Retelling Dmitri Karamazov’s Story in an Interactive Graphic Novel

by

Wei Tan

Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies
Duke University

Date:_______________________

Approved:

___________________________
Victoria Szabo, Supervisor

___________________________
Bill Seaman

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Raquel Salvetella De Prada

___________________________
Victoria Szabo

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis discusses the subject and media of *Dmitri Karamazov* an interactive graphic novel with Augmented Reality component. *Dmitri Karamazov* is adapted from Dostoevsky’s novel *the Brothers Karamazov*. The author uses a fannish, feminine reading strategy to interpret Dostoevsky’s character Mitya, transforms the original narrative and retells the story with the assistance of AR technology. The use of AR in *Dmitri Karamazov* highlights the fanfiction nature of this interactive graphic novel. It shows how a reader can actively participate in literary interpretation, criticism, writing, rewriting, adapting and creating in a new layer of reality. In terms of literature appreciation and consumption, AR encourages people to break away from their traditional passive-reader roles, and provides a virtual space for people to assume authorship of the materials they encounter.
Dedication

To my parents
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Introduction

My project is an interactive graphic novel called Dmitri Karamazov, focusing on a man named Dmitry Fyodorovich Karamazov. It contains two components. The first component is a printed book, which is a graphic adaptation of the famous Russian novel The Brother Karamazov written by Dostoevsky. The second component contains several branching stories based on the Brothers Karamazov storyline. Those branching stories will be presented virtually.

Dmitry Fyodorovich Karamazov is a fictional character in Dostoevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov. He is usually called Mitya. He is the eldest of the three brothers. In his childhood, he is neglected by his father and is adopted by a relative on his mother’s side when he is three. He is not well educated and has a history of spending money wastefully on alcohol and women. When he turns 28, he betrays his fiancee Katerina for another woman Grushenka, whom his father is also drooling over. He is later accused of murdering his father for money and out of hatred.

The interactive graphic novel Dmitri Karamazov is first of all a reader’s response to Dostoevsky’s novel. I consider adaptation, fanfiction and criticism as different forms of a reader’s response to the original text. Though these three activities use different methods to analyze, transform and expand the source text, they are all capable of criticizing, representing and amplifying the original text. Adapting the Brothers Karamazov into an interactive graphic novel is my way of re-experiencing, engaging with, and contributing
to Dostoevsky’s masterpiece. In *the Brothers Karamazov*, various characters have narrated and have commented on the same event concerning Mitya. They form a book-long discussion of Mitya. My interactive graphic novel is my attempt to join in this discussion.

In this thesis, I discuss how to regard this interactive graphic novel as a criticism, an adaptation as well as a fanfiction to Dostoevsky’s *the Brothers Karamazov*. In other words, this thesis focuses on the meaning and nature of such practice, making an interactive graphic novel out from *the Brothers Karamazov*, instead of the ideas and opinions embedded in the digital book.

Chapter 1 presents my interpretation of Dostoevsky’s character Mitya after close-read *the Brothers Karamazov*. It’s the base for the interactive graphic novel *Dmitri Karamazov*. This chapter describes the design of my protagonist in the book. All the utterance and movement of Mitya in my interactive graphic novel can be explained in this chapter. The whole process of this project is retelling Mitya’s story in *the Brothers Karamazov*, and telling new stories about this character based on my own interpretation of him. Retelling Mitya’s story is a method Dostoevsky used to structure the novel. I will examine the personality of Mitya Karamazov and how Dostoevsky retold his story multiple times in *the Brothers Karamazov* in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 discusses the formats and media used in this project. I state that the physicality of a paper book and the interactivity of augmented reality content are two
important elements of the reading experience of Dmitri Karamazov. This multimedia approach of retelling a story creates a mixed reality. This mixed reality consists of a physical book and several augmented reality stories. On one hand, the printed book can keep the users’ attention longer than on a monitor or a screen. On the other hand, the augmented reality content can provide a few more narratives possibilities for readers who are not content with the story development provided by Dostoevsky.

Chapter 3 is divided into three parts. The first part tries the answer the following question: why there isn’t an online fandom for the Brothers Karamazov? I give two reasons. One is that the Brothers Karamazov is relatively old and it doesn’t have a widespread exposure to potential fanfiction writers. The second reason is that as an acclaimed classic, the Brothers Karamazov has a powerful academic tradition of interpretation which leaves young female fanfiction writers under greater pressure and less freedom. In 3.2, I use Dostoevsky’s own writing as an example to argue that writing a fanfiction is a practice of interpretation, criticism and expansion of the original story.

In the last section of chapter 3, I explain the metaphysical meaning of the application of AR in this project.

1. Dostoyevsky’s Mitya Karamazov

I have said that the interactive graphic novel is the outcome of my close-reading to the text of the Brothers Karamazov. To prove this point, I believe I am obliged to present
my critical analysis of the character Mitya and his function in the narrative in a
traditional literary criticism first. Section 1.1 will be dedicated to this obligation.

The reading strategy I apply in reading the *Brothers Karamazov*, draws on the
readers’ daily experience to make sense of the characters and fictional world. The reader
is aware of the fact that the work has been written into existence, but she doesn’t place
much importance to it. Being aware of writing a story as a literary practice is not key to
the enjoyment of readers reading femininely. This approach emphasizes empathizing
with the character, and encourages readers to focus more on the questions and issues
raised in the content rather than extratextual aspects of the literary work. This method is
commonly used among fans in deciphering characters intentions, motives and the
complex plots. It insists readers to seek answers for questions within the text as the first
priority, instead of investigating indirect exterior influences of the narrative such as the
author’s intentions, or the social, cultural and historical context of the work. This
feminine approach values subtle, careful and convincing interpretation of the character
and the story. It strives to explain the body language and verbal language of a character
reasonably as if he or she were a real human being instead of a symbol for an abstract
idea. Such method foregrounds and underlines the importance of thoroughly grasping a
character’s personality, which is the foundation for any further hermeneutic activity
concerning extratextual aspects of the literary work.

Henry Jenkins thinks the reading approach I apply in reading *The Brothers Karamazov*
bears a significant feminine trait. He said that: “For the female reader, there could
be no simple, clearly defined boundary between fiction and experience, since their metatextual inferences relied upon personal experience as a means of expanding upon the information provided and since character identification became a means of self-analysis.”¹ I’d like to argue that no matter whether male or female, it is impossible to make sense of a story without any real-life experience. The ability to read a story like it’s real comes so naturally that people may not recognize that they are using it. A person, who is not good at observing or understanding emotions in real life, cannot comprehend some characters and stories well. E.M. Forster said that fictional characters are created to be like people: “the actors in a story are, or pretend to be, human beings... their (the characters) nature is conditioned by what he (the novelist) guesses about other people, and about himself, and is further modified by the other aspects of his work.”² If the fictional characters pretend to be real humans, readers can try to interpret their behaviors like real people. Sure, some characters will be better explained by extratextual factors that don’t belong to the fictional world. But for “all the Dostoevsky’s characters,”³ for a round character like Mitya Karamazov, who “is capable of surprising in a convincing way”⁴, the feminine interpretive strategy yields insight.

Now let’s start the analysis.

Among the three Karamazov Brothers, Dmitri Karamazov tends to attract less academic interest than his two younger siblings. However, that doesn’t mean this

² E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, published by Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1927,
character lacks literary appeal. In fact, he is a very charming fictional character and he is a vital force which drives the novel’s plots forward.

When Dostoevsky told a story about a character, he was also making a criticism about that character. Mitya is controversial. Dostoevsky depicted him as someone more than a superfluous profligate, a dissipater and a betrayer. Mitya is presented as a noble human enslaved by desire, who has the will but not the strength to fight that desire. A coward, you might say, but a coward that every person can, and should have the courage to identify himself with: “gentlemen, we’re all cruel, we’re all monsters, we all make men weep, and mothers, and babes at the breast… I’ve sworn to amend, and every day I’ve done the same filthy things.” 5 Dostoevsky said that Dmitri Karamazov was “a thoroughly Russian character: unless there’s thunder, the peasant won’t cross himself.”6

What is unique about Dmitri Karamazov is that, when a character tells a story about Mitya, they are also making a criticism of themselves. This particular man, or character who is good at self-reflection, has the special power to bring out the fundamental characteristics of the people around him. He is like a mirror, a touchstone in the novel. Mitya has hurt many people, including himself. His seemingly noble fiancé once chooses to forgive him, not out of generosity but out of revenge. His second brother

Ivan, who claims that “everything is lawful”, despises him, but chooses to save him because he believes he himself is responsible for their father’s death. He and his father hate each other, partly because his father is a brazen old clown that has love for none of his sons. Mitya’s lover Grushenka is mean to him at first, but later she is willing to be his slave. His youngest brother has never stopped believing in his good nature. All these characters have their own opinions of Mitya and their opinions vary tremendously. Mitya either earns their instinctive affection, or stings the softest part of their souls. No matter what their attitudes towards Mitya are, they reveal their true nature when they talk about him and interact with him. Maybe that’s the reason why Dostoevsky retold Dmitri Karamazov’s story from various perspectives and in various time orders over and over.

In section 1.1.1, I will mainly discuss how the narrator’s voice describes Mitya, where it occurs, what it says, what’s those words impact on readers, and how it reveals Dostoevsky’s own moral judgement. I will describe how Mitya regards himself in 1.1.2. In section 1.1.3, I will present Katerina and Grushenka’s opinions of Mitya and how they react to his behaviors. Then I will discuss how their reactions reflect their inner most desires.

Section 1.2 examines the functionality of different versions of Mitya’s stories in regard to the entire novel.
1.1 What people say about Mitya

1.1.1 What the narrator says about Mitya

There is a narrator in The Brothers Karamazov. He appears in the novel as “I”. He frequently comments on Mitya’s actions. However, so many things have been said about Mitya and they are all said in a tone so genuine and certain that it seems they are irrefutable. It’s easy for a reader to get lost in the eloquent speeches from various characters. One may find it hard to tell whose which sentence follows the author’s judgement of Mitya and whose does not. Thus, before I move on to talk about how this narrator described Mitya and what’s his attitude for Mitya, I want to sort out the relationship between “I” and Dostoevsky first. Does “I” share the same moral norms as Dostoevsky himself? Is “I” a reliable spokesman for Dostoevsky in the novel?

In the first sentence of the book “I” has made his unmistakable and strong appearance: “Alexey Fyodorovich Karamazov was the third son of Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, a landowner well-known in our district in his own day (and still remembered among us) owing to his tragic and obscure death, which happened exactly thirteen years ago and which I shall describe in its proper place.” According to Wayne C. Booth, narrators who are “aware of themselves as writers” are “self-conscious” narrators.

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Booth also says that: “in any reading experience there is an implied dialogue among author, narrator, the reader, and the other characters of the story. Each of the four can range, in relation to each of the others, from identification to complete opposition, on any axis of value, moral, intellectual aesthetic, and even physical.” So how is this “I” related to Dostoyevsky himself? “I”, the narrator is definitely not identified with Dostoevsky physically, because “I” is at the trial of Mitya and “I” has written sentences like “I turned cold and trembled as I listened.” “To my thinking she(Katerina) was very good-looking at that moment, and not at all pale, as the ladies alleged afterwards.” “It must be noted that Grushenka’s surname was ‘Svetlova.’ I heard it for the first time that day, during the case.” Therefore, we can assume that “I” only exists in the fictional world created by Dostoevsky.

I want to call your attention to the section called “From the Author” at the beginning of the novel. This “author” refers to himself as “I”, too. So, is he Dostoevsky or the narrator? Booth would call this “author” in the foreword “the implied author” of “the author’s ‘second self’”: “This implied author is always distinct from the ‘real man’--whatever we may take him to be--who creates a superior version of himself, a ‘second self,’ as he creates his work.” It is impossible for us to get to know Dostoevsky in person, because he is dead and we were not part of his life. When we read and study Dostoevsky’s works, we can only get to know the “second self” of Dostoevsky. In this case, when I talk about what

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Dostoevsky thought about Mitya, I actually means what “the implied author” of the *Brothers Karamazov* thinks about Mitya. “The ‘implied author’ chooses, consciously and unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices.”

There is inevitably a distance among Dostoevsky the physical person, Dostoevsky the author and the narrator “I” in the novel. Since understanding Dostoevsky in flesh is out of question, what matters here is how distant the rest two identities are from each other? How “I” and the second self of Dostoevsky in *the Brothers Karamazov* regards Mitya differently?

My answer to the questions above is that “I”, the narrator shares the same moral principle as Dostoevsky the author and they interpret Mitya’s behaviors in the same way. Let’s compare how the narrator describes and comments on the scene where Mitya checked on the unconscious Gregory, who is the servant of his father, and how Dostoevsky explained Mitya’s action in this scene in a letter to his reader. The narrator writes:"

*Mitya jumped back into the garden and bent over the fallen man… The old man’s head was covered with blood. Mitya put out his hand and began feeling it. He remembered afterwards clearly, that he had been awfully anxious to make sure whether he had broken the old man’s skull, or simply stunned him with the pestle…He remembered taking out of his pocket the clean white*
handkerchief... and putting it to the old man’s head, senselessly trying to wipe the blood from his face and temples. But the handkerchief was instantly soaked with blood.

‘Good heavens! What am I doing it for?’ thought Mitya, suddenly pulling himself together. ‘If I have broken his skull, how can I find out now? And what difference does it make now?’ he added, hopelessly. ‘If I’ve killed him, I’ve killed him... You’ve come to grief, old man, so there you must lie!’ he said aloud. And suddenly turning to the fence, he vaulted over it into the lane and fell to running.....’

Sixty pages later, Mitya is being questioned by the prosecutor about this. The prosecutor asks Mitya to explain why he jumps back down to the old servant. Mitya replies: “Oh, hang it!... I jumped down to look at the man I’d hurt... I don’t know what for!” The prosecutor asks if Mitya wants to help him or restores him to consciousness, Mitya answers: “Help!... Yes, perhaps I did want to help him... I don’t remember... I don’t know whether I hoped it (to restore Gregory to consciousness). I simply wanted to make sure whether he was alive or not.” The narrator then comments: “Alas! It never entered Mitya’s head to tell them...that he jumped back from pity, and standing over the prostrate figure had even uttered some words of regret: ‘you’ve come to grief, old man--there’s no help for it. Well, there

you must lie.’”14 The narrator states Mitya’s action and words are out of pity and regrets, instead of cold-blooded calculation to wipe out witness.

In 1879, a reader named E.N. Lebedeva wrote a letter to Dostoevsky asking for clarification about the murder--did Mitya kill his father or not? And Dostoevsky replied as follows: "When Dmitri Karamazov jumped down from the fence and started to wipe the blood from the head of the old servant he had wounded, by that very act and his words: ‘you’ve come to grief old man,’ etc., he already seems to indicate to the reader that he is not the parricide. Had he killed the father and then ten minutes later Grigory, he wouldn’t have jumped off the fence to go to the servant he had knocked down, except possibly to convince himself that a vital witness of his crime had been destroyed. But besides that, he seems to feel compassion for him, says: ‘You’ve come to grief, old man,’ etc. Had he killed the father, he would not have stood over the servant’s body with words of pity. The plot is not the only important thing for the reader, but also some knowledge of human soul(psychology), which every author is entitled to expect from the reader.”15

We can see it clearly from the expert of the book and the expert of the letter that the narrator’s interpretation of Mitya and Dostoevsky’s design of Mitya at that scene are completely identical. When “I” comments on certain characters’ behaviors, expresses

certain emotions for certain acts, we can assume that Dostoevsky would comment and feel the same way. “Vetlovskaya writes that Dostoevsky deliberately blurred the lines between himself as author and his fictional narrator because this indistinction allowed him to express his own opinions in a veiled and seemingly naive and innocent fashion...Dostoevsky uses him to insinuates his own point of view without arousing an instantly hostile response.”¹⁶ We can then rely on the narrator’s moral judgement and use it as a standard to exam the value of other characters’ opinions. How do those characters deviate from Dostoevsky’s moral norm set for the Brothers Karamazov?

Having established the the authority of the narrator’s voice, let’s now see how he talks about Mitya: “this Dmitry Fyodorovich was the only son of Fyodor Pavlovich’s three sons who grew up in the belief that he had some property, and that he would be independent on coming of age. His boyhood and youth passed in a disorderly way... he... led a wild life and spent a comparatively large amount of money.”¹⁷ Before chapter VI, “Why is such a man alive”, all the narrator does was “telling” us about Mitya without “showing” him. The narrator says his life is “wild”. But how wild, in what sense? What he spends his money on? We don’t get the specifics. Dmitry doesn’t come “face to face” to readers until 50 pages later, when he arrives late at the family gathering held at Father Zosima’s place.

He is properly dressed and is polite to everyone. He even bows to his father. He remains silent for most of the time, listening to other people. It isn’t until his father slanders him further and further that he becomes agitated and asks the people in the room why a man like his father should be allowed to live? The narrator says that Mitya “was irascible by nature”\(^\text{18}\) and sketches out his general countenance: “Even when he was excited and talking irritably, his eyes somehow did not follow his mood, but betrayed something else, something quite incongruous with what was passing… People saw something pensive and sullen in his eyes were startled by his sudden laugh, which bore witness to cheerful and playful thoughts at the very time when his eyes were so gloomy”\(^\text{19}\). This reflects his “broad Karamazov character” that “he was capable of… simultaneously contemplating both abyss, the abyss above us, the abyss of the high ideals, and the abyss below us, the abyss of the lowest and foulest degradation.”\(^\text{20}\)

The narrator doesn’t comment on Mitya’s personality again until Book Eight. It is two days after the farce at the monastery. By then, Mitya has made up his mind to take Grushenka away once and for all, and he will go to great lengths to restore Katerina’s 3000 roubles. He despises his current life-style and yearns for a virtuous life. Mitya

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believes that his resurrection can only begin with Grushenka accepting his love, but not Katerina’s forgiveness or marriage. “He resolved with all the fervor of his passion that when once Grushenka told him she loved him and would marry him, it would mean the beginning of a new Grushenka and a new Dmitri Fyodorovich, free from every vice, and containing only virtue. They would forgive one another and would begin their lives afresh.”

The narrator generalizes that many men (including women, like Grushenka) in Mitya’s case, who “had sunk of his own free will” into “the filthy morass” which “was too revolting to him”, think that changing place is their best option to end all the vice. They blame the environment: “if only it were not for these people, if only it were not for these circumstances, if only he could fly away from this accursed place — — he would be all together regenerated, would enter on a new path.”

The tone of the narrator is mildly accusing. The narrator apparently doesn’t think changing of environment will necessarily result in a profound change in one’s personality. As later we can see clearly that Ivan’s escape to Moscow neither quenches his love for Katerina nor clears his guilty conscience for putting his father in danger.

When Mitya comes up with the idea of asking Grushenka’s former “sugar daddy”, old businessman Kuzma Samsonov, for money, the narrator has anticipated that readers will feel contempt and disapproval of Mitya’s thinking: “possibly many of the readers...will

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feel that in...being ready to take his bride, so to speak, from the hands of her former protector, Dmitri Fyodorovich showed great coarseness and want of delicacy”. So, he tries to dissolve such reactions by commenting on this in an amused and slightly endeared tone: “I would only observe that...in any case there was much simplicity on Mitya’s part in all this, for, in spite of all his vices, he was a very simple-hearted man. It was an instance of this simplicity that Mitya was seriously persuaded that...old Kuzma must sincerely repent of his past relations with Grushenka, and that she had no more devoted friend and protector in the world than this, now harmless, old man.”²³ However, Kuzma Samsonov is not what Mitya hopes him to be. He not only refuses to give Mitya money to take Grushenka away, but also sends Mitya on a wild goose chase later.

