewell at a complete loss. You could say, "My daughter is a nurse," or "My daughter is a schoolteacher," or even, "My daughter is a chemical engineer." You could not say, "My daughter is a philosopher." That was something that had ended with the Greeks and Romans. All day [Hulga] sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks but she didn't like the dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as though she could smell their stupidity (276).

This quote shows a comic juxtaposition between mother and daughter. Hulga and Mrs. Hopewell act as comedic foils for one another. In general Hulga seems overly concerned with pursuits of the mind, whereas Mrs. Hopewell is overly shallow and mostly focused on issues of the body. Mrs. Hopewell's conversations with her servant, Mrs. Freeman, are grotesque and usually related in one way or another to someone's body; they talk about Mrs. Freeman's daughters' sex lives, or the state of Mrs.

Freeman's 15-year old pregnant daughter. "Every morning Mrs. Freeman told Mrs. Hopewell how many times [her daughter] had thrown up since the last report" (272). Mrs. Hopewell is proud of this, claiming that she thinks Mrs. Freeman's daughters are "two of the finest girls she knew" (272). This positive picture of Mrs. Freeman's daughters is drastically different from Mrs. Hopewell's view of her own daughter as "a poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any *normal* good times" (274). Mrs. Hopewell's focus on physical activities like dancing, as the main avenue for "normal good times" drastically differs from the manner that Hulga seems to enjoy herself - by reading passages from existentialists like Heidegger or Malebranche (276).

Another way O'Connor underscores the difference between Hulga and Mrs. Hopewell is through an anecdote about when Hulga legally changed her name from "Joy" to "Hulga." Mrs. Hopewell originally named Hulga "Joy," but as soon as Hulga turned twenty-one she legally changed it to "Hulga." The narrator tells us that Hulga did not change her name because she liked it, but because "of its ugly sound" that she knew her mother would hate (275). A person's name is a kind of symbol for their identity, and in changing her name from 'Joy' to 'Hulga' makes the point that Hulga wishes to sever her identity of herself from that of her mother's - the exact opposite of the dialectical movement towards "self-dispossession."

By the end of the story, though, we see that despite Hulga and Mrs. Hopewell's comically different outlooks on the world, they ultimately make the same mistake of thinking themselves 'superior' in a system of hierarchal social roles as O'Connor has set

up in the polyphonic narrative, Mrs. Hopewell believes she is the 'master' over simple country folk and Hulga/Joy believes she has intellectual superiority over the simple-minded people around her – her mother being the first person she regards in this manner, and Manly Pointer being the second.

Manly Pointer shows up on Mrs. Hopewell's doorstep with a large suitcase claiming he wants to devote his life to "Chrastian service" (279), and tries to sell Mrs. Hopewell a bible. Just as Hulga's name-change is symbolic and meaningful, the name "Manly Pointer" foreshadows the plot to come. His first name, 'Manly' is speaks of his ability to seduce women, and is also an indication of the sexual attraction that Hulga will feel toward him. His last name, Pointer, can be interpreted as a critique of Mrs. Hopewell and Hulga's belief systems because his character effectively 'points' out the discrepancies and assumptions both mother and daughter have towards those they consider inferior to themselves.⁴

On his way out of the house after a second visit to Mrs. Hopewell's, Pointer stops to talk to Hulga. He clearly picked up on her self-identity as an intellectual, and flatters her by saying "I like girls that wear glasses... I think a lot. I'm not like these people that a serious thought don't ever enter their head" (284). Hulga's glasses are a symbol for her intellectuality and a metaphor for the power she feels her intellectuality gives her over other people; just before Hulga is humiliated by Pointer, he steals her glasses, a symbolic action for taking away her self-power and identity. After Pointer comments on

⁴ Although it is not nearly as blatant as in O'Connor's stories, Dostoevsky's use of names is also interesting. For Dostoevsky, however, this is not so important for the internal consistency of the story as much as it relates to certain biographical details about his life and beliefs – For example, Dostoevsky named 'Fyodor' after himself. Alyosha is named after his youngest son. "Smerdyakov" in Russian stems from the word for death (с м е р т ь) a possible foreshadowing that he will commit murder.

her glasses, he flirts with her and says, "Don't you think some people was meant to meet on account of what all they got in common and all? Like they both think serious thoughts and all?" (284).

Pointer's flirtation is successful and they agree to meet for a picnic date the next day. Upon making this date, Hulga immediately sees herself in a position of authority to Pointer, a position that is directly connected to her higher intellect. She thinks herself a person in control of his emotions, and he a kind of sexualized, helpless victim to her wiser and more developed thoughts.

[Hulga] had imagined she seduced him...then, of course, she would have to reckon with his remorse. True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life (284).

