Surprised by Shame
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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Martinsen, Deborah A.
Surprised by Shame: Dostoevsky’s Liars and Narrative Explorers.
The Ohio State University Press, 2003.
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To see shame is to feel shame. Dostoevsky exploits this property of shame and uses it as a narrative strategy. Shame collapses the intersubjective boundaries between characters and thus accounts for the emotional intensity of Dostoevsky's scandal scenes. Shame also collapses the intersubjective boundaries between characters and readers and thus accounts for readers' emotional involvement in the text. In mobilizing shame as a narrative strategy, Dostoevsky adds shame's affective and cognitive synergy to the recursive relations among author, readers, and text. The activity of writing exposes characters to readers' views; the activity of reading positions readers as witnesses. Portrayed shame overflows textual bounds. Just as shame disrupts individuals' unexamined sense of self and their sense of the world, so portrayed shame disrupts readers' sense of personal inviolability and their narrative expectations. By positioning readers as witnesses to exposed shame, Dostoevsky catches us off-guard and entangles us in an archaic, anxiety-fraught experience that accounts for those who recoil, never to return. Nonetheless, as I will show, by aggressively implicating readers in the painful experience of exposure and self-consciousness, Dostoevsky uses shame as an instrument of social conscience that gives us as readers the opportunity to know ourselves not as self-sufficient subjects but as members of a social and metaphysical community.

Dostoevsky aptly titles Book Two of *The Brothers Karamazov* “An Inappropriate Gathering” (*Neumestnoe sobranie*), thereby preparing his readers for the scandal that ensues. The words in the Russian title, in fact, pinpoint two major components of Dostoevskian scandals: *sobranie*—a gathering, meeting, assembly, literally “a bringing together,” that is *neumestnoe*—inappropriate, untimely, unfitting, literally “not in place.” Like much else in a Dostoevskian
text, the book’s title suggests multiple meanings: the time is not right, the place is not right, the meeting is not right. And, as is so often the case in a Dostoevskian text, all of these meanings obtain. Having read Book One, “The History of One Little Family,” readers know that the unprecedented gathering of a histrionic father and three unlikely sons—a former army officer, an intellectual journalist, and a novice monk—at a time when father and eldest son are openly feuding, in a sacred place, for a secular purpose, in the company of mixed onlookers, is a set-up for scandal.

Scandals proliferate in Dostoevsky’s work. But why? Scandals move personal crises into the public realm. Personal crises express social and political tensions. By shaking individuals up, crises provide them with an opportunity to move beyond the quotidian and focus on the spiritual. Personal crises exposed to public view awaken voyeuristic fascination. By exposing readers to characters’ crises, Dostoevsky implicates us in their lives and thus entangles us in their ethical and metaphysical dilemmas.

This book will argue that shame precipitates scandals, that for Dostoevsky scandal is the exposing of shame, and that Dostoevsky uses exposed shame as a narrative strategy to implicate readers in the ethical action of his texts. Indeed, Dostoevsky could have written the entry for “scandal” in the dictionary of the nineteenth-century Russian lexicographer Vladimir Dal’. Whereas the Old English Dictionary does not once use the word “shame” in its definitions of scandal, Dal’s first three entries are words denoting shame: *sram*, *styd*, *pozor*. In addition to their figurative meaning of “shame,” both *sram* and *styd* signify the sexual organs, with *sram* having the stronger physical connotations. The noun *pozor* denotes “a spectacle” and thus incorporates the visual dimension into its meanings of “shame” and “disgrace.” Dostoevsky also activates the Greek root *scandalon*, which denotes a trap or moral stumbling block. As I will show, Dostoevsky uses shame’s unexpectedness, contagiousness, and paradoxicality to ensnare his readers. Shame’s unexpectedness in particular allows Dostoevsky to unleash the affective and cognitive synergy of three properties of the shame experience: disruption, disorientation, and self-consciousness. No wonder the word “suddenly” (vdrug) abounds in his work. Dostoevsky surprises readers with shame.