In chapter 3 of Book 8 in the Brothers Karamazov, the narrator talks a lot about Mitya’s jealousy: “he was that sort of jealous man who, in the absence of the beloved woman, at once invents all sorts of awful fancies of what may be happening to her, and how she may be ‘betraying’ him, but, when shaken, heart-broken, convinced of her faithlessness, he runs back to her; at the first glance at her face, her gay, laughing, affectionate face, he revives at once, lays aside all suspicion and with joyful shame abuses himself for his jealousy.”²⁴ The narrator links jealousy to shame and moral degradation. He adds that many honorable men are jealous

men too: “those very men of noble hearts, standing hidden in some cupboard, listening and spying, never feel the stings of conscience at that moment, anyway, though they understand clearly enough with their ‘noble hearts’ the shameful depths to which they have voluntarily sunk.” Mitya is one of these people. He has a broad character that allows contradicting emotions to coexist and he is capable of acting on both his most virtuous and most disgraceful intentions. Mitya’s ill intention to insult Katerina when she first comes to his apartment is offset by his generously offering her 5000 roubles without any condition. The harm he has done to the captain, Fenya and Grigory is cushioned by his sincere regret for his behaviors. Every time the narrator exposes one of Mitya’s many shortcomings, he will never forget to mention one of Mitya’s advantages. This reminds me of Prosper Mérimée’s comment on Carmen’s appearance: “to every blemish she united some advantage, which was perhaps all the more evident by contrast.” To every flaw in his personality, Mitya unites some virtue, which is perhaps all the more evident by contrast.

I have discussed “the tone of the narrator” several times previously. I should admit that these are merely my interpretation of the narrator’s narration from his choice of words. Certainly, there are other readers who think differently. Booth has said that:

“‘Tone’ is ….. used to refer to the implicit evaluation which the author manages to convey

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behind his explicit presentation, but it almost inevitably suggests again something limited to the merely verbal; some aspects of the implied author may be inferred through tonal variations, but his major qualities depend also on the hard facts of action and character in the tale that is told.”

He also said that: “his (an author’s) very choice of what he tells will betray him to the reader.”

So, for the rest of this section, I want to back up my interpretation by looking at what the narrator chooses to show and not to show instead of how he commented on what he showed.

We never get many details of the debauched and dissipated side of Mitya. Compared to words about a remorse, lovesick Mitya who “struggled with his own destiny and trying to save himself”\(^\text{29}\), depictions about how Mitya indulges himself in drink and women are rare. Most of those rare depictions are not narrated in the third person, but from Mitya’s own mouth and even those words are very abstract: “I always like side-paths, little dark back alleys behind the main road---there one finds adventures and surprises, and precious metal in the dirt. I am speaking figuratively, brother. In the town I was in, there were no such back alleys in the literal sense, but morally there were. If you were like me, you’d know what that means.”\(^\text{30}\) Maybe it is because Dostoevsky thought it’s inappropriate to describe such activities in graphic details. Or more likely, he deliberately chooses not to show the


ugliest side of Mitya to his readers. For example, one of Mitya’s biggest wrongdoings is betraying Katerina, becoming one of Grushenka’s pursuers and spending lots of Katerina’s money in revelry with Grushenka. According to Mitya, it all happens on the same day. But we never get much details of that day from either Mitya or the narrator, compared to the exhaustive description of their second visit to Mokroe. What happens between the two when Mitya finally succumbs to Grushenka’s charm? How does Mitya look when he drools over Grushenka? What is he thinking when he uses Katerina’s money to buy Grushenka wine and sweets? How does Mitya tell Grushenka about the incident that Katerina comes to him for money when he is drunk? The infidelity of Mitya is frequently mentioned and discussed by the narrators as well as other characters, but it is never fully demonstrated, never fully “shown”. Those events are never described or retold in detail by any involved or uninvolved parties in the book.

The narrator also tries to hide the brutal side of Mitya, too. One may argue that he does show how Mitya brutally beats his father and the old servant Grigory in the living room in chapter 9, book 3. On one hand, under that circumstance, he is holding the belief that his father and the servant has hidden Grushenka from him. His behavior is disgraceful but understandable. He is using violence to get back the woman he loves. On the other hand, Mitya frequently looks for meaningless fights. He inflicts harm to innocent people to vent his frustration out. Mitya has more than once hurt people who means him no malice. He beats the captain who brings him his father’s message in public. He seeks fights in local pubs. He shakes Grushenka’s poor servant girl Fenya
violently when she refuses to tell him where Grushenka is. None of these events gets fully dramatized. Mitya’s wild behaviors in pubs and his bestial beating of the captain are frequently referred to but never shown. The narrator refrains from his readers how cruel Mitya can become when he is bilious. Though the narrator does vividly depict how Mitya barges into the apartment and orders Fenya to tell him Grushenka’s location, their total encounter lasts for less than three minutes and Mitya doesn’t do Fenya any actual physical harm.

Why? Why does the narrator choose to tell us about the honorable and misfortunate side of Mitya instead of the despicable side? Why does the narrator choose to show the readers only a few days in Mitya’s life during which he is undergone big changes, and says only a couple of words about the rest?

The most natural answer to this question is that the narrator wants us to like this character. He wants us to sympathize him instead of despising him. As a fictional character, with the help of a masterful narrator, Dmitri Karamazov successfully arouses the readers’ tender feelings, like he does to the ladies in the novel, and makes us feel sorry for the court’s decision. I have an anecdote that makes me think deeper about my empathy for Mitya. I retold Mitya’s story to my mother with the intention of making her despise him. I told her that Mitya originally tries to seduce a noble young lady with money but fails, and later Mitya betrays his fiancée for a cunning woman. When I told her that Mitay is found guilty for his father’s murder, my mother exclaimed: “poor
man...” My skill of telling the story is certainly not as great as Dostoevsky’s, and I tried to use the story materials to get a negative opinion of Mitya from a reader who had never read Dostoyevsky’s version, but the Mitya in my retelling still succeeded in gaining my mother’s sympathy, though she later referred to Mitya as the “playboy”. If the sympathy is not simply the result of the narrator’s technique, then there must be something in Mitya’s encounters that make him pitiful.

The narrator only shows a fraction of Mitya’s life, about a week in his 28 years, in which he has spent most of his time in unhealthy habits. Are these few days in his life capable to define what kind of person Mitya is? How can these few days weigh against years of unmentioned debauchery? Can we judge Mitya simply by these few days of nobility, these few highlights in his mostly chaotic life? I believe the narrator wants the reader to do so, but the court, Mitya’s fellow citizens refuse to comply.

I, as a reader of the Brothers Karamazov only had a vague idea of how low Mitya has already sunken before he meets Katerina. Therefore, even though I feel sorry for Mitya’s misfortune, I could not be sure whether Mitya’s guilty conscience is heavy enough for the harm he has done to others. I could not say whether 20 years in Siberia is a justified punishment for all his violence, his debaucheries. I don’t even know whether he is the man he describes himself to be. What if he is too sensitive, too easy to feel guilty that he considers himself much worse than he truly is? What if in the past he doesn’t cause that much harm as he thinks now? What if during his early life, all he commits were petty crimes in law but he considers them horrible sins out of excessive sense of honor,
according to his higher ideal? How is a reader supposed to judge him fairly, when so much of his life is unknown? As you can see above, I tried to think in Mitya’s logic, that twenty-year of hard labor in Siberia is what he deserves. Such logic dissolves my initial sympathy for Mitya, instead of explaining it.

Therefore, I engaged in another discussion with my mother, who is a very traditional Chinese lady and has zero tolerance for infidelity, to find out why she still pitied such a “playboy”. She then told me, she could not accept Mitya’s idea that the court’s decision was his nemesis for all he had done. If later Grushenka abandons him, and he gradually becomes a beggar and leads a miserable life, that it will be the right form of a nemesis. Mitya should be punished for and by what he has done, but not by what he does not do. A nemesis should be an execution of justice, and should not be inflicted on people as a miscarriage of justice. The court, the law could only punish Mitya if he had actually killed his father. It could not punish Mitya for his previous mistakes. It could not punish Mitya for having the desire to kill his father—even though Mitya thinks he should be punished for that—as Ivan said: “as for rights, who has not the right to wish…even if for another man’s death?”31 I am not saying that wishing for somebody’s death is appropriate. My point is that law is not applicable to ideas within people’s heads.

The puzzle of why one will sympathize Mitya is hence, solved. This sympathy comes largely from the fact that we readers disagree with Mitya on what he deserves. On one hand, we think the name of a patricide and its punishment was too heavy a cross for Mitya. We think it is unfair for a young man like Mitya, or any one, to be punished for a crime he does not commit. On the other hand, Mitya thinks twenty years in Siberia is appropriate for his sins. He has a conscience that is ready to suffer pain for more than his share. Jesus has a heart that is willing to suffer pain for others, which is a wish to sacrifice. Mitya’s logic and his attitude towards the court’s decision demonstrated that he truly repents all the harm he had caused in his life. He deems himself lower than readers think he is, because he is comparing himself to a higher moral standard than the common readers are. He is being unfair to himself (in the readers’ eyes) by accepting the court’s accusation. In addition to his generosity, his honesty, his compassion and other virtues, his repentance and his ability to see a nobler moral standard than us fuel our sympathy for him. If we had reached “the abyss of the highest ideals”32 which Mitya is contemplating—to love your neighbors, to be responsible for starving mothers and crying babies33— if we were people who acted according to those ideals, we wouldn’t feel

33 Mitya said that “we’re all cruel, we’re all monsters because we all make men weep, and mothers, and babes……” He was taking responsibility for other people who weren’t related to him. He was blaming himself for others misfortune. He did so because he failed his higher ideals, which require people to love their neighbors.
sympathy for him, we would think he deserves 20 years in Siberia. Mitya is below us, and above us at the same time.

1.1.2 What Mitya says about himself and others

Mitya’s self-evaluation is generally close to the narrator’s judgement about him. One of the main differences is that Mitya doesn’t think he is naive and simple, especially on financial matters, while the narrator has said so on several occasions.

To understand how Mitya regards himself, we should turn our attention to Mitya’s two confessions, the one to his youngest brother Alyosha, and the one during the preliminary investigation. In this section I will mainly discuss two aspects of his character: first, his attitude towards his wild lifestyle; second, how he compares himself to Katerina and to Grushenka. These two women are the main driving forces behind most of his actions in the novel. Finally, I will briefly explain how his attitude towards Ivan changes.

In the first confession, which is made to his young brother Alyosha, Mitya calls himself an “insect”, to whom God gives sensual lust. His idea of beauty is of the most sacred and the filthiest, which reflects his character that can contemplate two abysses at the same time. He says: “Beauty is a terrible and awful thing!...... I can’t endure the thought that a man of lofty mind and heart begins with the ideal of the Madonna and ends with the ideal

of Sodom. What’s still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna, and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in his days of youth and innocence. Yes, man is broad, too broad, indeed. I’d have him narrower. The devil only knows what to make of it! What to the mind is shameful is beauty and nothing else to the heart… Believe me, that for the immense mass of mankind beauty is found in Sodom…… The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is the heart of man. But a man always talks of his own ache.”

On one hand, Mitya despises himself of indulging in base vice, desire. On the other hand, he is quite proud of his frequent successful attempts at satisfying such desire. He says: “ladies used to be fond of me… I’ve a perfect album of reminiscences, brother. God bless them, the darlings…” He isn’t willing to break away from the sensual pleasure at this point, even though he knows it is unhealthy: “for when I do leap into the abyss, I go headlong with my heels up, and am pleased to be falling in that degrading attitude, and consider it something beautiful.” He claims that he doesn’t know how to reform himself, how to lift himself from the vilest degradation. However, he knows very clearly that he has sunk this far because of his lack of self-control: “I’m a beast, with no more self-control than a

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It is driven by such lust, and his inability of controlling such lust that Mitya has become so dissipated that he would murder his father to meet his immoral sexual desire, which is embodied by Grushenka. It isn’t until the preliminary investigation, when he is threatened to bear the name of “parricide” that he starts to realize how horrible his idea of murder is. He is so abhorred by the ugliness of such intention, by how blinded and despicable he has become, that he tells the prosecutor that though he is innocent, he is willing to accept punishment for the fact that he means to kill his father. In his first confession, Mitya is pleased to leap into the abyss with his heels up. In his second confession, the one to the prosecutor and the attorney, Mitya is eager to purify himself. He chooses to suffer instead of cleaning his name or continues his indulgence: “I accept the torture of accusation, and my public shame, I want to suffer and by suffering I shall be purified.”

Katerina and Grushenka, two important women in Mitya’s life, are both beauties. They somehow represent the two ideals of beauty in Mitya’s mind. He refers to Katerina as “the angel of his heart” and praises her lofty sentiments as sincere as “heavenly

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angel’s”. As for Grushenka, Mitya loves her and hates her at the same time. He said “she’s a merciless cheat and swindler,” but he is willing to marry her if she would, and “be the porter at her gate...” and “clean her friends’ galoshes, blow up their samovar, run their errands.” He refers to Grushenka as his “back-alley”, “his filthy back-alley, his beloved back-alley, where he is at home and where will sinkin filth and stench at his own free will and with enjoyment.”

Readers later know clearly that Katya is not a forgiving angel but a jealous woman who is capable of remarkable wrath. And Grushenka turns out not to be a pure devil but a woman who will sacrifice and repent.

Mitya is sure that Katya is way above him. Katya’s offer of love and marriage brings him no comfort. He says the love letter from Katya “stabbed” him. In that letter, Katya says she loves Mitya and wants to save him from himself. Katya’s love is a constant reminder of how low he is compared to Katerina’s self-sacrifice out of gratitude to him. Mitya has never felt at ease by Katya’ side. He has doubted that he will not love Katerina forever. He agrees with Alyosha’s opinion that he will not be “tranquil happy with her.” He says Katya is proud, she is the sort of person that does not yield to fate: “she thinks she can overcome everything, that everything will give way to her.” He often

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unconsciously laughs at her risky noble attempts, saying that she falls in love with her own illusion, saying that such self-sacrifice is ridiculous, but he will quickly criticizing himself for doing so. It is because he is ashamed of himself for not being capable of what she will do for virtues, even though he knows that Katya’s obsession of being noble is not healthy, either. Mitya realizes that Katya’s offer of marriage is generous and it is a huge sacrifice on her part. He is convinced that Katya does not do so out of love for him, but out of her desire for loftiness, her illusion of herself being a goddess. Her love, her marriage, her offer of salvation is not sincere. He is right.

The nobler Katya appeared, the more ashamed Mitya felt. Both of them knew this. Katya has been using her nobility as a weapon to shame Mitya, to keep reminding him that even though Mitya doesn’t take advantage of her when he has the chance, she is still the nobler, the more generous party in their relationship. Although Mitya acknowledges whole-heartedly that Katerina has the moral high ground: “I know that I am a million times baser in soul than she”[^44], he has sensed that behind every forgiveness, every sacrifice she gives him for his profligacy and dissipation, there is a will to revenge, a will to subdue, a will to control him by his own guilt and shame. That’s why he wants to get rid of Katya, the woman who encourages him to hurt her and then torments his conscience.

He writes to Katya that: “better Siberia than your love”\(^45\) and he will “ruined himself to hold his ground, rather than endure your pride”. At the court, when Katya betrays Mitya, he yells that he knows Katya has tried to dishonor him. He swears he loves her even while he hates her, but she doesn’t love him.

As for why Katerina wants to seek revenge from Mitya, why she wants to dishonor him so badly that she is willing to encourage his unfaithfulness, why she chooses him to fulfill her ideal image of herself, Mitya does not know. He has a simple mind and he does not realize how he has wounded Katya’s pride when she comes to him for money, and when he offers her 5000 roubles without asking for anything in return. I shall come back to this when I discuss Katerina’s character in 1.1.3.

Mitya’s desire for Grushenka is complicated in the novel. It is hard to tell whether it is morally right or wrong. The author clearly states that such desire is more than primitive, base sexual attraction, even though it probably started as such: “in his (Mitya’s) love for the woman, there was an element of something far higher than he himself imagined, that it was not only a sensual passion, not only the ‘curve of her body’, of which he had talked to Alyosha.”\(^46\) If it is such great love, is it enough to justified Mitya’s betrayal of his


fiancée Katerina for his pursuit of Grushenka? Should a man be encouraged to pursuing such love even though he will hurt another woman deeply? Dostoevsky didn’t give direct answers to these questions, but we can assume that he favored Grushenka over Katerina as Mitya’s lover, since the narrator had openly criticized Katerina’s love was unhealthy: “she had loved him with an hysterical, ‘lacerated’ love only from pride, from wounded pride, and that love was not like love, but more like revenge.”

Mitya considers Grushenka to be of the same rank as he is, though he later refers to her as “the queen of queens.” In his first confession, he believes Grushenka will lead him to a lower lifestyle and his obsession of her is harmful to his morality, but he is willing to sink further. He is amused by her insult to Katerina and says endearingly that she is “the queen of impudence” and “hanging is too good for her.” But he soon puts his faith in Grushenka, believing passionately that if Grushenka accepts his proposal, they could become new people and they will start a virtuous new life immediately. He considers Grushenka is similar to himself. He is a man of many sins, and she is a woman of many sins. Many girls have become the victims of Mitya’s lust, while many men have fell for Grushenka. Mitya has broken many girls’ hearts, while Grushenka has cruelly tormented no fewer pursuers. Mitya yearns for a virtuous new life and he thinks

Grushenka needs the same, which he is right. Maybe that’s why he thinks once he gets Grushenka’s love, the two of them will be completely different. He may think that since both of them have the will to be good, if they love each other, they will have the strength to get rid of all their bad habits. Dostoevsky didn’t give his readers the chance to find out if Mitya was right, because no sooner than Grushenka accepts Mitya’s love, they are separated.

In the second confession, we can see very clearly that Mitya not only has a good sense of honor, but he is also very proud of it. He curses himself for not being able to act honorably, and treats people who cannot understand his sense of honor with contempt:

“Gentlemen, we’re all cruel, we’re all monsters...but of all, let it be settled here, now, of all I am the lowest reptile!”

That’s why he is so annoyed when the lawyers cannot understand his “a-thief-is-worse-than-a-scoundrel” theory: “Oh, God, you horrify me by not understanding... Do you understand now? Do you understand?” That’s why during the preliminary investigation, he keeps calling the prosecutor and the attorney “blind moles and scoffers” who won’t believe his words because they don’t share his sense of honor. He seems to think mistakes make under certain passion are less severe than having a

nasty intention consciously: “it’s just the motive of it that’s the disgrace!” He thinks spending all of Katerina’s money in excitement is better than stealthily keeping half of it for his betrayal. In such logic, it is not hard to understand why he is willing to being punished for having the idea of killing his father. It is because in Mitya’s eyes, murderous intention is worse than the actual act of killing.

Mitya’s attitude towards Ivan changes. In his first confession, he speaks very highly of Ivan and he thinks that a girl like Katerina deserves Ivan instead of him: “Don’t you see what a lot she thinks of Ivan, how when respects him? When she compares us, do you suppose she can love a man like me, especially after all that has happened here?” But after Mitya has undergone the preliminary investigation, when Ivan visits him, he tells Ivan “sharply that it was not for people who declared that “everything was lawful,” to suspect and question him.” His attitude towards Ivan changes mainly because he, Mitya himself no longer considers “everything was lawful”. Before, he feels no discomfort to murder his father, but now he realizes parricide is unlawful under any circumstances. Mitya now has consciously known that he has a moral bottom-line that he would not cross. It is that bottom-line that has stopped him from killing his father. The fact that he has always had


such morality in his heart even though he doesn’t realize it, gives him the impression that he has the moral high ground. Therefore, he is “proudly scornful of the charges against him” and is angry at people who think that he is a person capable of actual murder, a person who has no sense of honor. He feels that Ivan is as impudent and despicable as he original is. That Ivan doesn’t have a bottom line as he does. Thus, he “was anything but friendly with Ivan”\(^53\) when Ivan came to find out the truth about their father’s murder. When Ivan declares in the court that he is the one who is responsible for their father’s death, “Mitya stood up and greedily looked at his brother and listened to him with a wild, twisted smile.”\(^54\)

1.1.3 What the two women thought about Mitya

Katerina accuses Mitya as a “scoundrel”\(^55\), a “monster”\(^56\), but she has once offered to save him and be “the carpet on which you walk”?\(^57\). Grushenka says Mitya is a “noble

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heart”⁵⁸, but claims that she has only loved him for an hour. His second brother calls him a “reptile”. Rakitin says he is honest, stupid and a sensualist⁵⁹. Father Zosima says Mitya has a look in his eyes, that makes him ”horror-stricken at what that man is preparing for himself.”⁶⁰ Many people have commented on him, but no one seems to be able to grasp him completely.