Even though Hulga had disagreed with her mother when Mrs. Hopewell called Manly Pointer a "good country person" Hulga nevertheless seems to think of Pointer as an inferior intellect, lacking in a certain capacity for wisdom that she has. Because this is such an integral part of her identity, this superiority Hulga feels toward Pointer causes Hulga to sever her identity with Pointer and does not relate to him in a truly dialectical way.

What occurs on their date is far from the seduction Hulga fantasizes about. Instead it becomes a humiliating punishment for Hulga, and cautionary tale about the dangers of egocentrism. Pointer asks Hulga if they can go sit in the barn loft, an area that can only be reached by ladder. Hulga is able to get to this spot with little difficulty,

despite her wooden leg. Once in the barn loft, they begin to kiss and Pointer asks her to show him how to unscrew her leg. Hulga is offended by this, but decides that his request is due to his "innocence" (289) and a lack of understanding, instead of the grotesque, conscientious, request that it is. When Hulga asks Pointer to put the leg back on, he refuses. Although she failed to realize it beforehand, Hulga now understands that she has placed herself in a vulnerable situation, because without the leg she will not be able to get down from the barn.

Give me my leg!" she screamed and tried to lunge for it but he pushed her down easily. "what's the matter with you all of a sudden?" he asked, frowning as he screwed the top on the flask and put it quickly back inside the bible. "You just a while ago said you didn't believe in nothing. I thought you was some girl!" (290)

Despite all of her previous fantasies where Pointer was emotionally and intellectually dependent on Hulga for a "deeper understanding of the world" the fact is that now Hulga is dependant on Pointer. This change of circumstance seems to reveal Hulga's true sense of superiority as similar to her mother's. The narrator says,

[Hulga's] voice as she spoke had an almost pleading sound. "Aren't you," she murmured, "Aren't you just good country people?" The boy cocked his head. He looked as if he were just beginning to understand that she might be trying to insult him. "Yeah," he said, curling his lip slightly, "but it ain't held me back none. I'm as good as you any day of the week. (290)

O'Connor deliberately makes Hulga use the words "good country people" as a way of solidifying the idea that both mother and daughter feel themselves superior to other's,

even though they see themselves as opposites. At this point we learn that the suitcase of bibles that Pointer carries actually contains liquor, contraceptives and a deck of cards. This suitcase, which had thus far acted as a symbol for Manly Pointer's piety and religiosity, becomes a symbol of his deception and manipulation. Hulga's assumption of Pointer's inferiority, and the fact that she did not consider that he may have had malicious intentions that differed from her own ideas, directly led her to a vulnerable situation, that is a punishment for her inability to recognize that "other is self." However, this punishment makes a very different point in the context of the polyphonic narrative that the a self- identity that views people as inferior and the "opposite" of oneself is weak and likely to endanger one's wellbeing.

Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman

Mrs. Hopewell is similar to Fyodor from *The Brothers Karamazov* in that she is self-absorbed and thinks herself superior to her hired help, Mrs. Freeman. However, unlike Fyodor who does not have any pretensions of nicety towards Smerdyakov, Mrs. Hopewell believes that she treats Mrs. Freeman in a way that is not condescending. Hopewell's moniker for Mrs. Freeman – "a good country person" is not nearly as harsh as Fyodor's names for Smerdyakov as "the lackey" or "Balaam's Ass," but it still points out the difference in their social status.

O'Connor's narrator often points out the discrepancy between Mrs. Hopewell's idea of herself as a "good" person, and the sense of superiority she gets from this view of herself. Mrs. Hopewell is "never ashamed to take [Mrs. Freeman] anywhere or introduce her to anybody they might meet," but not because she regards Mrs. Freeman

as a friend and equal, but instead because it seems to bear on her own goodness and self-conception. Much like the way that Ivan befriended Smerdyakov because it boosted his own ego as an intellectual, Mrs. Hopewell seems to enjoy having the “good country people” around because it bears on her own innate goodness and moral purity. Her friendship with Mrs. Freeman is not due to the fact that she actually respects her, but instead because Mrs. Hopewell wishes uphold an ideal of herself as a person who “had no bad qualities of her own” (272). After introducing Mrs. Freeman to a friend, Mrs. Hopewell would then “tell how she happened to hire the Freemans in the first place and how they were a godsend to her and she had had them for four years. The reason for her keeping the so long was that they were not trash. They were good country people” (272).