In Book Two, Chapter Two of *The Brothers Karamazov*, a chapter titled “The Old Buffoon” (Staryi shut), Fedor Pavlovich Karamazov aggressively shames his cousin-in-law Petr Alexandrovich Miusov. He begins by mimicking Miusov’s bow to Zosima, a parodic gesture that calls attention to an action that is already “out of place.” As the narrator notes, Miusov had fully intended to ask for Zosima’s blessing, perhaps even kiss his hand, but discomfited by the monks’ deep ceremonial bows, with fingers touching the ground, Miusov instead makes a deep civilian bow, hands at his side. Feeling out of place,
Miusov acts out of place. Fedor’s parody accentuates Miusov’s gesture, highlighting its inappropriateness. Miusov avenges himself by insulting Fedor Pavlovich. Thus begins the cycle of aggressive clowning and antagonistic response, shame and counter-shame, exposure and counter-exposure, that characterizes their interaction. In this scene, as elsewhere in Dostoevsky’s work, scandal and shame go hand in hand. The agonistic in-laws vie to expose each other before those assembled, heightening onlookers’ sense of impending disaster. The narrator heightens readers’ expectation of scandal by reporting onlookers’ responses. For example, as he watched his father’s apish bow, “Blood flooded Alesha’s cheeks; he became ashamed (emu stalo stydno). His evil forebodings were coming to pass” (14:36;39). By reporting this and other shame responses, the narrator dramatizes shame’s contagiousness.

In response to Miusov’s second round of shaming, Fedor Karamazov appeals to the elder Zosima:

In those seconds when I see that my joke isn’t going over, my cheeks, reverend father, begin to stick to my lower gums; it feels almost like a cramp; I’ve had it since my young days, when I was a sponger on the gentry and made my living by sponging. I’m a natural-born buffoon, I am, reverend father, just like a holy fool; I won’t deny that there’s maybe an unclean spirit living in me, too, not a very high caliber one, by the way, otherwise he would have chosen grander quarters, only not you, Petr Aleksandrovich, your quarters are none too grand either. But to make up for it, I believe, I believe in God. It’s only lately that I’ve begun to have doubts, but to make up for it I’m sitting and waiting to hear lofty words. I am, reverend father, like the philosopher Diderot. Do you know, most holy father, how Diderot the philosopher came to see Metropolitan Platon in the time of the empress Catherine? He walks in and says right off: “There is no God.” To which the great hierarch raises his finger and answers: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” Right then and there our man fell at his feet: “I believe,” he cries, “I will accept baptism!” And so they baptized him at once. Princess Dashkova was his godmother, and Potemkin his godfather. . . . (14:38–39;41)

As this passage makes clear, shame has been Fedor Karamazov’s companion from an early age. He describes how shame affects him physically, like a cramp. He demonstrates how shame has affected his self-image: he calls himself “a natural-born buffoon” and confesses to having an unclean spirit—a sign of dirty, thus shameful, contents. Then he tells a plagiarized story that marks him as a vrun, an exhibitionist liar. He thus engages in a form of rhetoric that his creator, Fedor Dostoevsky, has identified as the rhetoric of shame.
In an 1873 *Diary of a Writer* article titled “Something about Lying” (*Nechto o vran’e*), Dostoevsky’s narrative persona identifies shame as a critical motive for lying (*vran’yo*). He hyperbolically argues that all Russians lie because they sense a discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves: “The second thing at which our general Russian lying hints is that we are all ashamed of ourselves. In fact, every one of us carries in him an almost innate shame at himself and at his own identity; the moment Russians are with others, they all try as quickly as possible, no matter what, to appear surely different from what they are in reality. Everyone hastens to assume a completely different identity” (21:119). Dostoevsky’s *Diary* writer cannily associates shame with exposure, identity, and pain. Twentieth-century shame experts have corroborated his observations, defining shame as a painful affect originating in exposure (seeing, being seen, or both) that prompts (1) self-consciousness, consciousness of others, or both; (2) negative self-assessment; and (3) feelings of weakness, defectiveness, dirtiness, estrangement, or any combination thereof. Positioned on the boundary between self and others, shame derives and reinforces its particular power from a fundamental duality of human experience: self in relation to self, self in relation to others. The pain of shame is caused by a sense of being exposed that arouses a person’s feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, or defectiveness vis-à-vis self or others. The source of shame can be internal or external, imagined or real. Furthermore, shame can be experienced privately or publicly.