Let’s talk about how Katerina perceives Mitya first.

Edward Wasiolek gives a succinct summary of Katerina’s attitude towards Mitya:

“Engaged to Dmitry, Katerina regards him as a repugnant monster; determined to save him, she plots his ruin; frantic to keep him faithful, she provokes his betrayal of her. It is she who almost saves him at the trial, and it is she who most irrevocably ruins him legally by the letter she produces in which he had uttered threats against his father’s life... Her fitful character sweeps her from love to hate, generosity to spite, arrogance to submissiveness... There is something in her relations with Dmitry that she cannot forgive, something that drives her to pursue him with an unrelenting, self-punishing love.”⁶¹

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⁶¹ From Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction, pp151-60. 1964 Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Published by the MIT Press.
Mitya has wounded her pride three times. The first time is when Mitya showed no interest to be acquainted with her in a ball. She revenges by treating Mitya coldly and scornfully when Mitya finally comes up to her a few evenings later. The second time is she comes to Mitya’s apartment for money to save her father, exactly as Mitya suggests to her sister earlier. Mitya’s suggestion is already an insult. She allows herself to sell her beauty is an even greater insult to her dignity. But she has no choice. She sacrifices herself for her father and the nobility of such sacrifice soothes her ego. In her eyes, Dmitri Karamazov is a despicable man who takes advantage of her family’s misfortune.

The third time comes as a surprise. Mitya doesn’t salvage her. Instead, he manages to refrain himself from his malicious plan and offers Katerina all the money he has without asking for anything in return. He then bows to her. Katerina is shocked. She believes she ought to be grateful, which she appears so with a bow to Mitya, but deep down she feels profoundly humiliated. Edward Wasiolek says that “it is his bow, out of respect to her, that hurts. For with the bow Dmitry changes from one who abases and humiliates to one who respects and forgives. And she hates the long bow she must return, for it acknowledges his triumph over her.”62 I agree with the first part of his opinion, but I cannot agree with the second. If there was a “triumph”, then there must have been a competition going on between this two. Mitya and Katerina doesn’t compete on who had the higher morality at the very beginning. Their grudge starts with Mitya ignoring

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62 From Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction, pp151-60. 1964 Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Published by the MIT Press.
Katerina’s attention, and then Katerina ignores his: ”I simply wanted to revenge myself, because I was such a hero and she didn’t seem to feel it”

63. It is childish, but their twisted feelings for each other might have led them to belittle each other’s personality later.

Another pride, which is unique to a woman and has nothing to do with morality, is hurt by Mitya’s bow. Katerina has been a very popular and highly regarded girl in their community. She is also an acknowledged beauty, while Mitya “behaved like a boor on many occasions at that time, and” he “was conscious of it” himself

64. She has come to offer this man her virginity. This man is below her in every way, family background, education, sense of honor…… However, this man, dares to refuse such offer. Any man would beg for such offer! Any man would take it as soon as he gets it! But Dmitri Karamazov refuses to take her virginity as a king pardons a criminal. Dmitri Karamazov is no king in Katerina’s eyes, he has no right to have mercy on her and she accepts no mercy from him. So, she insists on Dmitri to take it, even though Dmitri doesn’t want it:

“even if you don’t love me, never mind. Be my husband.”

65. The further Dmitri tries to be away from her, the more determined she becomes to control him: “Even if he marries that—creature…whom I never, never can forgive, even then I will not abandon him.


Henceforward I will never, never abandon him!” Worst of all, she has originally doubted, and later convinces herself that ever since her bow to him, she has lost Mitya’s respect and that Mitya has no longer regarded her as a goddess: “he has despised me horribly, he has always despised me… he has despised me from the very moment that I bowed down to him for that money. I saw that... I felt it at once at the time, but for a long time I wouldn’t believe it. How often I have read it in his eyes, ‘You came of yourself, though.’” The truth is that Mitya has never despised her, though he knows her gesture of forgiveness is not always sincere. He continues to regard her highly after she comes to him for money. It is Katerina’s insecurity and her wounded pride that lead her to believe that Mitya has harboured great contempt for her.

She insists on Mitya to fulfill his role of a nasty little man who forces her, a noble lady, to undignified situation. If Mitya refuses to comply, she will fuel his vice herself. That’s why when she notices Mitya needed money to take Grushenka away, she offers Mitya 3000 roubles. She knows Mitya is weak, and Mitya will take her money. She also knows that Mitya has a sense of honor, and he will be tormented by his conscience. The more generous she appears, the more ashamed Mitya is of himself. Through this, Katerina seeks her revenge. By forgiving Mitya’s unfaithfulness, She wants to prove to him and reminds him that she is the noble one in this relationship, and he is the base one: “let him see that all my life I will be true to him and the promise I gave him, in spite of his

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being untrue and betraying me.” Through this, Katerina retakes the moral high ground, which is occupied by Mitya due to his unexpected generosity earlier.

If it were only out of revenge, Katerina wouldn’t be this obsessed about Mitya. She needs Mitya because he is also a stark contrast to her ideal image of herself. Mitya says that Katya is a girl that falls in love with her own illusion. And her illusion is that she is an extremely noble lady, who is willing to sacrifice her happiness for an unworthy man out of gratitude. The narrator says that perhaps she longs for nothing more than that, that heartbreaking image of herself. Without Mitya, the vulgar, dissolute, wild, reckless future husband, her image of an unfortunate lofty girl could never be completed. Since Mitya acknowledges whole-heartedly that Katerina has the moral high ground: “I know that I am a million times baser in soul than she,” Katerina gets to achieve her illusion of herself at the beginning of their relationship. This contributes to her imperiousness, proud ease, and self-confidence and haughtiness when she is with Mitya, which strikes Alyosha greatly.

She needs Mitya’s moral weakness to make her virtues more significant, which Ivan sees clearly: “You love him just as he is; you love him for insulting you. If he reformed,


you’d give him up at once and cease to love him. But you need him so as to contemplate continually your heroic fidelity and to reproach him for infidelity.” The deeper Mitya hurts her, the nobler her forgiveness appears. “The more sunken Dmitry is, the stronger her spirit is in lifting him; the deeper the injury to herself, the more lofty her forgiveness, the more lofty her forgiveness, the sweeter her repayment of the insult of Dmitry’s respectful bow.” In her ideal, she should be a goddess to Mitya: “I will be a god to whom he can pray—and that, at least, he owes me for his treachery and for what I suffered yesterday through him. And let him see that all my life I will be true to him and the promise I gave him, in spite of his being untrue and betraying me.” She requires Mitya to come back to her, beg for her forgiveness every time he does her wrong: “I will insist on his knowing me and confiding entirely in me, without reserve.” However, Mitya doesn’t treat her as a goddess. He treats her as a woman who gets jealous, which Katya was. So, when Mitya avoids her, when he cannot find the courage to face her or seek forgiveness from her, she realizes that her ideal image begins to fall apart without Mitya’s cooperation. When Alyosha tells her that Dmitri “told me to bow to you-- and to say that he would never come again--but to bow to you” without asking for forgiveness, which would leave her ideal image incomplete, she panics, flushes hotly: “Accidentally perhaps he made a mistake in the word, perhaps he did not use the right

71 From Dostoevsky: The Major Fiction, pp151-60. 1964 Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Published by the MIT Press.
She envies Alyosha, whom Mitya regards as an angel and confides everything to: “he won’t recognize that I am his truest friend; he won’t know me, and looks on me merely as a woman…He can tell God everything without shame. Why is it he still does not understand how much I am ready to bear for his sake? Why, why doesn’t he know me? How dare he not know me after all that has happened...Why, he wasn’t afraid to be open with you, Alexey Fyodorovitch.

*How is it that I don’t deserve the same?*” These accusations are Katerina’s way of asking why Dmitri won’t regarded her as she hopes him to.

She is a woman who requires herself to behave as a saint; she is a woman who believes that she can be or at least to Mitya, she can be a saint; but she is not. A saint, an angel can forgive everything. Katerina tries to forgive everything Mitya has done to her, Katerina wants Mitya to believe that she can forgive everything, but she actually cannot. And Mitya knows that clearly: “*There is something a woman cannot forgive*”. Katerina is a woman not a saint, nor an angel. She is proud. She is jealous. She cannot even forgive Mitya’s impoliteness when she first shows interest in him. How could she possibly forgive his betrayal?

Twice, she shows her affection for Mitya with a rare submissive tone. The first time is in her letter to Mitya: “I love you madly...Don’t be afraid. I won’t hamper you in any way. I

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It is at the beginning of her obsession of Mitya, whom she believes will be morally subdued by her. The second time happens when Mitya asks for her forgiveness in prison, after she betrays him in the court. She breaks into tears: “That’s what I loved you for, that you are generous at heart!...What have I come for?...To embrace your feet, to press your hands like this, till it hurts— you remember how in Moscow I used to squeeze them—to tell you again that you are my god, my joy, to tell you that I love you madly...” She remembers her love for Mitya when Mitya temporarily snaps back to his role of a profligate but honorable fiancee, making mistakes but coming back to her arms for forgiveness in the end. But now Katerina has realized her love for Ivan, and it becomes easier for her to let go of Mitya, and of her unrealistic image of a noble self.

Now we should move on to Grushenka. Mitya isn’t of much importance to her until her Polish lover disappoints her greatly. However, in contrast to Katerina, Grushenka has never regarded Mitya as someone below her. She tell Alyosha that his brother is a “noble heart”. She tells Mitya that: “though you’re a brute, you are generous.” Grushenka and Mitya are alike. They both want to break away from their old lifestyle and to leave the town where they have become infamous. When Grushenka finally accepts Mitya’s love, she tells Mitya that they should lead an honorable life from then on.

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on, and she asks Mitya to take her away: “It shall be honorable for the future...and let us be honest, let us be good...take me away, take me far away...I don’t want it to be here...” Mitya’s love for Grushenka might have started as sexual attraction, like Mitya says “his beloved back-alley”, but in this love, he finds strength to get rid of his unhealthy habits. And Grushenka, hearing that Mitya will be arrested for murdering his father, tries to bear Mitya’s burden by claiming that it is all her fault. Mere mutual sensual attraction could not generate lofty feelings such as the will to be good and the will to sacrifice. Their relationship is healthier than Mitya and Katerina’s because both Mitya and Grushenka have forgiven each other. When in Katerina’s case, she has always bore a grudge against Mitya.

People like to be honest with Alyosha (except Rahkin) and they confide to him willingly. While Mitya somehow manages to force people to show their true nature in one way or another. A lot of people lie to Mitya, including his father, Grushenka’s keeper Samsonov, the inn owner in Mokroe. From those lies readers get to know what kind of people they are. Mitya lets us see the sounded pride of Katerina under her noble, forbearing and positive appearance. He lets us see the tenderness and selflessness of Grushenka who has the reputation of being cruel and shameless. Dmitri Karamazov is a character that could bring the best or the worst out of people.

1.2 Mitya’s story in regard to the narrative structure of the whole book

Each time a character narrates a story about Mitya, some important episodes and details get omitted. Those details can be found in another version of the story told by a different character. In each retelling, we get new details, which we gather together to get the whole picture. This is how Dostoevsky retold Mitya’s story in the Brothers Karamazov. Missing details in Mitya’s story are important element of suspense to keep the readers curious in the novel. Each time a different character retells a certain event concerned Mitya, we learn more facts about him. We find out what relevant parties are thinking when Mitya is doing certain things to them. We solve more puzzles about his messy relationships with his father, his fiancee Katerina and his lover Grushenka. There is always something new and interesting when some character talks about what Mitya has done. Therefore, his story survives several times of retelling without feeling repeated.

Mitya’s story is retold consistently four times in the whole novel. The first time is Mitya’s passionate confession to his youngest brother Alyosha, which takes part in Book Three, chapter 3, 4, and 5. It starts from days before Mitya becomes acquainted with Katerina, and ends with his vague words about executing a despicable scheme, which as we later know, is to spend the 1500 roubles in his collar. The second time takes the form of a preliminary investigation, in Part three, Book nine. Mitya is questioned by the prosecutor Ippolit Kirillovich and the district attorney Nikolay Parfenovich about his father’s murder. The third and fourth times happen in the court, one is Kirillovich’s speech and the other is the defense attorney, Fetyukovich’s speech.
We have closely examined the first retelling—“the Confession of an Ardent Heart”—in 1.1.2. In Book one, chapter two “He Gets Rid of His Eldest Son”, the narrator only gives a general and brief sketch of Mitya’s teenage years and early adulthood. The three chapters of the confession provide more anecdotes and mental description of Mitya Karamazov, as a poorly-educated, dissipated and frivolous young officer who surprisingly has a clear sense of honor. There are also important plots in these three chapters, like the acquaintance with Katerina, the bow, his falling in love with Grushenka, and Mitya’s financial as well as emotional conflicts with his father.

I shall name several significant functions of these chapters. One, for the first time since we have opened the book, we can finally have a clear idea of how Dmitri Karamazov regards his troubled past with the other three major characters: Fyodor Karamazov, Katerina and Grushenka. This makes his later interactions with them much easier to understand. Second, since Mitya’s self-evaluation is close to what the narrator, who is the moral authority of the novel, says about him, we can assume that he is honest about the flaws in his personality, honest about his moral mishaps. This prevents us from misinterpreting his certain irrational and instinctive words, behaviors as Katerina and the prosecutor do.

To talk about the third function of the Confession of an Ardent Heart, we need to juxtapose it against Book Nine, the Preliminary Investigation. The former is the first criticism that Mitya has made on his own character and it creates a contrast to the confession he makes to the prosecutor in Mokore. The latter is also a process of Mitya
criticizing and commenting on his own soul and life. His confession to Alyosha is not thorough. In that confession, he is still proud of his countless love affairs and feels smug about his heroic gesture of giving Katerina all the money he then has. His heart is unpurified then. Dostoevsky said that in Book Nine, Mitya purifies his heart during the preliminary investigation: “I am writing a different ninth book, entitled ‘the Preliminary Investigation’... I will mark Mitya Karamazov’s character even more strongly: he purifies his heart and conscience under the threat of misfortune and false accusation. He accepts punishment in his heart not for what he has done, but for being so dissipated that he could have, and wanted to commit the crime for which he will be falsely found guilty by a judicial error. A thoroughly Russian character: unless there’s thunder, the peasant won’t cross himself. His spiritual purification begins during the several hours of the preliminary investigation, to which this ninth book is devoted.” From the torment, he endures during the preliminary investigation, we can see clearly how he finally takes the responsibility of redeeming his soul on his own shoulders, instead of relying on either Katerina’s marriage or Grushenka’s love to become a “new” man. Mitya’s confession to Alyosha, and his confession to the prosecutor work as a whole to show the development of Mitya’s soul from indulging in dishonor with a guilty conscience to accepting severe punishment in exchange for redemption.

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I shall further discuss the third retelling, the prosecutor’s speech in the court in 3.2.1. The forth retelling is the defense attorney’s speech. Both speeches can be regarded as adaptations of Mitya and other witnesses’ narratives. The prosecutor wants Mitya to be found guilty, while the defense lawyer wants the opposite. Their interpretations of Mitya’s behaviors will certainly be contradictory and they will each use their imagination to fill in the blanks where Mitya doesn’t give a clear description. They will accuse each other for distorting the truth. However, the value of these two versions of Mitya’s story doesn’t lie on their closeness to the truth, but how these two speeches represent the argument between two typical groups of people who have conflicting opinions about Mitya. I shall discuss this further in section 3.2.1.

Other characters’ discussions concerning Mitya’s anecdotes scatter throughout the book. All characters, including the narrator in the novel has make a criticism on Mitya’s personality. They do so with their words, with their actions, with their facial expressions. The whole novel, hence, can be regarded as a great discussion on the sins and honor of Dmitri Karamazov to some extent. If we use the narrator’s attitude to and his analysis of Mitya as the standard interpretation, by comparison we can see the narrator’s attitudes towards other characters when they discuss Mitya. They reveal themselves when they make a criticism of Mitya and they are criticizing themselves in the meantime.

For example, both Katerina and Mitya have talked about that day which Katerina knocks on Mitya’s door for money, but their feelings for that day are different and they
differs on the meaning of certain gestures and facial expressions. Mitya’s narrative is: “I turned around, went up to the table, opened the drawer and took out a banknote for five thousand roubles (it was lying in a French dictionary). Then I showed it her in silence, folded it, handed it to her, opened the door into the passage, and, stepping back, made her a deep bow, a most respectful, a most impressive bow, believe me! She shuddered all over, gazed at me for a second, turned horribly pale—white as a sheet, in fact—and all at once, not impetuously but softly, gently, bowed down to my feet—not a boarding-school curtsey, but a Russian bow, with her forehead to the floor. She jumped up and ran away.” 78 Apparently, Mitya has no idea why Katerina turns pale all of a sudden. He thinks his offer of five thousand roubles and his bow are both respectful, but Katerina does not see it that way. At least she thinks there is something more than respect in that bow.

Here is Katerina’s version of the story, when her grudge for Mitya finally explodes:

“he has despised me from the very moment that I bowed down to him for that money. I saw that.... I felt it at once at the time...Oh, he didn’t understand, he had no idea why I ran to him, he can suspect nothing but baseness, he judged me by himself, he thought everyone was like himself...Oh, he is a brute! He was always convinced that I should be trembling with shame all my life before him, because I went to him then, and that he had a right to despise me forever for it, and so to be superior to me—that’s why he wanted to marry me!” 79 As we can see above, in Katerina’s attempt to save Ivan and in her unexpected revenge on Mitya, she completely

leaves out the part that Mitya bows to her. She keeps saying “he”, “he”, “he”, but all we can see is “her”. When she talks about Mitya, she actually reveals herself. From her outburst, we see a long-offended woman, who could no longer bear the hurt of taking the high road.

As a person, Mitya has a dialectic personality. He is capable of the filthiest, base actions and the noblest sacrifice at the same time. As a fictional character, Mitya is a round thanks to Dostoevsky's genius. And as Forster said, a round character can surprise\textsuperscript{79}. The reason that no one in the novel could completely understand Mitya or predict his actions is that he was capable of contradictory things simultaneously. Neither killing nor not killing his father would be out of his character. Neither maliciously insulting nor generously helping Katerina would be out of his character. Neither accepting Katerina’s money nor refusing it would be out of his character. He is ready to make surprising decisions at any moments. He is evolving and every important choice he makes turns him into a different person. Since he has been constantly making choices in the novel, his character is ever changing. In the first volume he is a smug, impenitent sensualist, and then several hundred pages later he becomes a pious, passive sufferer.

By giving Mitya the ability to change, the ability to surprise, Dostoevsky gave Mitya a forever life. Mitya is a round character that can lead a life outside his original context. Fictional characters like Mitya “have these numerous parallels with people like

ourselves, they try to live their own lives and are consequently often engaged in treason against the main scheme of the book…They are creations inside a creation…if they are given complete freedom they kick the book to pieces…” It is because of such quality that a round, fictional character is able to survive remediation, survive in alternative universes created by other writers without losing its substance and aesthetic power. I try to recapture and reproduce his appearance and spirit in an interactive graphic novel. I shall discuss how the format of graphic novel, interactive fiction and the application of augmented reality can renew our experience of Mitya’s stories in next chapter.
2. A Form and Two Media

There is no doubt that my interactive graphic novel is an adaptation of Dostoevsky’s *the Brothers Karamazov*. What I want to point out is that within the original text of *the Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky had already incorporated techniques of adaptation in his storytelling. As I have analyzed in chapter 1, Mitya’s story was retold multiple times. I consider this as Dostoevsky adapting his own writings. But all versions of Mitya’s story within the novel are text-based. There are changes in narratives, but the medium remains the same.