Unlike Fyodor whose self-absorbed nature negatively and seriously impacts the people around him, Mrs. Hopewell’s self-conception is portrayed as a caricature of egocentrism and self-delusion. She thinks she “has no bad qualities” and yet speaks about the Freemans as though they are her property; she claims to her favorite saying is “well, other people have their opinions too,” and yet she cannot tolerate her daughter’s atheist opinions. Mrs. Hopewell cuts off a possible connection that she might have with her daughter, because she cannot reconcile her own beliefs with Hulga’s.

Dostoevsky writes separate chapters each of which are narrated as from one character’s perspective to show one character’s outlook on the world. These chapters together create a dialectical tension. Because O’Connor’s stories are much shorter, she does not employ chapters but instead frequently switches the narrator’s perspective to

alternatively sympathize with characters who are “opposed” to one another in the space of a few pages. Sometimes the narrator seems to offer a perspective as though from Mrs. Hopewell’s eyes, and then quickly change it to Hulga’s. For example, the narrator from Mrs. Hopewell’s perspective claims, “Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs. Hopewell’s favorite sayings. Another was: that is life! And still another, the most important, was: well other people have their opinions too” (273). From this perspective, these statements seem like nothing more than character details. When O’Connor’s narrator switches to Hulga’s perspective, though, these seemingly innocuous statements take on a decidedly shallow connotation that is akin to how Hulga views her mother:

“Everybody is different” Mrs. Hopewell said

“Yes, most people is.” Mrs. Freeman said

“It takes all kinds to make the world.”

“I always did say so myself” (273)

[Hulga] was used to this kind of dialogue for breakfast and more of it for dinner”

From Hulga’s perspective, these statements seem so vague that they are meaningless, and the banality of this conversation is comical. This technique creates a heightened tension between the characters, and even a tension about who exactly, to sympathize with.

In the final page of the story O’Connor does not exactly punish Mrs. Hopewell in the way we’ve thus far seen, but the tone of the narrative becomes decidedly

judgemental towards her, and readers are left with a sense that Mrs. Hopewell has exposed herself to vulnerability even if it has not occurred in the space of the plot. The scene depicts Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Hopewell on the countryside, pulling up onions. They glimpse Manly Pointer walking down the road as he returns from the barn-loft where he stole Hulga's wooden leg and left her helpless. Neither Mrs. Hopewell nor Mrs. Freeman are aware of the crime. Mrs. Hopewell says to Mrs. Freeman,

Why that looks like that nice dull young man that tried to sell me a bible yesterday' Mrs. Hopewell said, squinting. "He must have been selling them to the Negroes back in there. He was so simple," she said, "But I guess the world would be better off if we were all that simple." Mrs. Freeman's gaze drove forward and just touched [Manly Pointer] before he disappeared under the hill. Then she returned her attention to the evil-smelling onion shoot she was lifting from the ground. "Some can't be that simple," she said. "I know I never could" (291).

Mrs. Freeman's final response to Mrs. Hopewell is haunting. This is in part due to the fact O'Connor's narrator had not taken on Mrs. Freeman's perspective as explicitly as she did with Mrs. Hopewell and Hulga, and the sudden change of perspective comes as a surprise. The line is also jarring because it can be interpreted in two drastically opposing ways. The word "simple" can mean either "dim-witted" or "morally good," and depending on which way readers interpret the word, the meaning of the last lines change. If one interprets the word simple to refer more to a "dimwitted" person, than it is likely that Mrs. Freeman's comment refers to Mrs. Hopewell herself. The

condescending manner which Mrs. Hopewell regards Freeman and Pointer makes her stupid, clueless, and "simple" because she does not realize that people like Manly Pointer are more in tune with their identities and with the realities of their situation. In this light, Mrs. Freeman's attitude toward Mrs. Hopewell is decidedly negative. However, if we interpret the word to mean "morally good" than Mrs. Freeman's final statements can be interpreted not as a comment about Mrs. Hopewell, but instead a reference to Manly Pointer. Given what we know about Pointer's sinister actions, Mrs. Freeman might be taking issue with Mrs. Hopewell's idea that Pointer is a "good" person. When she says that she could never "be that simple" perhaps she means that she could never commit the kinds of evil deeds that she understands Pointer capable of. Interpreted this way, Mrs. Freeman's attitude of Mrs. Hopewell is decidedly positive and refers not to Mrs. Hopewell's stupidity, but instead for her laudable capacity for good.

Despite the differing possible interpretation for this sentence, the hint of a "punishment" is still present. Interpreted the first way, O'Connor's punishment for Mrs. Hopewell is to further emphasize her idiocy, so that readers are left with a sense that perhaps Hulga's view of her mother was accurate. Interpreted the second way, though, Mrs. Hopewell is naïve to the point where she might place herself in a vulnerable position like Hulga did. So even if Mrs. Hopewell was not harmed in the space of the narrative, there is a hint that Mrs. Hopewell has left herself vulnerable and could very easily find herself in a physically threatening situation, as occurred in Hulga's situation.