In the chapter “The Old Buffoon,” Dostoevsky demonstrates how shame propels the action as Fedor Karamazov and Miusov compete to expose one another. In making Fedor Karamazov a liar, however, Dostoevsky also parades his own poetics and trains his readers by showing how lying conceals shame yet signals its concealment. Fedor Karamazov’s Diderot story, for example, is a conversion tale featuring shame as the instrument of change. Fedor Karamazov tells this story as an artful ruse, ensnaring his audience with their own inappropriate laughter, thereby shaming them. Fedor Dostoevsky exploits the old buffoon’s prankishness to mask an authorial message: positively confronted, shame can lead to revelation and change. Shame normally engenders painful self-consciousness that produces a desire to cut self off from others, thereby ridding the self of the pain. But this painful self-consciousness can also produce a desire to reconnect with others and to reorient the self, thereby healing the pain. This second scenario describes the action of the Diderot story. Fedor Karamazov deliberately tells a story that pits an atheist against a believer. Fedor Dostoevsky situates this story in a novel about atheism and belief, the secular and the sacred, alienation and community, the West and Russia, the devil and God in the human soul. Both Fedors tell a story in which a European atheist challenges a Russian man of God who calls him a “fool,”
thereby awakening his self-awareness and moving him to convert. Dostoevsky, however, adds thematic resonance and metaliterary play to the story. In Dostoevsky's world, atheists have isolated themselves from human community: having denied God, they deny the ties that bind—the image of God within all humans. In his story, the atheist moves from intellectual isolation to spiritual community.

Dostoevsky also uses this storytelling scene as a metaliterary opportunity, that is, as an occasion to reveal his own poetics. For example, the words that reputedly affect Diderot so dramatically are not Metropolitan Platon's own words, but a repeated quotation from the first lines of Psalms 14 and 53. Fedor Dostoevsky thus has Fedor Karamazov tell a story (about Diderot) that refers to another story (about the fool who says in his heart that there is no God), both of which have subjects who question God's existence. Fedor Karamazov tells the story; Fedor Dostoevsky frames it. Fedor Karamazov identifies with Diderot; Fedor Dostoevsky uses his character's identification with Diderot, whom Platon identifies with the unbelieving fool (bezumets) of the Psalms as a triple mise en abyme to situate the old buffoon's comic crisis of identity and belief in a literary, historical, and metaphysical continuum that moves backward from the nineteenth to the eighteenth century to the time of the prophets—a time of direct struggle with God the Father. Under the mimetic cover of Fedor Karamazov's clowning, Fedor Dostoevsky thus reveals his authorial hand. He creates a liar who tells a story about atheism and belief that reflects his novel's thematics.

Dostoevsky also fashions a narrator who maintains a critical, though not hostile, distance from Fedor Karamazov so that both author and narrator can tell a far richer story than the old buffoon. Here, as elsewhere, Fedor Dostoevsky does not share his characters' narrative limitations. For instance, Fedor Karamazov's story is based on a historical event—Diderot's meeting with Metropolitan Platon. Fedor Dostoevsky exploits the literary resonance in the historical name "Platon"/Plato to tell a story that recapitulates the dramatic action of a Platonic dialogue in which an uninitiated seeker of knowledge moves from ignorance to aporia, a position of perplexity that can lead to enlightenment. Although Platonic aporia is not identical with Dostoevskian shame, in both experiences the person becomes conscious of a lack, a critical awareness that for both Plato and Dostoevsky can inspire change. Dostoevsky thus inscribes clues to his own poetics in his character's story, thereby enhancing his authorial audience's aesthetic pleasure.

Furthermore, by making Fedor Karamazov a storyteller who can manipulate audience response, Dostoevsky demonstrates his own talent. The two Fedors tell stories for different reasons, however, thus illustrating a major difference between lying and fiction. For Dostoevsky, fiction places mimetic
truth in the service of poetic truth. Exhibitionist lying, on the other hand, ignores truth and uses hyperbole and plagiarism as protective covers. The liar’s narcissism impedes his narrative efficacy. Fedor Karamazov can manipulate his audience, but he cannot get what he really wants, because he fashions and then flaunts a provocative self-image. Blinded by his narcissistic injury, he cannot engage in sincere dialogue. The Diderot story locates Fedor Karamazov at the center of shame’s paradox, caught between his conflicting desires to alienate and to join his fellow men. Telling the story enacts his dilemma. By violating the spirit of the place, he challenges every auditor in the cell. Yet his specific challenges to Zosima and Miusov dramatize his inner conflict. He challenges Zosima, a spiritual father, to read his heart and convert him. He challenges Miusov, his worldly cousin-in-law, to defend the decorum violated by the story’s provocative content. As he anticipates, Zosima pierces his heart with wisdom, and Miusov creates a scene that compounds the scandal. Faced with the choice of accepting Zosima’s offer or responding to Miusov’s counter-provocation, Fedor Pavlovich remains on the familiar side of shame’s paradox. His narcissistically motivated desire to avenge himself proves greater than his desire to be one with God’s community. The inertial force of habit wins.★

Miusov accuses Fedor of lying, thereby sharing the shame he feels at being witness to Fedor’s buffoonery. The aggressiveness of his accusation adds to the scandal and reveals Dostoevsky’s authorial hand.