When I adapt Dostoevsky’s texts into an interactive graphic novel, the medium for the story changes. "Technology is also altering how we actually tell and retell our stories."¹ I would rather look at it this way, that technology enables people to experiment with new strategies of narratives that were originally impossible due to the limitations of traditional media. Then, what is new about media change in my particular case? "In a word, nothing."² The majority of the narrative in the printed section of my interactive novel is quite similar to Dostoevsky’s text. I extend the original storyline, lengthen it and attach a sequel in the end. I also add in a few parallel storylines, which can be activated at certain points of the main storyline with a mobile device. I want more stories about Mitya. Hence, I add in a sequel and what-if stories in my interactive graphic novel. In

each storyline, no matter printed or virtual, I tell the story, visualize the text using traditional narrative strategies that have been commonly and extensively applied in literature and comics. What’s new here is the structure of an interactive fiction, which I shall come back to. By discussing the roles of printed texts, graphic novel and interactive fiction in this project, I shall answer why I choose to adapt the Brothers Karamazov into an interactive graphic novel instead of other media.

2.1 The role of printed text in the interactive graphic novel

“Paintings illustrating stories from the bible or other literary sources, where apparently only the story content is borrowed. The contemporary entertainment industry calls such borrowing “repurposing”: to take a “property” from one medium and reused it in another… there may be no conscious interplay between media. The interplay happens, if at all, only for the reader or viewer who happens to know both versions and can compare them.”³ As a reader of Dostoevsky’s the Brothers Karamazov and its adapter, I am surely consciously comparing the differences among the story’s forms and media used to present those forms. Texts and graphic novel can be printed on paper and posted online. Although an interactive fiction is also a form of telling stories, it probably relies on a digital device to operate. In each of these forms and media, there are things I want to keep and things I want to change.

For *The Brothers Karamazov* as a printed text, I want to keep the eloquence of Dostoevsky. And I want to maintain its privileges and established academic reputation as a serious form of art. “For some, as Robert Stam argues, literature will always have axiomatic superiority over any adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form. But this hierarchy also involves what he calls iconophobia (a suspicion of the visual) and logophilia (love of the word as sacred)”⁴ *The Brothers Karamazov* is an acknowledged masterpiece of literature. Texts, as a form, have been long regarded as the elite of various art forms by conservative critics and artists. Although I personally think there should be no hierarchy within forms and media, a privilege, even an unreasonable one might help me evade the criticism of sabotaging Dostoevsky’s classic.

I want to preserve the charm of the text form of the Brothers Karamazov in my adaptation. I strive after fidelity without losing individuality. This results in that many texts in my interactive graphic novel are direct quotations from Constance Garnett’s translation of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Yes, translation is not the same as the original Russian text, but this is the best I can get. The first time I approached Dostoevsky’s works was through Chinese translation.

What I like to change about the printed text of *The Brothers Karamazov* is that I want it to more organic. A physical, static paper book page doesn’t allow me to see more than what is already printed on it. And since I have read the novel hundreds of times, I want

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the page, the texts to grant me access to more texts, more materials about *the Brothers Karamazov*. I want something new, but also familiar. “The appeal of adaptations for audiences lies in their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty.” I want to be able to read the original novel and see relevant information on the same interface. I don’t want to read the book, put it aside and then go online to search for more. My interactive graphic novel allows user to see the original work and its criticism, fan arts, commercial adaptations side by side.

What I described above is close to a web page filled with hypertexts and multimedia content. But I am looking for something better than that. On the screen of a computer or a mobile device, there are too many clickable links, too many buttons, too many animations. Those features will easily divert the focus of my users when they have a cursor in hand. “The practice of hypermediacy”, such as reading a hypertext fiction, “in the words of William J. Mitchell (1994), ‘privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity and...emphasizes process or performance rather than the finished art object.’” It’s exactly the finished art object, the story of Dmitri Karamazov that I want my readers to focus on. At least for readers who have never read *the Brothers Karamazov*, the first and the most prominent thing I want them to get from my adaptation is Dostoevsky’s narrative. Sit back and listen, no more actions required.

Here is one thing I want to preserve that is closely related to printed text as a medium: the reading habit that is trained to comprehend difficult texts. It requires a great amount of concentration, and a relatively long attention span. Without such ability, without the mindset of reading a printed, meaningful and serious text, the pleasure of reading Dostoevsky’s words could not be gained. Therefore, one of my tasks is to create an interface that will encourage my users to get in the mood of reading a traditional novel instinctively. This interface has been invented a long time ago: a physical book that is not too large for hands or too heavy for laps.

Improvements have to be made on this physical book because I also want it to be interactive. As I have said above, I want the pages to be not only the carrier of the original novel but also a portal to derivative works. This portal should be open easily whenever I want more, and closed when I want to retreat to the simple delight of reading surrounded by the light fragrance of ink and paper. But for a physical page, if it is page one, it remains as page one. It’s not magical. It cannot change its molecular conformation and turns itself into page two. On the other end, though, human eyes can be tricked to seeing things that don’t exist in the physical world. The solution that came to me is Augmented Reality, which through proper visual display, allows me to superimpose virtual content on top of physical one and create the illusion that the book page has changed.

Therefore, in my interactive graphic novel, I make all the parallel stories, which divert from Dostoevsky’s storyline, virtual. I print the visualization of Dostoevsky’s text on physical pages, and on certain pages I add a graphic symbol on it. This graphic
symbol works like a QR code, when scanned by a mobile device, the virtual images will overlay the physical pages on the screen. Here is an example. When you point your phone’s camera on the page through an App called Zappar,

you will see extra content.

Figure 1: An AR panel appears on a smartphone screen

One more thing about printed text that I want to preserve in this project is its physicality, and the sustainability that comes with it. The digital content of this project may not be accessible in the future due to the advancement of technology. It might not be suitable to be viewed on mobile device 2 or 5 years from now. The developers of the app Zappar, through which the virtual content is activated, might stop supporting later versions of operating systems. If the content is virtual, then it faces the risk of becoming unprocurable in a relatively short amount of time. On the contrary, natural language and printed books have survived hundreds of generations as the most common tools for
communication. I don’t expect my invention to Dostoevsky’s text can be influential enough to be transformed into newer digital formats for future readers. Nevertheless, I printed the visualization of *the Brothers Karamazov* on physical pages with the hope that it can last a little bit longer.

### 2.2 Telling a story in the form of a graphic novel

This project is my response to Dostoevsky’s *the Brothers Karamazov*. It’s my criticism to the character Mitya in a story form. I express my opinions by retelling his story. “The adapted text… is not something to be reproduced, but rather something to be interpreted and recreated, often in a new medium.”⁷ I choose to present my interpretation and “recreate” the text about Dmitri Karamazov in the form of graphic novel.

In 2.1, I said that I want to preserve the beauty of *The Brothers Karamazov* as a literary text. What I also want is to experience and engage with the story in a new way. “We may want to enter the narrative and its world through some other medium (a graphic novel, for example) or to access backstory or other characters’ perspectives.”⁸ Since I want to preserve the charm of literary text and that leads me to settle on the format of a physical book, I need a medium that allows texts and more. “The new medium can remediate by trying to absorb the older medium entirely, so that the discontinuities between the two are minimized.”⁹

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graphic novel uses both texts and pictures to tell a story. It can “absorb” the old medium of *The Brothers Karamazov* entirely.

A piece of toilet paper is not a suitable holder for a business proposal. A bedroom is not a suitable place for an international conference. The new medium I use to recreate Dostoevsky’s text needs to have equal cultural significance as the novel has in the field of literature. The medium should have the ability to handle serious, complicated theme and narratives. It also needs to arouse users’ respect and careful attitude when being approached. Surly all media have the potential of presenting and expressing intensive topics, I feel more secure with a medium that has successful predecessors that are similar to my project. The form of graphic novel has been proved to be a compelling and sophisticated way of narratives for several decades. It has the potential of absorbing the power of literature and adding in visual stimulations at the same time. “The format of comics presents a montage of both word and image…The regimens of art (e.g., perspective, symmetry, line) and the regimens of literature (e.g., grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. The reading of a graphic novel is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit.”

Lynd Ward’s woodcut novels, Will Eisner’s *To the Heart of the Storm, A Life Force, Dropsie Avenue*, Amir and Khalil’s *Zahra’s Paradise*, Craig Thompson’s *Blankets* have all demonstrated the graphic novel’s remarkable capability of narrating, describing and criticizing fundamental religious, racial, social-economical and moral issues. “The application of sequential art, with its interweaving of words and pictures, provides a

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dimension of communication that contributes -- with increasing prominence-- to the body of literature that concerns itself with the examination of human experience...within the limitation of the medium and with ambitious narratives and themes to attract and challenge ever more sophisticated and critical audiences.”

Another advantage of the format of comics is its flexible application of typography, or lettering. Words can convey meanings. The appearance of the words can also convey meanings. The appearance of the words has an impact on the message that the words convey. “The lettering reflects the nature and emotion of the speech. It is most often symptomatic of the artist’s own personality (style), as well as that of the character speaking.”

For a lettered word, we need to process the meaning of its appearance, its linguistic meaning and what those two mean as whole. This is similar to how an adaptation creates a space for the adapter and the original author to express and exchange their ideas. When enjoying an adaptation, one is actually experiencing two people’s works. We see the theme and narratives of the original work through the adapter’s creative alterations.

In my project, I want my users to see text from the Brothers Karamazov (or to be precise, its translation) as it originally was and my interpretation of the story at the same time.
time. This seems similar to the experience of watching a movie with commentary. However, usually people who have already seen the movie would go into the commentary mode. Those people have already experienced the movie’s as a new artwork, so they are ready for more movies and discussions about the movie. They pay more attention to the commentary instead of the moving images when they watch the movie again. They reinterpret the movie using the commentary as a reference. However, my interactive graphic novel may have readers who haven’t read *the Brothers Karamazov* before. It takes some effort to digest Dostoevsky’s writing alone. If my commentary is too “loud”, I may distract readers from the narrative and ruin the experience of reading the intriguing plots for the first time. Thus, lettering Dostoevsky’s text is an efficient and convenient way to convey layered meanings. I can present the novel’s sentences in my visual style, which reflects my interpretation, without distracting my readers from the story.

I adapted part of the text of *the Brothers Karamazov* into a graphic novel. The original printed text is now broken apart and is incorporated into various panels of drawings. “One medium is itself incorporated or represented in another medium...we call the representation of one medium in another remediation”13 My adaptation process is remediation. I’d like to talk about how “telling” and “showing” a story in *the Brothers

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Karamazov results in two different graphic styles in my graphic novel. Here are two examples for mere “telling” in contrast to realistic rendering in fictions from Ford Maddox Ford: “We know that if we said: ‘Mr X was a foul-mouthed reactionary,’ you would know very little about him. But if his first words were: ‘God damn it, out all filthy Liberals up against the wall, say I, and shoot out their beastly livers…’ that gentleman will make on you an impression that many following pages shall scarcely efface.”14

The first and second chapter of The Brothers Karamazov is typically “telling” a story. The author just briefly introduced the temperaments and important events concerning the family members of the Karamazov’s. It is quite challenging to visualize declarative sentences such as “he was one of those senseless persons who are very well capable of looking after their worldly affairs, and, apparently, after nothing else.”15 It is because such sentence doesn’t emphasize what happens first and what happens next. Such sentence doesn’t narrate an action that lasts for a period of time. It’s abstract, not descriptive. It’s a conclusion formed after what the eyes may have seen. It’s not an object or a gesture that the eyes could actually see. The result is that I use one single image to summarize the general idea of the text, see below:

This “landowner”—for so we used to call him, although he hardly spent a day of his life on his own estate—was a strange type, yet one pretty frequently to be met with, a type obdurate and vicious and at the same time senseless. But he was one of those senseless persons who are very well capable of looking after their worldly affairs, and, apparently, after nothing else.

Fyodor Pavlovitch, for instance, began with next to nothing; his estate was of the smallest; he ran to dine at other men’s tables, and fastened on them as a toady, yet at his death it appeared that he had a hundred thousand roubles in hard cash. At the same time, he was all his life one of the most senseless, fantastical fellows in the whole district.

Figure 2: Page 2 of the Printed Graphic Novel

In this particular page, the image serves as an illustration of the text. It signifies the character of Fyodor Karamazov instead of showing a particular event from start to finish. This is how I visualize text that “tells” something.
For texts that depict an action, I usually use clear, undisguised panels to divide and structure time. “In visual narration, the task of the author/artist is to record a continued flow of experience and show it as it may be seen from the readers' eyes.”¹⁶ This principle is not very useful when it comes to narrate a series of events stretching out several decades. For “showing” a short scene however, it is quite efficient. One of the most significant functions of panels is that they establish a flow of visual experience by picking out key moments within an action. The importance of panels to graphic narrative is analogous to that of shots to a movie. A series of sequential panels make a reader feels that he is watching an event in either slow or fast mode. If organized and compositied wisely, panels are especially good at “showing” scenes with a clear sense of time. “In the modern comic strip or comic book, the device most fundamental to the transmission of timing is the panel (or frame or box). These lines drawn around the depiction of a scene, which act as a containment of the action, or a segment of the action, have as one of their functions the task of separating or parsing the total statement.”¹⁷ According to McCloud’s classification, there are 6 ways of using panels for transition. They are moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect and non-sequitur. “By far, the most common type of transition...is Action-to-action.” Mine is no exception. Action-to-action transition “shows

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things happening in concise, efficient ways.” You can see subject-to-subject and action-to-action transitions in the following book page.

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Figure 3: a Page in one of the Branching Stories
People tend to say reading comics is faster than reading texts. “The reader, it was assumed, sought from comics either instant visually transmittable information, as in daily scripts, or a visual experience of a sensory nature, as in fantasy comics.” However, in my graphic novel I actually try to slow people down. For example, the first chapter of the Brothers Karamazov, “The History of a Certain Little Family” has five pages of text and I take 9 pages to visualize nearly every sentence of it. On each page of my graphic novel, there are less texts and readers are forced to read slower. When one reads slower, the words tend to sink in deeper. It helps to understand the content better.

I don’t worry about pictures limiting imagination as Eisner did. Helen Papagiannis provided a perfect answer to this concern: “When you do watch a film or experience something that is technologically represented or enhanced, it doesn’t mean that you are no longer using your imagination; you continue to apply it, further extending what you are experiencing.” One thing I disagree with Will Eisner is that he said “in graphic storytelling, there is little time or space for character development.” It is true that most of Will Eisner’s characters in his graphic novels are stereotypes. Other artists have already gone beyond the use of easy recognized to establish round characters that develop as the narrative unfolds.

All the stories in the interactive graphic novel—Dostoevsky’s narrative and the branching stories—are presented in the form of graphic novel. There are physical comic pages and virtual comic panels.

2.3 An interactive physical book

As I have said in the beginning of this chapter, the change from a printed text to an interactive graphic novel didn’t alter the original storyline much. The biggest difference is that one story turns into a collection of stories. This is enabled by the unique structure of an interactive fiction.

An interactive fiction has a branching structure. It’s designed for presenting, organizing and assembling parallel storylines. In my project, I adapt Dostoevsky’s text into a graphic novel, and create several new what-if stories. I need to incorporate them into a narrative unity. And the structure of an interactive fiction suits my need.

However, the experience of reading one interactive fiction, is different from the combined experience of reading a graphic adaptation and reading fanfictions about the source work. To access most of the current interactive fictions, one needs a digital device, like a laptop, a smartphone, or a tablet. The sad truth is that I have never managed to finish an interactive fiction on the screen of any devices. When reading an interactive fiction, no matter how short a paragraph is, I cannot suppress my urge of clicking through all the buttons and getting to the end. The narrative is a blur to me during the whole process. If a reader has already had a fair amount of knowledge about the narrative, then the presences of clickable buttons, animations and other interactive features wouldn’t become a problem of distraction. Returning readers of a story return
for a both familiar and fresh experience. The interactive features serve to defamiliarize and transform the original materials, with the hope of inspiring new insights for and arousing new feelings from the loyal readers.

In 2014, Inkle released an interactive fiction game called 80 Days, which is adapted from Jules Verne’s novel *Eighty Days Around the World*. The game can be played on an iOS platform with an iPad or an iPhone. Players assume the role of British Gentleman Phileas Fogg’s servant, Passepartout, and they must design the fastest route for them to get back to England based on their financial situation, physical situation and the information they get during the journey. The website of 80 days claim that there are thousands of choices of routes in the game. Every decision the player makes will embark an entire new route. I have read Jules Verne’s novel when I was in primary school, so when I play the game I focus on how to win. I calculate how much we had spent, how much we still get. I decide when the team should rest and when they should depart.

It is two very different experiences play the game and reading the paper book. When I first read the novel, I was thrilled by the adventures and focused on analyzing the characters actions and personalities. The goal of reading Jules Verne’s novel then was entertaining myself with a story. I sat back and listened (or more precisely, read the text), processing what the book presented to me from the first page to the last page. I watched the narrative developed, the plots unfold themselves without any control over the text, except whether to continue to read. The most common question came up during close reading is “why the author told the story this way?”
In contrast to this, playing the interactive fiction game, with an iPad that allows user inputs, I take actions to push the game’s narrative forward. The goal is to win, and to win with as little money as possible, with as little time as possible. While playing the game, the enjoyment comes from the lovely visual interface, solving puzzles and the possibilities of unexplored routes. There is little room for character development in this game, so playing the game cannot provide the pleasure of analyzing a character like most novels can. One reason is that the player has already become a character in the game, and that he is so focus on winning that he doesn’t have the energy to analyze his behaviors in the game. The other reason is that, there isn’t really much depth of the characters in the game. Sure, when you examine the game from a distance, questions like “why the developers designed the game this way” will come to mind. But when you engage in the task assigned to you in the game, all you can ask is “how can I pass this with a higher score?”

If a traditional book, a traditional novel is designed for reading and rereading, engaging and then critical interpreting, then a game is designed to prolong the first engagement with its users. The longer it takes for the player to win the game for the first time, the better. Players tend to lose interest in a game when the game is too easy, when they know how to trick and beat the developers’ design. A novel printed in text relies on its readers’ interpretations to generate new meanings. So, the author uses words that encompass as many interpretation possibilities as possible. While in a game, the developers don’t expect the players to interpret the game. They don’t rely on them to create new content for the game. It is the developers’ job to constantly update the game.
Their ultimate goal is to create infinite missions for the players to accomplish, to make the players addicted to solving the tasks. The longer it takes for a player to win, the better.

Developers try to make a game non-exhaustive for any single user. How long do you think it will take for a person to try out all the possible routes in the game 80 Days? By contrast, you only need an afternoon to exhaust the content of Jules Verne’s *Eighty Days Around the World*. In an interactive game like 80 Days, the narrative is in a sense, infinite. A player can never truly get “familiar” with the story, or stories within the game. Playing the game is the journey of continuingly discovers unexplored territories. While this may be true for the experience of reading *Eighty Days Around the World* the first time, it does not apply to the rereading experiences of the book, during which the readers start to get critical.

Although some people may be ready to criticize an artwork the first time they come upon it, for many others critical insights don’t come until they revisit the work multiple times. The traditional close reading and criticizing methods are not suitable for analyzing an interactive fiction game like 80 Days. It is because the traditional literary criticism methods are used to analyze static texts, while the game shifts its narrative and its appearance every time a user engages with it. So, each time the user opens the game, he deals with a new entity. While each time one opens a physical book, the book’s content remains the same. If a reader wants to gain new insights from the same text, he needs to change himself, defamiliarize the text by applying a different methodology to analyze it, reading it from a different perspective or read it backwards. I first read *The
Brothers Karamazov when I was 19. Four years later, I read it again and I understand the characters’ speeches and actions better that I first did. The text of The Brothers Karamazov didn’t change and I still read the same Chinese translation as I did four years ago, but my knowledge and life experience have grown, which is why I understand the text differently than the first time.

For a game player, the gaming experience is constantly new even though he is playing the same game, even though he plays it on the same computer, even though he hasn’t grown at all. For a game like 80 Days, it takes no effort on the users’ part to get a new experience of engagement. A gamer may still be able to view a game critically, but it’s unlikely he will use literary criticism methodologies in doing so. If I present Dostoevsky’s novel, which literary criticism methods can be applied to, in a game environment, how should this project be evaluated?