Mrs. Freeman's final lines be seen as a polyphonic moment of text, because it can be interpreted in two drastically opposing manners which adds to the complexity of

polyphonic narrative on the whole. O'Connor's effectively employed drastically differing viewpoints in the space of the narrative through her dynamic narrator. She alternatively showed the problem with the elitist intellectualism of Hulga who could not reconcile her beliefs with the idea of "goodness" that her mother was so preoccupied with, as well as how Mrs. Hopewell's insistence on an idea of "the good" gave her a kind of arrogance that caused its own problems. However, what both Hulga and Mrs. Hopewell had in common is the fact that they were unable to reconcile, and "synthesize" into their own identities into a conception that accounted for opposing viewpoints and outlooks. In doing so, they both failed to reach a dialectical understanding of themselves or the people around them.

This very failure of self-dispossession, however, shows just how important the move towards a "higher understanding" really is. "Good Country People" is a polyphonic narrative that clearly encompasses drastically opposing viewpoints and even drastically opposing ideas about who is "most guilty" of egocentrism, Hulga, the "intellectual snob" or the Mrs. Hopewell, the "social snob." Dostoevsky as polyphonic author sets up a similar dynamic in *The Brothers Karamazov* by begging the question of whether it is Ivan, "intellectual snob" who is most guilty of Fyodor's murder, or Fyodor himself, the "social snob" who treated Smerdyakov disdainfully. Both Fyodor and Ivan suffer for their inability to reconcile "self and Other" by the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and, while Hulga and Mrs. Hopewell do not suffer in quite the same tangible way, the humiliation proves a similar point: people who cannot realize Hegel's idea that "other is self," the same people who have weak self-identity, will suffer. These punishments are

a part of the larger point about the importance of recognizing one's place in a totalizing system. The fact that the *Brothers Karamazov* and "good Country People" are polyphonous narratives, and thus a system themselves actually show that even though these characters failed to see dialectic, readers do not have to, and proof of this is the fact of the Polyphonic narrative itself, which works to "synthesize contradictions" and merge them to a higher unity.

Conclusion

The Brothers Karamazov was first published in serial form in the journal *The Russian Messenger* (Русский вестник). Some critics thought that the arguments Dostoevsky put forth in the chapters "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor" were such compelling atheist arguments that whole book was intended to be a defense of atheism. As a devout Orthodox Christian, Dostoevsky was dismayed by this reaction; he repeatedly expressed to publishers that he wrote these chapters as one side of an argument about religiosity, and would address the other side of the argument later on in the narrative. In a letter to the intellectual Konstantin Pobedenotsev, Dostoevsky calls these sections the "Negative side" of his novel, and worries whether his more religious chapters, like, "A Russian Monk" will be "an adequate answer" to his atheist and agnostic characters' philosophical positions." (*Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky* 485)

About 80 years later Flannery O'Connor wrote to a friend,

It is hard to make your adversaries real people unless you recognize yourself in them – in which case, if you don't watch out, they cease to be your adversaries.

I don't know if that was Dostoevsky's trouble or not" (*The Habit of Being* 145).

O'Connor's basic point is that Dostoevsky perhaps did *too* good a job in characterizing those that he may have personally thought of as ideological "adversaries" that is, atheist characters like Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and as such his readers took away a message about atheism that he did not necessarily wish for them to have.

This issue about readers' reception of an author's work was a particularly sensitive issue for O'Connor. She once expressed a similar doubt that her readers would not understand her authorial intentions. She said, "When I sit down to write, a monstrous reader looms up who sits down beside me and continually mutters 'I don't get it, I don't see it, I don't want it. Some writers can ignore this presence but I have never learned how'" (*The Habit of Being* 171). Dostoevsky and O'Connor's personal beliefs about how their texts should be read were not always in line with the way people did read them. The amount of criticism and attention paid to these texts shows the various interpretations people have taken, and speaks to the idea that an author's intentions are not necessarily in line with the interpretations of its readers.

My argument has thus far been about how Dostoevsky and O'Connor operate as creators of a totalizing system, the system of the polyphonic narrative. That said, I do not believe they had absolute control over how their "systems" were to be interpreted, and the form of the polyphonic novel as a place that gives voice to contradictory ideas. The authors themselves allowed the polyphonic narrative grew into something beyond

their control, and beyond the carefully crafted manner that they created their worlds, and placed it in the control of readers. I think this an apt conclusion for the supposedly what I have called the "totalizing system" of the polyphonic narrative. Ultimately, it too, is caught in a dialectic between the author's intention and the readers appropriation.

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