“Fedor Pavlovich, this is unbearable! You know yourself that you are lying and that that stupid story isn’t true. Why are you clowning?” Miusov said in a trembling voice, completely unable to restrain himself.

“All my life I’ve had a feeling that it wasn’t true!” Fedor Pavlovich exclaimed with enthusiasm. “I, gentlemen, will tell you the whole truth. Great Elder! forgive me, that last part, about Diderot’s baptism, I invented myself just now, this very minute while I was telling it to you. It never even entered my head before. I made it up for its piquancy. That’s why I’m clowning, Petr Aleksandrovich, to be more endearing. Though sometimes I don’t know myself why I do it. As for Diderot, I heard this ‘the fool hath said’ maybe twenty times from local landowners when I was still young and lived with them; by the way, I also heard it, Petr Aleksandrovich, from your aunt, Mavra Fominishna. All of them are still convinced that the godless [bezbozhnik] Diderot went to Metropolitan Platon to argue about God. . . .” (14:39:42)

This interaction dramatizes a long-standing social tension and thus reflects the characters’ mimetic functions. Though both ostensibly members of the same class—the landowning gentry—Miusov and Fedor Karamazov travel in
very different social circles. Miusov is a hereditary landowner, a liberal westernized member of the intelligentsia, who lives on the income from his estate and spends large periods of time in Europe. Fedor Pavlovich hails from an impoverished landowning family, starts his career as a sponger, and acquires capital by his first marriage to Miusov’s cousin. After her death, he goes south, increases his capital, returns to her property, and invests in land and taverns. Miusov is ashamed of their family connection. Fedor Pavlovich gets his revenge for Miusov’s social snobbery by stressing their family tie and shaming him socially. Miusov’s loss of control in this passage demonstrates the depth of his concern for decorum, a concern that makes him emblematic of many aristocrats. His interaction with Fedor Pavlovich thus mimetically reflects an actual historical situation and metapoetically evokes the comic tradition in which clowns unmask their social superiors. By exposing Fedor Pavlovich as a liar, Miusov attempts to shame him, thus placing distance between them. Fedor Pavlovich, however, deftly collapses the distance by claiming Miusov’s aunt as a source for his story. The two thus work from opposite ends of shame’s paradox: Miusov uses shame to separate himself from his unwanted relative; Fedor Pavlovich uses shame to recall their connections. However scandalously, Fedor Pavlovich thus acts as the bearer of Dostoevsky’s authorial message about human interrelatedness.

Fedor Pavlovich’s contradictory response to Miusov raises questions of intention and poetics. He claims that he lies intentionally (“to be more endearing”) and without reason (“though sometimes I don’t know myself why I do it”). He admits to plagiarizing the story but confesses to fabricating a new ending. In claiming that he lies to ingratiate himself with his audience, Fedor Pavlovich echoes Dostoevsky’s journalistic observation that Russians lie for hospitality’s sake, sacrificing themselves to their listeners to produce an aesthetic impression and provide pleasure (21:117). Fedor Pavlovich’s conscious clowning does not aim to please, however, but to provoke. He plagiarizes and hyperbolizes aggressively, not hospitably. He plays the clown and humiliates himself, but he also exposes his audience both to the pain of witnessing and to the pain of exposure.

Although Fedor Pavlovich claims that he does not know why he lies, Zosima provides an answer: “And most importantly, don’t be so ashamed of yourself, for that is the cause of everything” (14:40;43). Fedor exclaims that with these words, Zosima

... seems to have pierced me right through and read me from inside. Indeed, it seems to me that when I enter a room I’m baser than everyone and that everyone takes me for a buffoon, so “Why not, indeed, play the buffoon, I’m not afraid of your opinions because you are all, to a man, baser than me?”
That’s why I play the buffoon, I’m a buffoon out of shame, Great Elder, out of shame. From touchiness alone I riot. If only I were sure, when I entered, that everyone would take me at once for the nicest and smartest of men,—Lord! what a good man I’d be! (14:41:43–44)

This interchange elucidates the scene’s shame dynamic. As Schneider observes, “Shame arises when something doesn’t fit.” Fedor Karamazov declares that he feels out of place when he is with others because he believes that they hold him in contempt. He responds to this social shame with a buffoonish verbal aggression that he acknowledges to be a defense. His hyperbolic rhetoric must be seen, and read, as a clown’s weapon.