Evaluation asides, the users/readers experience of this project is my major concern. People have different expectations for reading a digital interactive fiction and reading a physical book. In my case, I want my readers to read my graphic adaptation of The Brothers Karamazov and my fanfictions using traditional literary critical methods like close reading. The fact that I present them in the form of digital interactive fiction might result in my users focusing on getting to the end, instead of contemplating and engaging in the discourse of Dmitri’s morality raised in the novel. “The more a player is reading, the more he isn’t playing, and players don’t like this. Forcing players to wade through great swatches
of text only makes them impatient and irritable.”

This is certainly not what I want to happen. In David Bolter’s word, I am looking for “an ‘interfaceless’ interface, in which there will be no recognizable electronic tools-no buttons, window, scroll bars, or even icons as such. Instead the user will move through the space interacting with the objects ‘naturally’, as she does in the physical world.” I want a more convenient and transparent interface for my readers to appreciate both Dostoevsky’s and my stories.

The interactivity and features of a desktop or a mobile device do provide convenience for taking notes or making citations while reading. But if I read simply for pleasure, it is much more comfortable for the eyes to read a paper book than to stare at a lit screen reading digital files. “NOBODY wants to read text on a computer monitor, or chapters of books, or even long paragraphs...” Such personal preference is influenced by one’s familiarity to various media. It is still too early to decide whether paper books will be abandoned in the future. To fully reproduce the pleasure of reading Dostoevsky’s text as I first did, I reproduce the medium- a physical book. And I encourage my readers to concentrate on the content of the book by eliminating distractions on the interface. At least for the part that visualizing The Brothers Karmazov’s original text in the graphic novel, a desktop or a mobile device interface won’t work. It is because “unlike the painting or computer graphic, the desktop interface does not erase itself. The multiplicity of

windows and the heterogeneity of their contents mean that the user is repeatedly brought back into contact with the interface, which she learns to read just as she would read any hypertext. She oscillates between manipulating the windows and examining their contents, just as she oscillates between looking at a hypertext as a texture of links and looking through the links to the textual units as language.”

I want my users to immediately engage themselves with the content. And that allows little room for frequent oscillation or fragmentation.

I am not satisfied with the rigidity and stillness of traditional paper books. I am not accustomed to the hypermediated distractions of digital devices, either. As I have said before, a printed book cannot give me access to more relevant information. A physical book’s bibliography can give you clues for more information like articles’ names, authors’ names, the links, publishers and so on, but it cannot deliver the information to you directly. You cannot get the actual content by reading the content list. You cannot get food by reading out loud the menu. Harry Potter could, but we can’t. In my ideal, a physical book has the ability to give me more at my request instead of leading me to more. When I finish the Dostoevsky’s *the Brothers Karamazov* and demand more stories about those characters, I want the book itself to generate fanfictions on the physical pages so I can read again immediately. It can save me the trouble and time of searching for them online myself. This requires the book to be interactive without being distracting. On one hand, my interactive graphic novel must have “a transparent

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interface”, which “would be one that erases itself, so that the user is no longer aware of confronting a medium, but instead stands in an immediate relationship to contents of that medium.”26 On the other hand, it should allow user input and respond promptly when it is told to change its content.

If an artwork’s value depends on its impact on audience, and the audiences’ experience is hugely affected by its medium, then the medium is a significant parameter of an artwork’s value. The paper book format is well capable of releasing the charm of Dostoevsky’s writings, but it cannot alter its content to generate new experience for its readers. A digital interactive fiction promises multiple options for reading, but its interface provides too many distractions. These two media need to be reformed to achieve the following objectives: to keep reader’s attention on track and to deliver new and more stimulation continually.

“Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media...Remediation as reform. The goal of remediation is to refashion or rehabilitate other media.”27 An Augmented Reality book, which encompasses interactivity and physicality, brings me a step closer to my ideal interface. Although the book cannot change itself in the real world, on certain pages there is a mark which serves as a command to a digital device. When recognizing that mark, the mobile device adds

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virtual images to what it captures from the reality and presents the final result to us on the screen. In the image on the left below there is a “Zapcode”. User then can open the app Zappar and point the camera at the image. After that extra content will appear on the device scree.

![Image of a Zapcode and a phone with extra content displayed]

**Figure 4: How to use Zappar**

Unfortunately, I still cannot prevent my users from reading my stories from a screen.

If the medium of an artwork determines the way one appreciates its content, and if one wants to understand traditional arts like literature and painting without missing anything, then those art forms need to be represented in their original, or seemingly original way. In that case, the digital media that aim at making artworks available to a larger population, should imitate old media rather than replace them.

Whereas, the discomfort of changing reading habit might no longer exist for generations after me. “if the... software is ‘intuitive’, it is only intuitive because ...(it) is a culturally familiar object. In fact, the graphical interface referred not only to culturally familiar
objects, but specifically to prior media…””28 My children may be more comfortable reading an article from a screen instead of from a book, because screens are relatively culturally familiar to them. Digital files are more environmental-friendly, too. It’s dangerous to guess other people’s reading preferences, since this topic is very personal and the guess is hardly correct.

However, I still want to argue for the paper book as a medium in terms of the longevity and accessibility of its content. It has been proved to be a secure and easy-to-approach way of storing and communicating information. A smartphone, a tablet, a computer or any hardware we use to access digital books may become outdated, or malfunctioned. When it does, it’s useless. But a book won’t malfunction. A book won’t even run out of battery. Digital devices break down frequently, while a book can maintain its functionality for several decades if no physical damage happens on it. Also, current popular digital book file format may be indecipherable for future software. In contrast to this, as long as one can write, he can still see the content of an antique book and reproduce it on other papers easily. Without professional knowledge though, it is hard for someone to retrieve the information stored in an outdated, abandoned digital file format.

My interactive book integrates an adaptation, several fanfictions and links to external online academic resources. It unifies physical and digital media and creates a mini narrative and interpretive universe. However, its limitations are even more obvious than its advantages.

First of all, the content of this interactive graphic novel, its branching storylines provide no more than ten variations. It cannot simulate all the possible paths for a man in real life. This interactive graphic novel is more like a compressed, simplified demonstration of several real-life situations. Previously, I state that my desire for interactivity is out of my curiosity and appetite for more stories to read. It is obvious that the interactive graphic novel cannot generate more content than what I have designed for it. In several hours, one will exhaust all it can provide. If people are looking for infinitive new adventures like in 80 Days, my interactive fiction cannot provide that.

“Hypertext fiction...offers the reader a variety of narrative threads to choose from, but all have been written by the author in advance. The form may be reader controlled, but the content is not. This is ‘selective interactivity’...and the text is as much a database to be searched as a world in which to be immersed... which may explain why there have been so few adaptations to or from this medium.”29 The AR book Dmitri Karamazov is still a product of “the first wave of AR”, as Helen Papagiannis put it. The printed book “is...a ‘hit play’ process connected to a static library of things...There was little to no variation if you returned to the AR experience later; it was typically the exact same

content, providing not much incentive for repeat experiences.”\textsuperscript{30} Dmitri Karamazov is in nature an static art object like any works of literature. It is designed to be compatible with traditional literary reading and criticizing principles.

If the book is itself is connected an enlarging database, a growing fandom of the *Brothers Karamazov*, then readers wouldn’t be worried about running out of new materials to read. The book itself could “create an immersive experience by being able to learn more about what you are looking at without having to open up a web browser and type in a description of the subject you’re seeking.”\textsuperscript{31} Helen Papagiannis has cheerfully stated that this is absolutely possibly with current technology: “AR technology becomes a living, breathing database: an interaction in which both the triggers and the content are dynamic and can change at any moment because they adapt to your shifting contextual data to deliver timely and relevant information and experiences dictated by you and your environment.”\textsuperscript{32} Even though the technology is ready, I still cannot lead readers to a growing library of the *Brothers Karamazov* fanfictions. It is because the *Brothers Karamazov* doesn’t have a large online fandom that I can link to. And I haven’t got enough time and energy to start one.

Created from duke on 2018-02-14 18:15:33.
The novel’s sustaining reputation in literature doesn’t seem to attract many young female readers -- the main demographic group of fanfiction writers who read and publish stories online. Why is that? I will discuss this in section 3.1.

Let’s imagine that in the future the physical book does become a database of the *Brothers Karamazov* where critics, fans contribute criticism, stories and artworks every day. It still needs its reader, or user to decide which article or which fanfiction to display and which to hide. No matter whether it looks like a paper page or not, there will be inevitably an interface, which demands the user to give command for the database to respond. And we know such interactivity tends to disturb the fluid experience of reading. Of course, there isn’t any medium that is able to control its users’ attention completely. Temporarily, maybe, but it won’t last forever. No matter how addictive a video game is, its player will still pause to eat and drink. It would be rather scary if a medium can render a person intellectually paralyzed. The user’s need for content is still the most decisive factor of the length of his or her attention span. The medium of the content, and the environment where the content is consumed play significant roles on this matter. As an artist, I want a medium that can keep my audience’s eyes from wandering for as long as possible. I believe that for a graphic novel, a physical book is still the best medium. Its most deadly shortcoming is that its incapability of refreshing and updating itself. It won’t evolve, while humans get bored easily.

This brings us to this interactive graphic novel’s second drawback: it is not a transformer. A transformer can turn itself into a car or a killer robot. But my book cannot turn itself into a magazine, or a movie player. The physical book pages of my adaptation
cannot change what is already printed on it. It doesn’t let readers edit its text, either. It
doesn’t let its readers to customize its format, its font size, its shape, its weight……. At
least in the real world, it cannot, though I fake it in augmented reality. I trick my
readers’ eyes through the cameras and screens of their mobile devices, and give them
AR footages showing that the book changes itself. I shall return to this in section 3.3.

2.4 A Few words about the narratives in fanfiction and adaptation,

In a Theory of Adaptation, Linda Hutcheon defined an adaptation as “an extended,
deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art.”33 “An adaptation can be described
as the following: An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works. A
creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging. An extended intertextual engagement
with the adapted work”.34 From my perspective, this definition can be used on fanfictions,
too. But Hutcheon stated that fanfictions are not adaptations for two reasons. One,
“sequels and prequels are not really adaptations either, nor is fan fiction. There is a difference
between never wanting a story to end — the reason behind sequels and prequels, according to
Marjorie Garber (2003: 73–74)—and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different
ways.”35 Two, “Allusions to and brief echoes of other works would not qualify as extended

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engagements.” The first reason is irrelevant to the narrative of fanfictions. The intention of an adapter and the intention of a fanfiction writer doesn’t necessarily result in different methods of interpreting and retelling the source text.

To refute the second reason, I want to point out that not all fanfictions allude to the source work “briefly”. Some fanfictions are actually rewriting of the source text. Let me name one example here. In Archive of Our Own, among fanfictions that feature Thor/Loki, the one that receives most Kudo (represented by a little red heart), Shatter is actually a novel version of the script of the first Thor film, except that in Shatter it was Loki who got cast-out instead of Thor. The characters that Loki met, the incidents that happened to him in the fanfiction are pretty much the same as what Thor encountered in the film.

Fanfiction writers usually use characters from the source work and write stories about them under new circumstances or in new adventures. Fanfictions don’t merely tell stories that have never happened in the canon. There are a wide range of fanfictions. Prequels, sequels and what-if stories which usually set the cannon’s narrative as background, consist only part of this genre.

When it comes to recreating or transforming the source’ narrative, a fanfiction and an adaptation don’t follow different rules. Their fundamental difference is that an adaptation can be commercial, while a fanfiction writer cannot make profit from her

37 A huge online archive of fanfiction and other fanworks of various fandoms. https://archiveofourown.org/
38 Marvel characters.
works. This situation may change, though. If the canon of the fanfictions has fallen into public domain, then fans can gain profit from their fan arts. Like *the Brothers Karamazov* translated by Constance Garnett, its fanfictions can be commercial. Project Gutenberg has already digitized it and said “this ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever.”

Besides, adaptations are quite often not strict-retelling of the same story. In many cases, adaptations contain plots, characters that have never occurred in the canon. Take Akira Kurosawa’s movie *Rashomon* and Akutagawa’s short story *In a Grove* as examples. Movie *Rashomon* was an adaptation of Akutagawa’s two stories: *In a Grove* and *Rashomon*. In Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*, there were three men and a baby waiting for the rain to stop at Rashomon, while in Akutagawa’s *Rashomon*, there were only two people, and one of them was an old woman. So, in the film adaptation, there were new characters added to the original story. New plots were added to the story *In a Grove* too. In Akira Kurosawa’s film, the final version of the conflicts among the bandit, the samurai and the samurai’s wife were told by a woodcutter who claimed to witness the whole drama. The woodcutter said the wife laughed at two men and finally incited them to kill each other. In Akutagawa’s writing, this narration doesn’t exist. Therefore, Kurosawa’s film also contains some new events that were not existed, or explicitly described in the texts it adapted from. Those new events in the film are what-if stories to Akutagawa’s *In a Grove*. And I want to emphasize that one of the most common types of fanfiction are what-if stories.

Here is another example, Byron’s closet drama *Cain*, which retells Cain’s murder of his brother. In Byron’s rewriting, Cain had a long conversation with Satan and Satan showed
him the newly formed hell, which was empty back then. *Cain* was told from Cain’s perspective about the murder. In the Bible, there wasn’t any word about Cain meeting Satan. So, in the sense of narrative, is *Cain* an adaptation of the Bible story, or a fanfiction? The term “fans” probably means something different in Byron’s time. But if we just focus on how a story is retold and extend, focusing on the narrative techniques instead of social and cultural background, is there any fundamental difference between an adaptation and a fanfiction?

My point is, in the sense of narrative, an adaptation and a fan fiction often use similar methods to transform the source. Fanfictions don’t merely tell new stories about the same characters. And adaptations don’t always retell the same stories without fundamental alterations to the original plots and characters. Writing a fanfiction and adapting a story are both a process of innovating, expanding, twisting, changing, altering the source’s plots, characters, setting, moral values and so on. I think the relationship between works of adaptation and fanfictions can be visualized as indicated in the graph below.
Figure 5: The Relationship between fanfictions and adapted works
3. Fanfictions of Dostoevsky’s the Brothers Karamazov presented in Augmented Reality

If we regard adaptation, criticism and fanfiction as different forms of literary participation, fanfiction or writing a fanfiction is different from the other two that it is character-driven. In addition to characters, adaptation and criticism explore and study various aspects of a literary work, such as the author, the style, the genre, the narrative, the theme, the social and economic background and so on. For fanfiction though, everything is secondary to the characters. Archive of Our Own is “a fan-created, fan-run, non-profit, non-commercial archive for transformative fan works, like fanfiction, fanart, fan videos, and podfic.”¹ Most of the fanfictions there have a “character” tag, which indicates what characters are significant in the fanfiction. When we browse through a list of fanfictions on the web page, the character tag is always one of the first three tags² and it is usually highlighted by grey color.³

For fanfiction writers and readers, “the one aspect of canon that is not usually up for alternation is the nature of the characters...readers will have a firm idea of what those characters are like and won’t stand for interpretations that strike them as wildly off-beam... Whatever situation you put them (characters from the canon) in, they must behave and speak like themselves. Not that you will ever get a complete consensus among fans on that subject; naturally

¹ https://archiveofourown.org/
² The first tag by default is “archive warning”, which warns potential readers of the fanfiction about possibly disturbing contents.
³ Take a look at the Harry Potter fandom as an example: https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Harry%20Potter%20-%20J*d*%20K*d*%20Rowling/works
there are different interpretations of certain aspects of the canon characters, but if too many readers feel ‘that’s not them’, then the story will have failed as fanfic, however else it may succeed.”4 The character Mitya is the most important element in all my fanfictions concerning the Brothers Karamazov in this project. All the plots in my fanfictions serve to make Mitya more convincing. Chapter 1 presents my interpretation of Dostoevsky’s Mitya. Based on that interpretation, I write stories about him in different situations, striving to keep the Mitya in my fanfictions consistent to Dostoevsky’s, with the hope of establishing a “round” fictional character across media.

All the branching stories in my interactive graphic novel are categorized as fanfictions of the Brothers Karamazov5. In fact, the whole interactive graphic novel can be regarded as an interactive fanfiction. Whereas, the branching stories in AR deviate further from Dostoevsky’s narrative than the direct visualization printed on a book. Since the distinction between adaptations and fanfictions is still controversial, I will categorize the content printed on the physical book as an adaption and the augmented reality content as fanfictions for further discussion.

There are some noteworthy differences between my fanfictions in this project and other fanfictions of popular books, films, TV series and comics. In 3.1, I will first examine two aspects that makes my fanfictions different from others. The first aspect is that the Brothers Karamazov doesn’t have a big online fandom. The second aspect is that the

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5 Fanfiction writer usually refers to the original works which their fan works are based on as “canon”.

writing of these fanfictions is not result of the collective intelligence of fans. Then in 3.2, I will argue how my work can still be regarded as fanfiction. Using Dostoevsky’s writing as an example, I will point out that writing fanfiction is a practice of interpretation, a practice of criticism and a method of retelling and transforming the source story.

The fanfictions, the branching stories are presented using the Augmented Reality. By holding their smartphone at certain pages in the printed graphic novel, users can see extra panels show up on their phone screens. I choose to present those content in AR because the relationship between physical printed media and digital media is analogous to the relationship between fanfiction and the canon. I shall discuss this in detail in 3.3.

3.1 Where is the “fandom” of The Brothers Karamazov

The social background for the canon of my fanfictions is different from other fanfictions in that, there isn’t a large online fandom for Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Very few fanfictions of the characters in this novel can be found online. Why?

3.1.1 Silent fans

The first reason is that *the Brothers Karamazov* is older than most popular works that have large online fandoms. Nor does the novel have many adaptations films or TV series that have a great influence like some of Jane Austen’s works have.

_The Brothers Karamazov_, book one in Dostoevsky’s plan, was finished in 1880, while fanfictions didn’t start to become a phenomenon until 1960s, when *Star Trek* attracted a large number of young female fans who wrote and continue to write transformative stories of the characters in the TV series. In later decades, more fandoms for popular TV
series, book series, comics, films and even video games appear and grow rapidly with the help of the World Wide Web. Let’s look at a screenshot from Archive of Our Own:

![Figure 6: A Screenshot of Fandoms in Archive of Our Own](image)

These are some of the most popular fandoms in each medium. We can see that except Sherlock Holmes, which first appeared in print in 1887, all of these works didn’t exist before 1900. Also, most of these works’ authors, contributors, producers, intellectual property holders are still alive.

*The Brothers Karamazov* stopped updating in 1880. Dostoevsky died in the same year. We can assume that writing fanfictions wasn’t a common activity among readers in Dostoevsky’s time or, we can assume that even though there were a lot of fanfictions about *The Brothers Karamazov* in late 19th century, most of them didn’t survive until today nor did they succeed in going online. This is the first possible reason for the fact
why there isn’t an online fandom for *the Brothers Karamazov* today. It is relatively old and is not commonly read by readers nowadays.

As is known to all, most fanfiction writers are young educated females. I am sure there are a lot of young women like me who enjoy *the Brothers Karamazov*. But there aren’t many fanfictions for this book online. This may have something to do with the interpretive tradition of *the Brothers Karamazov*. Compared to other works listed in the screenshot of Archive of Our Own above, *the Brothers Karamazov* is several decades older. The academy has already established an orthodox interpretive tradition for it (though within this tradition there are various schools which analyze the text in radically different ways), while such tradition for *Harry Potter*, for *Naruto*, for *The Lord of the Rings* and other popular works have not yet formed.

Once such an academic interpretive tradition is formed, there will be a clear hierarchy of various interpretive approaches. Within such tradition, some methods of reading the text are deemed insightful, while others are considered to be trivial. “Fannish reading practices may represent… the institutionalization of a ‘feminine’ approach to texts that differs radically from the more ‘masculine’ style preferred by the academy.”

It makes a reader, who might be a young female, reluctant and afraid to share her intimate interpretation and true opinions of an academically acknowledged classic, like *the Brothers Karamazov*. This is because her views may be regarded as unimportant, insignificant, childish, shallow, irrelevant by authorities, who in many cases are older males and who shares

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6 I collected all of *The Brothers Karamazov* fanfictions I could find on the internet. See appendix.
few similar emotional, critical, social and economic interests with young female readers.

“Fan criticism is the institutionalization of feminine reading practices just as the dominant mode of academic criticism is the institutionalization of masculine reading practices. Men may learn to read as fans, just as women may learn to read within patriarchal norms of academic interpretation, but both are running contrary to their own socialization.”

I don’t think a person’s literary tastes will inevitably be confined by his or her gender socialization. Mutual understanding of genders will improve if both males and females learn to appreciate different kinds of narrative themes and interpretative strategies. Socialization is dangerous because it may mislead one’s taste and encourages people to suppress neutral individual preferences that are contradictory to conservative social expectations. Fan criticism can be as valuable as traditional academic criticism and both methods can benefit from learning from one another.

Henry Jenkins thinks that fanfictions, many of which focus on emotional relationship of characters, share the same subject matter with gossip. “If the public discourse of politics was reserved for men, the private and intimate discourse of ‘gossip’ offered women a chance to speak about controversial concerns in a forum unpolicing by patriarchal authorities because it was seen as frivolous and silly.” Henry Jenkins further said that gossip “allowed women room in which to speak about factors that shaped their assigned social roles and their experiences of subordination.”

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phenomenon but she didn’t think this is caused by the social territory difference between man and women: “some fans, often female, wanted the action to slow down enough to give the characters and relationships time to evolve; they wanted more overt emotion and personal interaction than the scriptwriters were giving them.”¹¹ Henry Jenkins is right about women tend to gossip more than men and that gossip is regarded as unimportant and superficial by men. But gossiping about real people is different from writing fanfictions about real or imagined characters. In real life, gossip sometimes includes invading other people’s privacy and exchanging ill-informed comments on business that have nothing to do with the gossipers. Gossip like rumors, may cause harm to innocent people. However, writing fanfictions foregrounds that the stories aren’t real. Fanfiction writers are not interested in commenting or finding out what actually happen. What’s wrong about getting a little bit more information about an imaginary characters’ emotional life? What’s wrong about wanting “vulnerability in the characters… so that they (female fans) could feel with and for them?”¹² It is a practice of exploring another side of humanity, to fill in what the canon’s narrative doesn’t focus on.

Fanfiction writers and readers spend lot of effort in interpreting the utterance, facial expressions and behaviors of the characters. Fans will try to explain the character’s every flinch, every tremor, every stutter, and every gesture. What fans are interested in what is going on in the characters’ head when they make certain decisions, say certain things, and move in certain ways? They treat the fictional characters as a real people and

try to get to know them better. It’s not a new reading strategy nor is it exclusively used by fans; critics have used their knowledge about humans to make sense of characters in stories for a long time. E. M. Forster has pointed out that it is possible to understand a fictional character like a real human completely: “for human intercourse...we cannot understand each other, except in a rough and ready way; we cannot reveal ourselves, even when we want to...perfect knowledge is an illusion. But in the novel, we can know people perfectly...In this direction fiction is truer than history, because it goes beyond evidence, and each of us knows from his own experience that there is something beyond the evidence...They (fictional characters) are people whose secret lives are visible or might be visible: we are people whose secret lives are invisible.”

Henry Jenkins states that this fan interpretive approach (actually it is commonly used in the academy and in the general public) requires “emotional realism”. It means that even though the canon’s story world is unreal, fans use their real-life experience to explain the characters’ actions and the plots: “What counts as ‘plausible’ in such a story is a general conformity to the ideological norms by which the viewer (or reader) makes sense of everyday life. Such a conception of the series (or books) allows fans to draw upon their own personal backgrounds as one means of extrapolating beyond the information explicitly found within the aired episodes (the canon).”

Figuring out the motives and intentions of the characters are what fanfiction writers and readers keep entertain themselves with in the canon. For a fanfiction writer,

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the author’s political view, the canon’s cultural background, medium, social influence
are secondary to the characters. They are also not that much interested in the
metaphysical meanings of the source work. For example, to read Dante’s Divine Comedy
in a fannish way, the reader would not try to match all the suffering souls in the hell to
their real life historical counterparts. Instead, they would focus on what happened in the
nine rings of hell, the utterance of the souls, the gesture of the monsters and demons so
as to emphasize with them and understand their choices. “What was the implication of a
particular phrase, or the tone in which it was spoken, or the expression on the man’s face and the
attitude of his body when he said it, or the reactions of those characters who heard it?”
These questions are what people ask themselves when they observe others in the real life.
These questions are also what fans ask themselves when they watch their beloved TV
series, read the canon novels, read canon comics, see the canon film. This doesn’t mean
fanfiction writers and readers cannot tell the difference between a real human being and
a fictional character. They are well aware of the difference, but they don’t see the
necessity nor fun to analyze the two differently, nor write stories about them differently.
Henry Jenkins said that: “Only by...close engagement with its (canon’s) meaning and
materials, can fans fully consume the fiction and make it an active resource.”

Henry Jenkins described the academic reading strategy to be more “masculine”.
Such masculine reading has two significant traits. First, it praises itself for keeping a

critical distance from the narrative and the characters so the reader can be rational while examining the work’s morality and political stance. Readers using this approach seek pleasure from comparative reading, and from reading against the works’ historical and social context. Based on this, the second trait of masculine approach is that its priority is to treat the work as a mirror reflecting other aspects of literary writing, like the religious and political intention of the author, the cultural influence on the work’s theme and style, the social and economic circumstances when the work first published, the position or rank of the work within its literary genre, times and geological division. Academic readers like this don’t pretend the story as real, nor the characters as people. Or more precisely, they don’t place much importance in using their daily experience to understand the actions and speeches within the work. They treat the characters more as the word masses of the author, as E.M. Forster put it. The fiction is regarded as a riddle, a metaphor, a distorted reflection and it is expected to point to something beyond what is already written on paper. Of course, this assumption is reasonable and well supported. Female fan readers are aware of this and well capable of this reading approach as males. It’s just not the interpretive approach that young female fans preferred that’s all. “Writers and critics of literary fiction complain about a kind of audience response based on criteria which strike them as irrelevant and non-literary...but very few general readers choose or enjoy a book purely for the writer’s technique. Other criteria do come into it, and if these are not ‘relevant’ to writers and critics, they are to the reader, who is the one looking
for enjoyment.”¹⁷ If one has to spend countless hours to reread a literary work, why shouldn’t she choose a reading strategy that she is more comfortable with?

There is nothing wrong, or childish, or unintelligent, or rudimentary about reading and enjoying the Brothers Karamazov as a fan. Both typical feminine and masculine interpretative approaches give valuable insights of the literary work. Without the sensitivity and perception for human emotions, one cannot comprehend all the mumblings, shouts and gestures of Mitya. Without the extratextual knowledge that Cain had once said “am I my brother’s keeper”, we could not sense the irony and self-loath in Ivan’s “am I brother Mitya’s keeper?” How to apply these two reading strategies doesn’t reflect difference in intelligence.

“Male reading acknowledged and respected the author’s authority, while women saw themselves as engaged in a ‘conversation’ within which they could participate as active contributors.”¹⁸ Henry Jenkins descriptions of two interpretative approaches are true. I want to add that many males engage in “conversation” within the narrative of the canon, and many females read fictions as a way to analyze the author’s motive. As I have stated in chapter 2, adaptation is similar to writing fanfictions of a canon. Sophocles, Shakespeare and other great male playwrights adapted old stories and put in their own voices in the new ones. They participated in telling and transforming the original stories. As for females reading like a male, just open the classroom of a literature

¹⁷ Sheenagh Pugh, The democratic genre: fan fiction in a literary context (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), 229.
class and you will see a lot of them. For the sake of easy discussion, I shall borrow Henry Jenkins’ generalization of feminine and masculine interpretive approaches to argue for the former’s value.

The masculine approach, which is favored by the academy, explicitly requires an emotional distance from the reader to the work. “For the distanced observer, the text remains something out there, untouched and often untouchable.”\(^{19}\) This approach circumvents the fictional characters’ interests and concerns. For example, masculine readers (not always males) would not think that their task is to help people like Don Quixote or Old Goriot to see the reality. Such interpretive strategy also tends to make the masculine readers’ conclusions and findings of the literary work descriptive. They are usually phrased like “this character can be categorized into the stereotype called ‘Superfluous Man’ in 19th century Russia;” “the structure of this novel has a similar pattern as that group of novels;” “we can tell from the ending that author is trying to criticize the alienation and exploitation of Capitalism” ...... There is nothing wrong about being descriptive. But sometimes, the original author may want his or her readers to discuss with what he wrote in the novel, instead of describing what he wrote. The author may want the readers to apply the feminine reading approach, empathize with the characters, and engage in the arguments, controversies and discussions in the story. I shall use Dostoevsky’s advice for reading the Brother Karamazov as an example, to support that authors sometimes expect their readers to read in a feminine way.

Remember the letter of Dostoevsky I quoted in Chapter 1? A female reader wrote to Dostoevsky and asked if Dmitry really did kill his father. Interestingly, this female reader adopted a reading approach that fits into the Henry Jenkins’ definition of masculine reading strategy: “largely male fans... focus on moments of character interaction as clues for resolving syntagmatic questions... Confronted by a complex plot, the male fans sought to ‘get the facts straight.”’

In the reply letter, Dostoevsky explained that Dmitry didn’t kill his father, by teaching the reader how to interpret Dmitri’s words and actions: “When Dmitri Karamazov jumped down from the fence and started to wipe the blood from the head of the old servant he had wounded, by that very act and his words: ‘you’ve come to grief old man,’ etc., he already seems to indicate to the reader that he is not the parricide”. At the end, Dostoevsky suggested the female reader who read masculinely to use her knowledge of human beings to make sense of the characters and the narrative: “the plot is not the only important thing for the reader, but also some knowledge of the human soul(psychology), which every author is entitled to expect from the reader.” He was actually asking the reader to drawing on her personal experience, the way she interprets a real person’s behaviors to understand his story. The author of The Brothers Karamazov encouraged his readers to find answers within the text, which is identical to feminine reading approach: “the rules of female fan interpretation dictate that explanations must be first be sought within the fictional world before

resorting to explanations that appeal to extratextual knowledge about authorship or the production process.”

One may argue that the academy also applies feminine approach in reading fictions, using their social interpersonal experience to make sense of the characters and events in the story, but instead of dwelling in it scholars move beyond the fictional world to analyze the writing of the fictional world. It’s true, but what I want to point out is that sometimes scholars move away from the story world too soon. Before they fully grasp the personality of the characters, they move on to place the characters in some abstract framework beyond the story universe, during which scholars reduce round, convincing characters into static symbols in a theory. For works like 1984, Animal Farm, The Sea-Wolf, where characters are mostly flat, and the story are clearly allegories, masculine approach will surely be more productive than feminine approach. For works like Macbeth, Goethe’s Faust, Notre-Dame De Paris, the Brothers Karamazov, where most characters are round, misinterpreting the motives and emotions of the characters will lead to great mistakes in understanding authorship. When the author writes the characters as real people, and we, the readers refuse to understand the characters as humans, how can we claim to understand the author’s intention when we cannot even understand what he utters through his characters’ mouths? How can a real conversation between a reader and the author be possible if they don’t agree on how the book should be read? Why should one keep looking for what has not been said instead of focusing on

what is already said? Not all stories are supposed to be read as riddles. And for some stories and characters, before you treat them as a riddles or mirrors, you first need to experience them, identify with them and understand them as if they were real. It is because such emotional realism maybe exactly what the original author wants us to feel, and that the answers for the riddle may not be gained after one immerses in the story universe. In 3.2.1, I present several examples of academic masculine interpretive approach that in my opinion “moved beyond” the fictional world too soon and misunderstood the morality of several plots in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

I should also note that there is one work and its film adaptation that render feminine interpretation strategy completely useless. They are Ryūnosuke Akutagawa’s *In a Grove* and its adapted film *Rashomon*, which are mentioned in section 2.4. In this story, there is no “truth”. *In a Grove* was not narrated by an authoritative voice. It is structured as a plain assembly of different people’s confessions. The reader doesn’t receive any guidance from the author for distinguishing the liars and truth-tellers among the characters. If you don’t have any credible information about a person, you have nothing to start your analysis of said person’s personality. Can you tell if the wife did love her husband? Can you tell if the bandit was honorable? Can you tell if the husband was a heartless coward? You cannot. It is because the truth of what happened in the grove, which would determine and clarify the nature of these three characters, is unknown to the readers. And this makes it impossible to understand the motives or grasp the personalities of the characters. Readers are unable to engage in the moral discussions among the bandit, the wife and the samurai because the subject of the moral
discussions is unclear. We don’t know “what happened”, so we don’t know who is good or bad. While feminine readers’ expertise is finding out who is good or bad based on what happened in the story, which doesn’t work at all under such circumstances. But works like In a Grove and Rashomon are rare; many stories are suitable for feminine interpretive method.

I would love to point out that fully understanding a profound round character is no less difficult than answering extratextual questions concerning a literary work. The feminin reading approach, which seeks to unfold the psychology and motivations of characters with daily experience, is equally valuable as (in some cases even fundamental to) the academy-emphasized masculine approach that alienates the fiction’s narrative from real life. Both the feminine and masculine approaches have been used together in literary criticism. You can see the former demonstrated in Chapter 1 when I quoted large amount of texts from the Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky’s letters, my social experience to support my analysis of Mitya, instead of heavily relying on extratextual resources like other scholars’ interpretations of Mitya, or comparing him to similar characters in other stories.

A fanfiction writer is usually a reader of the canon. A fanfiction is first and foremost its author’s interpretation of the source work. “According to Robin Wood (1986)... academic rereading produces new insights; fan rereading simply rehashes old experiences, a practice he labels as infantile and regressive.”23 If a young female reader and writer has to

risk such severe contempt and bitter criticism like Robin Hood’s, it is unlikely that she will share what she truly thinks about *the Brothers Karamazov* in public. Naturally, if she herself devalues fan reading and believes that only academic reading is productive, she dares not to write fanfictions about it, either. Instead, she may try to imitate some acclaimed academic reading methods (which usually established by male scholars) and express ideas that she believes are overlapping with the male interests. “*Girls were taught, then, to make sense of male-centered narratives while boys were only taught to devalue female-centered stories.*”24 Girl were also taught and trained to interpret a story like a man. How frustrated, why young women so frequently try to gain the acknowledgement of male authorities despite not being honest with herself?

> “*In practice, both the teller and the tale are often ‘radically other’ for women within a world where publishing, broadcasting and the film industry are all dominated by men… where educational institutions reward masculine interpretive strategies and devalue more feminine approaches.*”25 The atmosphere for sharing interpretation of a literary classic is not as friendly as that of popular media works. Harry Potter books and films, superhero movies and comics, manga are works that don’t attract much academic attention. Many scholars have a quite condescending view on their value. “*Media critics often express skepticism about whether the formulaic texts of broadcast television and the Hollywood cinema warrant extensive rereading.*”26 I will not provide my opinions for those commercial TV,

films, video games and books. What I am trying to point out is that, no matter what reasons, it is favorable for young female fanfiction writers that academic authorities, who are so enthusiastic about evaluating the value of arts, have little interest in these works. Without their attention, without their judging gaze, a fandom can thrive and young females can let their creativity flow freely. Fandoms are “where interpretive conventions are less rigidly defined or precisely followed than within the academy”.

Unfortunately for me, I write fanfictions for the Brothers Karamazov, one of the academy’s favorites. It doesn’t have a fandom. I shall brace myself.

3.1.2 Writing fanfictions can be private

Many scholars study large fandoms and are convinced that most fanfictions are shaped by popular interpretations within the community. In contrast to this, I believe writing a fanfiction a private activity from the very start. Let’s take a look at this quote:

“I mean, a lot of what we write is masturbation material, and we all know it, and we can’t really pretend that we’re only trying to write for our readers’ most rarefied sensibilities, you know?”

Of course, group masturbation exists in various forms, but masturbation itself is supposed to be private activity. If fan-created stories are masturbation materials, then at the very beginning when it is produced the fanfiction writer writes it for her own fun, not for sharing. Not all fanfictions are pornographic, but fanfiction writers do feel a strong intimacy and privacy for their fanfictions which makes they hesitate to share the stories with others. “There clearly remains some hesitation to share these feelings with the
world at large.” At first, when there is only one fan and there is no fandom, this fan writes stories about her favorite characters in the canon for herself. Then later, she discovers more fans and they share their stories with each other because their love for the canon helps establish mutual trust. The number of the fans grows and fans organize themselves into a fandom. Within this community, more fans start to share their fanfictions and exchange ideas for new stories. Writing fanfictions and getting feedback for it start to become a phenomenon, which soon catches the academy’s interest. While many fanfiction studies focus on established fandoms, I am interested in how the very first fanfiction for a canon comes into being.

Fanfictions, including my interactive fanfiction, are originally produced to satisfy its own author’s need for more stories about the characters they loved. Other scholars like Henry Jenkins have stated that fanfictions are usually products of the collective intelligence within a fandom. And that the narratives of the fanfictions, the personalities of the characters are heavily influenced by certain acknowledged interpretations established in the community. Before I argue against their opinions, I must point out that even though what they said is true for the materials they studied, it is not how my fanfictions of the Brothers Karamazov were conjured. I will go back to this at the end of this chapter. For now, I want to present several statements that claim fanfictions are mostly the products of collective intelligence in the fandom. I shall argue that it is


possible that there are even a larger number of private fanfictions than those shaped by the fandom’s mainstream interpretations.

“Fan culture generated texts that could be shared and exchanged and created a social infrastructure that supported such exchanges. The web’s robust system of circulation increased the speed and scale at which fan production operated…thinking about fandom as a site of collective knowledge production. Fan communities were among the first to experiment with ways they could pool knowledge, build on each other’s expertise, and trade insights within networked communities.”

Fandom can be a site of collective knowledge production, but an individual fan produces knowledge, too. We should note that fanfictions don’t just exist in online fandoms. Fandoms is just one of the most auspicious places where fanfictions get produced, read, disseminated and discussed. The way of writing fanfictions in a fandom cannot represent all the various situations of fanfiction production.

“The often close-knit community of fans allows readers and writers to interact, creating an environment of often shared ideas and collective creation, but also one in which writers are accessible and can be held accountable for their words and ideas. Fans continually challenge if not diminish clear boundaries of authorship as they negotiate reader and writer identities and collectively create interpretations and transform texts.”

I do see fanfiction writers argue with their readers about interpretation of the canon characters, but it’s uncertain


whether the writers take other fans’ interpretation into consideration when they write the stories.

“For most fans, meaning-production is not a solitary and private process but rather a social and public one.”30 I sincerely doubt whether “most” fans share their opinions in the fandom and intentionally write stories that cater to other fans’ tastes. Let me use my experience of reading and writing fanfictions as an example. I have been reading fanfictions since I was 10 years old. By the time I reached 14, most fanfictions online had ceased to satisfy my emotional needs, so I started to write fanfictions about my favorite manga, film characters and celebrities on my notebook. In some cases, I didn’t like how some authors wrote about those characters. In other cases, it was because the characters, films and books I liked weren’t the type of works that attract many fanfiction writers, like the Brothers Karamazov, like the Tales of the Two Cities, like Allen Poe’s fictions, like the Lion King. At the age of 15, I stopped writing fanfictions. Partly, it was because my parents found out about my notebook and partly, it was because my coursework was getting heavier and heavier. During these five years, I had never published my fanfictions online, though I mostly read fanfictions online. Writing fanfictions had been a very private, intimate and solitary activity for me, like writing my diary. I wrote them simply because both the original works and other fanfictions had bored me. I had no choice but to provide my own entertainment. And the fanfictions I wrote were supposed to be for me and myself only.

“In fanfiction the would-be readers themselves became the producers of what they wanted, at first because that was the only way to get it and later because they found the act of producing it pleased them for its own sake.”\textsuperscript{31} At first, a fanfiction writer is alone. She could not find people who share the same interest as hers. That’s why she has to write stories for herself. If there were a large number of fictions addressed to her needs, she would remain a reader. She might become a critic, but she wouldn’t become a storyteller. I started writing fanfictions because no one told the stories I wanted to listen. A writer was first a loner. “Many people who were once content to be the readers...did so (writing fanfictions) accidentally. It wasn’t, at that time, that they particularly wanted to be writers. It was that they wanted some fictional universe and/or characters not to come to an end, or to develop differently, or to reveal facts that were hidden. And since the original writers would not or could not oblige, they had to do it themselves.”\textsuperscript{32} Now, if a fan thinks the canon ends too soon and she is able to find a fandom where other fans share her tastes and write stories that suit her needs, a fan remains a fanfiction reader. Yet even within a fandom, many fans have highly individual interests that other fans don’t share. Such fans can gain satisfaction from neither the narratives of the original authors nor other fans. Thus, these fans write stories for themselves and they may or may not publish their works online. My point is, for a fan, writing fanfictions may not only be the result of being alienated from the canon, but also being alienated from other fanfictions. That’s why I say writing

\textsuperscript{31} Sheenagh Pugh, \textit{The democratic genre: fan fiction in a literary context} (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), 218.

\textsuperscript{32} Sheenagh Pugh, \textit{The democratic genre: fan fiction in a literary context} (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), 236.
fanfiction can be a very personal, intimate activity that is distinguished by the writer’s
unique preferences.

“Fans often discuss story ideas informally with other fans...Stories are often workshopped
with other fans... and revised in response to the group’s feedback.”33 This is indeed a common
practice within fandom, but it is not always the case. Many fanfictions are written by
individuals. “Being aware of their reader’s preferences doesn’t directly affect their writing; they
(fanfiction writers) write what they want.”34 In my case, I rarely commented on other
authors’ fanfictions, though I would read the stories over and over again or saved them
on my local drive if I liked them. I have never maintained a very active and significant
online identity in any fandoms, but I read fanfictions from their websites on a weekly
basis. The population of the anonymous, silent fanfiction readers maybe much larger
than that of the active members within the community.

“For most fans, meaning-production is not a solitary and private process but rather a
social and public one.”35 This notion is contradictory to the assumption above that fans
interpretation and interests are often alienated. Such alienation exists between fans and
the canon, and it exists among fans. Meaning-production for some fans are forced to
become private because they realize they are neither the ideal audience for the canon,
nor are they the mainstream within a fandom. Thus, those twice-alienated fans might
choose not to voice their objections to popular interpretations in the fan community.

34 Sheenagh Pugh, The democratic genre: fan fiction in a literary context (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), 229.
Writing a fanfiction is harder than reading one. It is even harder to publish a fanfiction that may upset a lot of people. The number of “silent” fans may even be larger than that of active fans that contribute comments and stories to a fandom. If a fan is silent, then it is not surprising that she is out of the academy’s radar since she leaves little trace of her affection for the original work in public. But this doesn’t mean no fanfictions got produced from a shy fan like this. “Fan reception cannot and does not exist in isolation, but is always shaped through input from other fans and motivated, at least partially, by a desire for further interaction with a larger social and cultural community.”36 This is so not true in my case. Fans can exist in isolation. Not everybody is eager to get their voices heard. During the first five years of reading and writing fanfictions, I had only noticed 3 fanfiction writers and readers— in Chinese or Japanese we called ourselves “同人女”， which means girls who enjoys fan made transformative arts — one was my primary school classmate, one was my cousin who was 7 years older than me. They were all very surprised when they found out there was a “同人女” in their social circle. We visited different fandoms, though. But all of us were mostly passive readers who never commented or post stories online. In the second year of my middle school, I shared my fanfictions notebook with a close friend who was not a “同人女” but had no problem in accepting the narratives and characters’ designs in my fanfictions. She was the only person who had ever got invited to see my notebook. My parents just spotted and read my notebook when I let it lay open on my desk carelessly the other day. None of the “同人女” I knew sought to join

the fandoms they visited, nor interacted with other members in the community. We just wanted to consume the products shared in the fandom to get more of the stories and characters we loved.

If from the very beginning the writer has already decided not to share her fanfictions to others, then extrinsic standards and social requirements should no longer apply to her works. Young females like me escape to fandoms because there isn’t that much of a judging gaze. “Here fiction is a tool to evoke emotion, allow escape, and enter a space that is not bound by the limits of reality. In terms of erotic … stories, it is ultimately irrelevant as to what specifics appeal, whether readers and writers try to exorcise personal demons or get off on imagined victimhood or perpetrator hood. It is safely ensconced within a fictional space that is framed (often repeatedly) as imaginary.”

Unfortunately, my teenage fanfiction stories were accidentally read outside a fandom, by my parents, and all of sudden the morality of erotic content and my virtue came into question. They thought what I wrote was much more explicit than pornographic material and that’s not what a young girl should do. “Fanfiction challenges many attempts at traditional aesthetic valuation because critics who ignore the guiding frameworks of how, when, and where a fan text was created can easily misread and misjudge.”

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Those erotic stories were not written for my parents or my teachers. They are not supposed to be discussed by them. They are private. Quote what the cowboy Jack said in the Brokeback Mountain: “It’s nobody’s business but ours.” My fanfictions were nobody’s business but mine, and of the people who I willingly shared my stories with. In such a private space, I wrote what I wanted to. And even if I did put those stories online, I would make sure that I warned away people who might feel uncomfortable about them.

“You write what you want to, and the reader reads what they want to.” Works are only shared among trusted ones, those who wouldn’t judge my personality by what I wrote.

“Fanfictions purposefully encourages and thrives on intimacy.”

“Fan fiction is not necessarily wholly unlike other fiction in its creation, dissemination, and reception, but it markedly foregrounds… intertextual performativity that often caters to highly individualized reading desires.” When one’s reading desires are so unique that she couldn’t find a community that share her taste, her fanfictions then exist outside a fandom and are confined to only one reader, the writer herself. Writing a story that may only be enjoyed by oneself is not without value. It is common, especially in writing fanfictions. “It may be that very ephemerality— the fact that stories are remnants of actual emotional and social engagements -- that makes fans seem embarrassed at times. It may be that fanfiction is often tailored to our desires and innermost fantasies, sexual or not. Or it may be the

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42 Kristina Busse, Framing fan fiction: literary and social practices in fan fiction communities (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017), 156.
interplay between those two.” Many fans don’t put their fanfictions online because they are embarrassed about their writing skills, the stories they invented, and the emotional connection they have with the fictional characters and story worlds of the original works. (I remember I was embarrassed by believing the human history written by Tolkien was real and by referring to it in a fantasy story I wrote when I was in primary school.) In public space (a home can be regarded as a public space in my case), there will always be censorship and rules to define what is acceptable and what is not. A fandom may be more tolerant and friendly than my home, or the academic community, but it is still a public space. Many fanfiction writers apologize to their readers for not giving a happy ending to the characters in their stories. Solitude seems to be the only option for writers who seek ultimate freedom in artistic expression.

Even though I do want to share my interpretations and fanfictions of The Brothers Karamazov with others in a community more flexible and casual than the academy, I couldn’t. The Brothers Karamazov doesn’t have an online or offline fandom which collects and circulate fanfiction stories. This results in the second unique aspect of my fanfictions. There isn’t a community that I can actively exchange individual interpretations with other fans.

“For the fan, watching the series is the beginning, not the end, of the process of media consumption.” The first thing I did after I finished the Brothers Karamazov for the first time...

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time was to look for the second novel that Dostoevsky promised his readers in *From the Author*. Then I found out Dostoevsky died before he could even start it, which left *The Brothers Karamazov* a cliffhanger, screaming for someone to finish it. The second thing I did was trying to find classic movie adaptations of this book, but most of the movies I found were either too old to be viewed or didn’t receive much critical acclaim. So, I moved on to look for *The Brothers Karamazov* fanfictions, which were equally few and of little literary quality (though I greatly admire my fellow fanfiction writers’ courage and effort). Afterwards, I searched for criticisms about *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Like a typical fan, my interest is in getting more stories about Mitya. I “wanted more overt emotion and personal interaction” of the character than what is already there in *The Brothers Karamazov* (which has a lot). “What was the implication of a particular phrase, or the tone in which it was spoken, or the expression on the man’s face and the attitude of his body when he said it, or the reactions of those characters who heard it?” These questions are what I constantly contemplate when I read and reread the text, but many scholars (usually males) are interested in other aspects of the novel. Besides, many of their interpretation of the characters are drastically different from mine. It surprised me that so many people are convinced by Smerdyakov’s crooked defense that Ivan was the murder of their father. What’s even more surprised is that a scholar called Gerigk said: “Dmitry alone is responsible for the fact of the crime.” He argued that this is because Dmitry had the evil will

to kill and made such will obvious. Such reasoning had already refuted by Dostoevsky through the defense lawyers mouth, that Dmitri’s words were no different than a drunk man’s empty threats. When reading criticism, I tend to shift my focus from arguing against opinions I disagree to interpreting why this scholar would explain the novel in such a way. Criticisms tell readers more about the critics than the Brothers Karamazov itself, especially after you read several articles from the same scholar.

Before I started writing fanfictions about the Brothers Karamazov, I was a passive consumer of the original novel, its rather limited film adaptations and fanworks, its large amount of criticisms most of which doesn’t address my need of getting a more intimate knowledge of the characters. This situation inevitably drives me to write my own stories for the characters in the novel and use them in a way to express my critical opinions for the materials listed above. “‘fans’, and the community they constitute is consciously nurtured by adapters, who realize that young women in particular need to be able to “appropriate cultural material to construct personal meaning” (Laurel 2005); this is why the interactive mode can be so attractive to them and why stories, in particular, are central to their pleasure in adaptations.” It is true that I used the Brothers Karamazov as a “material” to construct my personal understanding of the moral principles of intersexual relationship as well as raising interest for Mitya, a character that seems relatively unimportant in academic discussion. I want to show people that Mitya is a character that has depth and

he is worth further study. I will demonstrate how writing a fanfiction is an insightful interpretive strategy using Dostoevsky’s examples in 3.2.

3.2 Writing fanfiction as a process of interpreting the canon

I use the word “interpretation” in a very limited sense. When I say “interpreting” a plot or a story, I simply mean the efforts of making sense of the characters’ every word and every movement as they were real human-beings, figuring out what they are thinking when they say and do certain things. What I call interpretation, Dostoevsky termed it as “psychology”: “the plot is not the only important thing for the reader, but also some knowledge of the human soul(psychology), which every author is entitled to expect from the reader.”

For a fanfiction writer, she needs to first apply “her knowledge of the human soul” to understand the characters in the canon, which means to interpret the character, before she moves on to retell or expand the story. The same practice is also necessary for the critics before they start writing criticisms of the work. “A canon before or without interpretation doesn’t really exist; even a plot summary already makes choices on what to include and what to ignore.” A criticism without interpretation doesn’t exist, either. Later in this section, I will use some experts from literary criticism to show how the critics interpretations of the fictional characters are embedded in their writing.

49 Fanfiction writers are usually females.
“As reader engage with a text, they produce a personal and idiosyncratic reading of their canon that then becomes the basis for their interpretation and writing. This maybe as minimal as focusing on one character and his or her interaction at the expense of others.”\(^{51}\) Based on her understanding of the characters, the fanfiction writer starts to imagine and experiment how those characters will act in a different scenario, a different setting or facing a different challenge. Thus, the fanfiction she writes will definitely reflect her own interpretation of the characters.

As I have said above, in many cases, fanfiction writers are first of all, the readers or consumers of the canon. Some of them may not finish reading the original book, the original comic series or seeing the original film completely, but they have some knowledge about what happens and who are there in the canon’s story universe\(^ {52}\). I won’t say all fanfiction writers and readers are fans of the source works. There is still a difference between being a fan of a certain work and being merely a consumer of it\(^ {53}\). However, the purpose of this section is not to study the complexed social groups consistence of the fanfiction writers and readers community and their various degrees of 

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\(^{52}\) For example, when I first started reading fanfictions about Batman and joker, I have never read the comic books nor seen any of the batman movies. But I have come across their names in multiple locations, for example in one of my favorite director Tim Burton's wiki page. I know he has directed Batman movies and I searched what those moviez are about. So I know there is a mainstream American stereotyped superhero named Batman and he has an enemy Joker who is crazy. That’s all I need to know to start reading fanfictions about them. Later, after I have read a large number of fanfictions about them, I began to write my own and to watch Batman movies and a little bit Batman comics. (My point is, fanfiction can be enjoyed outside the canon. I still find it more interesting to read fanfictions of a story than reading the original one.)

\(^{53}\) I wrote and read fanfictions of characters in *Harry Potter* and I have read the original *Harry Potter* book series, but I don’t consider myself a fan of it. You cannot call whoever buys a copy of *Harry Potter* and then leaves a one-word comment under its Amazon page a fan of the book.
emotional attachment to the canon. Let’s just say in my case, as a fan of the novel *the Brothers Karamazov*, I have read the whole book and have close-read sections concerning Mitya multiple times.

A fanfiction, in its first place, tells a story. An interpretation, on the other hand, is basically about guessing someone’s intention and it usually arrives at an assumption or conclusion of why a character or the author does something. Let’s use E.M. Forster’s famous example of the queen and the king. The story is simple: “*the king died and then the queen died.*” Then he said: “*The king died, and then queen died of grief.*” E.M. Forster said the latter narration is a plot, because plot is “*a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality*”. But if the writer only writes “*the king died and then the queen died*” on the page, and one of his readers retells this story by saying “*the king died, and then the queen died of grief,*” we get an interpretation of the queen’s action. The second sentence is not only a plot, but also an explanation of why the queen died.54 There is also an extra information: the queen was in grief. We can see that when a story is retold, the retold version usually contains the reteller’s interpretation of the source material. The reteller’s interpretation adds content to the original text, which may be not intended by the author. In a different interpretation, a reader may retell the story this way: “The king died, and then the queen died because someone believed she knew too much.” The queen might be killed by an assassin. Who knows? Fanfiction writers keep looking for causality of the events in the canon. Some fanfictions are basically retelling the canon’s story with an interpretive

causality. “Fan fiction thus becomes a specific interpretation of the text as it conjectures motivations for characters and constructs background stories.”\textsuperscript{55} 

Not only fanfiction writers have to retell the story of the source work. Critics have to retell the story, too. In literary criticism, it’s inevitable for scholars to summarize and narrate a plot or a scene from the book they study in their own words before they move on to analyze it. Such summarizations of plots and stories are soaked with their own understandings of the story and characters. Let’s look at some critics’ summarizations of \textit{the Brothers Karamazov}. We all know that in the novel, although all sons of the old Karamazov harbors malicious will towards their father consciously or unconsciously, neither Dmitri nor Ivan actually killed their father. The servant and bastard son Smerdyakov murders the old man. Scholar Horst-Jürgen Gerigk summarized the story as such: “\textit{Dmitri eventually threatens to kill his father. But the idea of murder has already blossomed and stayed alive in Ivan, the second brother, as well. Ivan, the intellectual brooder, has planted his intention in the soul of Smerdyakov, who has offered himself as a tool to Ivan with abysmal cleverness. Without speaking aloud, Ivan commissions the lackey Smerdyakov with the father’s murder and keeps far away from the paternal house on the designated night, simultaneously hoping for Dmitri to commit the crime.}\textsuperscript{56}” From Gerigk’s retelling of the story, we see an Ivan who is evil and manipulative. We can infer that Gerigk’s

understands Ivan’s conversation with Smerdyakov, Ivan’s departure to Moscow as a fully intentional scheme of his father’s murder.

Gerigk’s interpretation of Ivan is different from mine. Based on the description in the novel, I don’t think Ivan was evil enough to plan such a crime so calmly, undoubtedly (to himself) and cold-bloodedly. It’s true that he hates his father and will like to see him dead. He does let the murder happen, but that is different from “commissioning” someone else to do it. He is still hesitating whether he should accelerate his father’s murder when he starts off to Moscow on impulse. He lies to himself that going to Moscow doesn’t necessarily result in Smerdyakov’s killing their father, which deep deep down he believes just so. He hasn’t made up his mind when he leaves his father’s house, but Smerdyakov regards his departure as an implicit but clear permission for the crime. As you can see, I summarize the plot with the word “let”, Gerigk with “commission”. In these two summarizations, you get two different interpretations.

Let’s look at the third summarization, which was made by Dostoyevsky himself when explaining the plot to a reader: "Ivan Fyodorovich participated in the murder only obliquely and remotely, only by failing (intentionally) to inform Smerdyakov during their conversation before his departure for Moscow and clearly and categorically expressing his repugnance for the crime Smerdyakov conceived (which Ivan Fyodorovich clearly saw and had a presentiment of) and thus seemed to permit Smerdyakov to commit that crime."

explanation of Ivan’s actions contradicts neither Gerigk’s nor my interpretation. What I inferred from Dostoevsky’s summarization is that Ivan fails intentionally to prevent the crime from happening against his own repugnance for it. Scholar Vladimir Kantor quoted the same letter as I did and he interpreted Ivan’s conversation with Smerdyakov subtly differently from both Gerigk and me: “It’s as if some irrational forces have entered into the action, and Ivan is not in a condition to resist them. Smerdyakov almost forces Ivan to give him a sanction for the murder.” In fact, Dostoevsky’s explanation in the letter together with the description in the novel can be further interpreted and open up more interpretative possibilities, which might exactly be the author’s intention. Arguing whether Ivan is the true murderer of the old Karamazov will make this paper endless, so let’s stop here, after all my project is mainly about Dmitri. By presenting Gerigk’s, my, Dostoevsky’s and Kantor’s summarizations of this plot, I try to point out that retelling a story is a common practice in both literary criticism and fanfiction. Summarization is a mini form of retelling. Both critics and fanfiction writers are retellers of the original story. In the case of literary criticism, the interpretation of the reteller who is also the critic is made much clearer than that in fanfiction. Thus, a good literary criticism, a criticism that makes its point clearly and comprehensively inevitably, allows less possibilities for other interpretations than a good story. It may ignite controversy and invite more people to argue with it, but it leaves little space for interpretation.

In 3.1.1, I have said that feminine reading approach, which focus on explaining the motive and intention of characters, is sometimes crucial to the success of masculine approach, which tends to treat the narrative as a riddle, and read it against its authorial, social, historical and cultural context. The scholars above interpret Ivan’s actions and speeches differently from the way I do. The Ivan I understand is not the Ivans they understand. When they later “went beyond” the fictional world of The Brothers Karamazov, and begin to apply masculine reading to argue how Ivan represents a group of Russian intellectuals who were corrupted by western liberalism in 19th century, I could not agree with their opinions. It is because the Ivan I read in the novel is not the Ivan they described in their criticism. They are actually talking about a character that I don’t see in the Brothers Karamazov.

Actually, several chapters of The Brothers Karamazov can be read as fanfictions presented by two fictional characters in the novel, the prosecutor Ippolit Kirillovich and the defense lawyer XXXXX. These two characters interprete Mitya’s actions and words differently and based on their interpretations they have contradictory evaluations of the social, legal and moral significance of old Karamazov’s murder. At first, they both apply the feminine interpretive approach to understand Mitya’s character as well as the murder by analyzing his oral and body language. Then they adopt a masculine, distanced gaze at Mitya and the crime, to discuss what influence the court’s decision for people like Mitya could have on the society, which Dostoevsky set as late 19th century Russia.
When one retells a story, especially a story with plots, his interpretation of the source will usually be reflected in his retelling. By retelling the story, one creates a distorted version of the original work. (Not all distorted versions are inferior to the source. Some fanfictions are even better than their canons. But I doubt any stories derived from *The Brothers Karamazov* can be better than it.) Please recall how the prosecutor questions Mitya and what he says in the court in *The Brothers Karamazov*. We all know that Mitya doesn’t commit the murder. And Mitya has told the prosecutor Ippolit Kirillovich nearly everything he does that night when his father is murdered, but still the prosecutor “genuinely believed in the defendant’s guilt”. This notion dominates all his interpretation of Mitya’s actions and speeches. The prosecutor interprets Mitya’s jumping back to check on the old servant Grigory he wounded as an attempt to make sure the only witness of his crime is destroyed, but actually Mitya does that out of regret and compassion, as Dostoevsky clearly stated in a letter. Kirillovich interprets Mitya mindlessly grabs a brass pestle on his way to his father’s house as an intentional act of getting a weapon: “Since he had been contemplating his plan and preparing himself for it for a whole month... so he instantly... recognized that it (the pestle) would serve his purpose. So it was by no means unconsciously, by no means involuntarily he snatched up that fatal pestle.”

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60 I have quoted that letter in 1.1.1..

prosecutor further states Mitya’s sincere confession “Of that bloodshed (Grigory’s) I am guilty, but who has killed my father...who can have killed him, if not I?” during the investigation is nothing but a cunning act to deceive the police.\textsuperscript{62}

The prosecutor sincerely believes that there is a murderous intention behind every word Mitya utters and every gesture Mitya makes. So, when he retells what Mitya does at that fatal night, and what Mitya says to him during the interrogation, the prosecutor portrays Mitya as a guilty man, a criminal. The distorted version of Dmitri he gives to the audience in the court is brutal, cold-blooded guileful and despicable.

Readers, the prosecutor, and the defense all agree on the following facts that Mitya jumps back to check Grigory, Mitya grabs a pestle and Mitya claims he doesn’t kill his father, but we differ on why he does so. We interpret him differently. Mitya’s defense lawyer more than once questions the prosecutor why he has to interpret Mitya’s certain actions in this way but not that way while the defense’s interpretations and Mitya’s confession were no-less and even more tenable than the prosecutor’s interpretation:

“Why not accept such an interpretation of the facts?”\textsuperscript{63} “Why not, why could it not be that...We’ve come to the real point: ‘since he was in the garden, he must have murdered him.’ In those few words: ‘since he was, then he must’ lies the whole case for the prosecution. He was there, so he must have. And what if there is no must about it, even if he was there?...Why, for


instance, does the prosecution refuse to admit the truth of the prisoner’s statement that he ran away from his father’s window?...Why should we assume everything as we imagine it, as we make up our minds to imagine it? A thousand things may happen in reality which elude the subtlest imagination.”

The defense criticized that the prosecutor “is charmed with his own romance” and dismissed the whole prosecution as a romance about quite a different man from Mitya. If we consider writing a fanfiction as a process of interpreting the character, then the prosecutor’s speech is a fanfiction that Dostoevsky wrote about his own character Mitya. If we admit that the prosecutor’s retelling of Mitya’s story is weaving a romance, then how is anyone else’s retelling of Mitya’s story not a romance? Who can be sure that the Mitya they portray in their retelling is exactly the Mitya who Dostoevsky designed? Readers may get close to Dostoevsky’s Mitya, but they can never wish to grasp him thoroughly because it is theoretically impossible. No, E.M. Forster didn’t tell the truth, we cannot fully understand a fictional character, no matter how hard the author and the readers try to achieve mutual understanding. Since I have demonstrated before that it is inevitable for one to interpret and retell the story in both literary criticism and fanfiction, I’d like to boldly point out that both critics and fanfiction writers are actually more or

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less romancing when they do their works. “Psychology lures even most serious people into romancing, and quite unconsciously.”

Dostoevsky termed what I call interpretation as “psychology”. It is interesting how Dostoevsky expected his readers to have “certain knowledge of human soul (psychology)” while he spent nearly forty pages criticizing it as a sword that cut both ways using the defense’s voice. “…a different psychology. I have purposely resorted to this method, gentlemen of the jury, to show that you can prove anything by it. It all depends on who makes use of it.”

“The psychological method is a two-edged weapon, and we, too, can use it.”

However, neither the fact that we can never understand an author’s true design of his character, nor the fact that psychological method/interpretation is a two-edged sword has ever stopped readers from romancing. Just because we don’t have the only correct answer of a character’s personality, it doesn’t mean we cannot continue to explain him in a way that we find convincing. Interpreting a character is an enjoyable practice. If there is really one true and correct understanding of a character, the fun of interpretation and reading others’ interpretation will be spoiled. No matter what, Dostoevsky did fully demonstrate the beauty of interpretation with the prosecutor’s and

the defense’s speeches—how neutral actions and mindless words can ignite one’s imagination and create such huge emotional turmoil within a person’s mind, and how one’s own interpretation of others reveal what kind of man he is. When different interpretations collide, when our own interpretation of Mitya, the prosecutor’s interpretation of him, the defense’s interpretation of him juxtaposes one another, the enjoyment we get triples. This is the beauty of fannish reading, what Henry Jenkins described as a feminine interpretive approach.

### 3.3 Printed Stories versus digital stories

In this project, I create an interactive graphic novel which consists of a graphic adaptation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and several branching storylines. These branching stories are “what-if” fanfictions, which are about events happened in alternate universes where Mitya made certain important decisions differently that he did in Dostoevsky’s novel. The graphic adaptation will be printed on paper, while the branching stories will be digital. When the user puts on a necessary device (I am thinking a mobile device), the “what-if” stories can be seen floating on top of their corresponding sections in the printed graphic novel.

Why present the adaptation and the branching stories in different formats?

First of all, it is because of the narrative clarity. In my interactive graphic novel, the visualization of the canon and fanfictions coexist. There is need to differentiate them obviously, otherwise it will cause confusion to readers who have never read the original book.
Moreover, it has something to do with the adaptation and branching stories’ “distances” from the *The Brothers Karamazov*. When I say “distance”, I mean their similarities regarding plots and characters’ personalities. *The Brothers Karamazov* is the canon; my branching stories and missing scenes are fanfictions. They are “what-if” stories with plots that have never occurred in the canon universe. What-if stories “are deliberate departures from canon; what if this, and not that, had happened.” In terms of the characters in the branching stories, they are manipulated by me based on my interpretation of the canon. Even though I have tried my best, I cannot be sure that Dostoevsky would depict them as I did when the characters are put into those “what-if” situations. As for the adaptation, though I only adapt about one third of the original novel and have made changes to the narrative order, the graphic adaptation is still very loyal to Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* with no big changes to plots and all the characters speaking the same lines as they did in the original book. Therefore, I would perceive that my graphic adaptation is much “closer” to the novel than my branching stories. Based on this, I think it would be better to present my graphic adaptation in a form that is similar to its source, which is printed on paper, and using other formats to present the branching fanfictions which are “further away” from the original novel.

I must clarify that I don’t think fidelity is the single most important standard to value an adaptation. In this project, I try to make my adaptation as loyal to Dostoevsky’s novel as possible simply because I think his skills in storytelling and developing

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characters are fabulous. And I believe maintaining them in my graphic novel will provide the best reading experience for my readers. If I am adapting other literary works, I will likely be using other approaches to transform the stories and fidelity may not be a major concern anymore.

Then why I use Augmented Reality to present the branching stories, my alternative-universe fanfictions?

The first reason is quite obvious, because those branching stories happened in alternative universes. The visualization of the canon exists on paper and it represented what have happened in the original book *The Brothers Karamazov*. The branching fanfictions in my project deal with “what could have happened” and “what might happen” if certain characters make a different decision at certain points. They exist in universes that are parallel to the canon’s. How to demonstrate and visualize this “parallel relationship” between the canon storyline and the fanfiction storylines? I think juxtapose two universes in the same virtual space, putting one on top of the other will be most efficient in conveying this idea.

Secondly, even though I want the adaptation and the branching stories to be visually different, they are still two inseparable components of my interactive graphic novel and I want this relationship to be clearly demonstrated in space as well. “AR experiences differ and deliberately depart from film by presenting... stories within a new time and space model: a real time integration in situ (locally in place) and with contextual relevance atop and
AR highlights the difference between my fanfictions and my adaptations that is very loyal to Dostoevsky’s novel. At the same time, without recognizing the pictures in my adaptations, the augmented reality content cannot be activated. This underlines how closely knitted my fanfictions/interpretation are to Dostoevsky’s text. AR can satisfy my need of distinguishing my branching stories from the printed adaptation, signaling their differences in authorship and social background, and still holding them together as equal storylines within one interactive fiction.

One may argue that even though I don’t use AR and instead print my fanfictions in paper together with the graphic adaptation, I still get a lot of options to differentiate the two by using two different color schemes, two different panel formats or append my fanfictions after the adaptation in their own section. Many books are edited this way—first the novel, then some letters and notes from the author, at last a selection of influential criticisms. If I am printing the full text of Dostoevsky’s *the Brothers Karamazov* and my fanfictions or criticisms about it in the same book, I will do that too. But in this project, I am printing my graphic adaptation of the novel and presenting my fanfictions. Here, the adapter, or the author of the printed graphic novel and the fanfiction writer is the same person. In the former scenario, the relationship between Dostoevsky and me is that between an author and a reader. I read *the Brothers Karamazov* first, then I write

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fanfictions or criticisms about it. Putting my works after the full text of *the Brothers Karamazov* in print signifies this author-reader relationship and suggests to readers that they are products of two remarkably different literary activities.

If a reader has never heard of *the Brothers Karamazov* and I refrain from telling him the information that this interactive novel is inspired and adapted from Dostoevsky’s work, he will not carry the concepts of adaptation, canon or fanfiction in his mind when he read *Dmitri Karamazov*. He will just experience it as a normal interactive fiction. My adaptation and the branching stories are closely knit together. In the sense of an interactive fiction, all storylines are equal. If I put my branching stories after the adaptation, readers won’t regard my graphic novel as a tree-shape interactive fiction, but rather a collection of fan works about *the Brothers Karamazov*. That’s not my goal for this project. My goal is to retell Mitya’s story as a way to relish the enjoyment of reading Dostoevsky’s *the Brothers Karamazov* and meanwhile present my own opinion of the character Mitya. I choose the form of interactive fiction because I think it is most suitable for combining and expanding Dostoevsky’s story. I can manipulate its narrative structure with more flexibility to argue my point about Mitya’s fate. For example, I can lead all branching stories to the same ending, which may suggest to my readers that the fate of Mitya is doomed no matter what choices he made.

In other words, if I print and place the branching stories and the adaptation one after the other in two individual sections, the notion that they are equal storylines of an organic interactive fiction will break apart, which I cannot allow. I need my readers to “see” them as parallel, as counterparts in the narrative structure. One may argue that
there is still a graphic design solution to it. Why not print the adaptation and the iteration side by side on the same page? The answer to this is simple, distraction. The traditional reading habit is finishing one page then go to the next. If panels containing contradictory plots are presented on the same page, I cannot control which panel my reader will read first and that may take a toll on the cohesiveness of his reading experience. Processing two stories at a time will inevitably make a reader pay less attention to each. If a reader gets distracted and find it tiresome to read two stories simultaneously, they will easily lose interest in both.

More questions arise: “isn’t Augmented Reality supposed to add in more virtual content to the physical world? You said so yourself that the branching stories will float on top of relevant pages in the graphic adaptation in the virtual space.” That is true. But to see the virtual content, one needs to use a mobile device. If one is absorbed in reading, he is probably not willing to go through the trouble of fetching his phone, unlocking the screen, turning on the app, and holding his camera against the pages to reveal the hidden content. The physical graphic novel, which only contains the adaptation, won’t force the reader to read the branching stories before moving on to the next chapter. The graphic adaptation can stand on its own as a single, close, complete story and it can be read as a traditional printed book. Users are expected to read through the whole printed adaptation before they read the alternative universe fanfictions. On several pages of the physical book, there are fiducial markers which hint that there are virtual contents registered on those papers. The marker is designed to be not that conspicuous to distract readers from the physical pages the first time they read, but clearly visible for people to
know that there are extra contents on those pages which they can revisit later. The physical book will only become interactive when the reader uses his mobile device to reveal the digital content.

The design of the format for the physical part of the graphic novel assumes that the user reads without looking at his mobile device constantly. “No matter what ebook publishers want you to believe nobody, NOBODY wants to read text on a computer monitor, or chapters of books, or even long paragraphs. The resolution of a computer’s monitor… is nowhere near as easy to read as the words on this page. At this point, the only digital screens that come close to paper are “electronic paper” or “liquid ink” screens like those on the Amazon Kindle. Multiple-purpose tablet screens like those on the iPad are glary and impossible to read in sunlight just like monitors.”

Ideally, the reader will use mobile devices to reexamine the book after he has at least finished reading the adaptation once. If one reads with a smartphone in his hand first time he comes across Dmitri Karamazov, there is no way I can prevent the virtual branching stories and the physical graphic adaptation from distracting the reader from each other.

In a nutshell, AR allows me to mix the physical graphic adaptation and branching stories in the same virtual space, which can visualize most clearly the relationship of these two components — — alternative storylines in an interactive graphic novel. Although a reader may need to go through several procedures to read the branching stories

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contents, such inconvenience may be beneficial to the reading experience because different storylines won’t be competing for attention within the reader’s sight. This is the second reason why I choose AR to present my branching stories.

Since I have touched on the inconvenience for a reader to get access to the branching stories in the interactive graphic novel, it’s time to introduce the third reason of choosing AR to present my alternative universe fanfictions. To read the branching stories in *Dmitri Karamazov*, the procedure one must go through to get to the AR content is similar to (though easier than) that of finding fanfictions for one’s beloved canon. Online fandoms are where a large number of fanfictions exist, and using a mobile device to access it reflects the hypermediacy nature of fanfictions’ modern circulating environment. A reader usually searches for fanfictions to read after they finish the canon. The source work is usually more accessible to a reader than a fanfiction that is to his liking. If the source work is a physical book, one needs to close the book, turn on his computer, goes to the Internet and finds the right online fandom that host a collection of fanworks of the canon. Finding the right community takes some efforts. Finding the fanfictions that satisfy one’s desire takes even more effort. So far, I haven’t found a website or a journal that host high-quality fanfictions for *the Brothers Karamazov*.

Some fanfictions retell the canon’s story well, some don’t. The good thing is that you can always close the windows of the online fanfictions and retreat to the source work, your forever classic. In my project, the graphic adaptation is mostly direct visualization of part of Dostoevsky’s *the Brothers Karamazov*, while the branching stories are more manifestations of my interpretation of character Dmitri Karamazov. On
condition that Mitya is not out of character, the purpose of having branching storylines is that the reader can make a few decisions for him and control the development of the story based on their own preferences to some degree, which also includes the preference of preferring no branching stories. So all the fanfictions in this project are invisible to the naked eyes, readers who don’t enjoy the graphic adaptation or Dostoevsky’s *the Brothers Karamazov* will not be bothered by my iterations. Meanwhile, there are clear instructions on how to access them for readers who wants more from the graphic adaptation and the original novel.

I’ve talked a lot about how AR can help to improve the reading experience of my interactive fiction. Now let’s move on discuss how AR assist my participation in writing along with Dostoevsky, and how AR can demonstrate more vividly the interaction between the fanfiction writer and the author of the canon. The technology of AR inserts virtual objects into real-world environment and allows users to see things that are normally invisible. The relationship between the virtual objects and physical objects here is similar to that between a literary work and literary participatory activities that are centered around it. Writing fanfiction is a practice of interpretation, an active engagement of the source work. All fanfictions explicitly refer to the very origin, the physical source which generates criticisms, adaptations and other literary products. In this project, the augmented fanfictions and the printed adaptation point to a physical
copy of the Brothers Karamazov.

Figure 7: The Narrative Structure of the Interactive Graphic Novel: Dmitri Karamazov
In the printed book, most of the texts are Constance Garnett’s translation of Dostoevsky’s writing with minimal alterations. AR technology adds virtual content to physical space without changing the reality. What it changes is our perception of the reality. In addition to present Dostoevsky’s writing, I need to present my own opinions and confusions of certain parts of the novel alongside. Instead of writing on the margins of the physical copy of *The Brothers Karamazov*, I present my ideas in the virtual space. My fanfictions can be regarded as annotations to the canon. Some of the fanfictions try to give details about what Dostoevsky just mentioned with a few words in the book. Some of the fanfictions provide extra mental state descriptions and explanation of intention for certain characters’ actions. Instead of putting footnotes and comments on the same page as the text of the novel, I separate my fanfictions/annotations and Dostoevsky’s narration into different spaces. For a footnote, a mark will appear at the right corner of the relevant sentence, indicating that there is some information outside the main narrative.
that worth noticing. The visual indicators of my fanfictions in this project are similar to the indicator of a footnote. There is a mark near the content that gives me the idea of a fanfiction. The fanfiction is not part of Dostoevsky’s design, but it is relevant. The mark signifies my participation in writing the characters and the story. Meanwhile, the difference between the virtual and physical media emphasizes how Dostoevsky and I are different in every aspect yet we can still form a discussion regardless of time and space.

Adding digital comments can be easily done on a pdf version of the Brothers Karamazov. But AR allows me to make notes on the physical without changing the physical reality. The tactility of a book is worth preserving and is a key element of reading comfort. For all fanfiction writers, as long as we have the canon we have a springboard for our imagination. It’s the source where we revisit again and again. A fanfiction may only cater to a small group of people’s needs, but the canon is the enjoyment of everyone. Placing my fanfictions in a virtual space is a gesture of respect for the original work and for other fanfiction writers. Let me put it this way, if you borrow a book from a library, you should not make any notes on the book because later other people may also read this book and they are probably not interested in what you think about it. Without the canon, there will be no fanfictions, and without the reality there will be nothing to augment. The nature of AR is a perfect metaphor of the relationship between fanfictions and the original work.
Conclusion

This project applies a feminine approach to interpret, criticize and engage in the discussions within *The Brothers Karamazov*. The findings of such interpretive strategy on the character Dmitri Karamazov were reported in Chapter 1 in text, and were embedded in a retold story, in the form of a graphic novel presented as an interactive AR book.

Such feminine reading approach allows readers to have an intimate, personal and sometimes highly individualized knowledge of the characters and the story. To some extent, such knowledge enables the characters to continue to exist in universes and settings other than their originals without losing their coherence and credibility to the readers. Feminine readers are more prone to participating in the discussions and issues of the fictional characters than masculine readers who treat fictional characters as stereotypes or incarnations of concepts. For feminine readers, writing fanfictions is a way of relishing, continuing, deepening, expanding the original literary work. Unlike readers who prefers the academic reading approach, feminine readers (not necessarily females) tend to less enjoy the text by describing it or studying its writing, nor by comparing it to other works, but by rewriting the original text and by using the original as a source to generate new narrative texts.

Chapter 1 of this thesis demonstrates how the feminine approach is used in reading Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* and presents the findings of such approach in the form of a literary criticism. Chapter 2 discusses the media and forms of the digital...
component of this project, which is an interactive graphic novel with Augmented Reality content. Chapter 3 states that this AR book, or this book’s AR content can be regarded as fanfictions of the Brothers Karamazov because its author, I apply feminine interpretive strategy to analyze Dostoevsky’s novel and contribute the fictional world by continuing and expanding the narrative. Chapter 3 also justifies the need of presenting the fanfictions in Augmented Reality by point out that the relationship between the reality and the augmented reality, is analogous to that between the fanfictions and their canon.

This digital project and this thesis aims at acknowledging and demonstrating the value of fannish, feminine reading approach in interpreting and reviving literary classics like the Brothers Karamazov in 21st century. Feminine reading is not uncommon within the academic community but it hasn’t been given enough credit and attention. Traditional literary criticism generated by masculine reading, and fanfictions encouraged by feminine interpretation are both beneficial to the amplification, dissemination, meaning-production and most importantly, the survival of literary classics that were originally produced in older media. By transforming Dostoevsky’ text into an interactive graphic novel, I present a humble example of how a modern reader, who is more confident in the strength and value of a fannish, feminine reading strategy than her predecessors, can contribute to and participate in the writing and presentation of a good story regardless of time and space, as well as make her voice heard by reconstructing existed cultural materials.
Appendix A

Below are links to some existed fanfictions of *the Brothers Karamazov* online:

http://archiveofourown.org/tags/Brat%27ya%20Karamazovy%20%7C%20Brothers%20Karamazov%20-%20Fyodor%20Dostoyevsky/works

https://www.fanfiction.net/s/4765583/1/In-the-Garden

https://www.fanfiction.net/Brothers-Karamazov-%D0%91%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%8F-%D0%9A%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%8B-Crossovers/11148/0/

https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11716426/1/Something-Happened-on-the-Way-to-the-Wedding

http://featherwriter.tumblr.com/post/45400898987/my-world-lit-class-was-talking-about-how-there-was
References