Miussov characterizes Fedor Pavlovich as a “Pierrot,” a character associated with commedia dell’arte. Like Pierrot, Fedor Pavlovich is a performer who subverts hierarchies. He admits to recycling the Diderot story, a time-honored tradition, yet he claims credit for improvising the baptism. He thus follows the generic conventions of commedia dell’arte, which “unscrupulously stole from other theaters, taking up the latest hit, turning it inside out and offering it back as parody.” By exaggerating the encounter’s outcome, Fedor Karamazov provides a parodic conversion story. The story’s source, Snegirov’s biography of Metropolitan Platon, portrays Diderot as a deliberate blasphemer who plans to confuse and mock Platon with his atheistic announcement. Unfazed, Platon notes that Diderot’s atheism is not original but is anticipated by David’s psalms. Shamed by this response, Diderot respectfully embraces Platon. This mild story certainly differs from Fedor’s. The move from embracing Platon to embracing Christianity may be Fedor’s own hyperbole, or it may have been part of the story by the time he heard it. Either way, Diderot’s conversion illustrates the point in Dostoevsky’s article on lying that all stories are exaggerated in the telling. In both scenarios, Fedor Pavlovich is just one in a series of narrators. Finally, whether Diderot’s conversion belongs to Fedor Pavlovich or his sources, the atheist’s flamboyant conversion suits the authorial thematics of Dostoevsky’s Johannine epigraph of the seed (John 12:24). Fedor Karamazov thus exemplifies and enacts the part of Pierrot: he conveys an authorial message by playing the role of the clown who steals a story and parodies it by exaggerating and improvising.

Fedor Karamazov’s improvisation of Diderot’s conversion also bears an authorial imprint. Old Fedor may have chosen Dashkova and Potemkin as godparents for their historical verisimilitude as well as for Potemkin’s scandal value. As two of the best-known figures of the time, Dashkova and Potemkin were cultural clichés, mimetically apt choices for a plagiarist. Fedor Dostoevsky’s choice of these two as godparents, however, resonates richly with the novel’s thematics. Dashkova was involved in the conspiracy that placed
Catherine on the throne. Dostoevsky thus has Diderot blessed by at least one person who had revolted against the God-ordained emperor (Peter III), replacing him with a secularly oriented empress (Catherine II)—an apt association for a novel about parricide/regicide/deicide as well as the conflict between atheism and faith. Furthermore, Princess Dashkova, in addition to being a famous salon hostess who knew Diderot personally, was also Catherine the Great’s literary rival, appropriate for a novel full of rivalries. Potemkin was the creator of “Potemkin villages,” those masks for the reality behind Catherine’s ideal for the Russian empire, a form of architectural lying. This synthetic detail thus accentuates Dostoevsky’s metaliterary play as it calls attention to Fedor Karamazov’s lying. Catherine’s most well-known lover, Potemkin, links lying and sensuality, making him a worthy parallel for Fedor Pavlovich himself. In fact, commenting on Diderot’s baptism, Fedor Pavlovich associates his verbal ingenuity with “piquancy,” a word that connects his rhetoric both to Ivan’s newspaper articles, which are “piquantly” composed (14:15;16), and to his own sensuality, which finds expression in his view that Lizaveta Smerdiashchaia “could be regarded as a woman, even very much so, and that there was even some piquancy in it of a special sort, and so on and so forth” (14:91;98). Dostoevsky thus deliberately links verbal ingenuity and sensuality, an association further underscored by allusions to Diderot, whose first commercial literary work, Les bijoux indiscrets, centers on the world of courtesans. The association with Ivan’s writing also links father and son in a significant way that Dostoevsky reveals late in his novel and that I will discuss in chapter 11.

In fashioning Diderot’s baptism as an unholy trio united in a holy rite, Dostoevsky exposes the conflict between Fedor Karamazov’s metaphysical longing for community and his materialistic longing for power. He also reveals Fedor Pavlovich’s unconscious desire for spiritual guidance and a way to rejoin the community he provokes to reject him. In short, Dostoevsky shows that while Fedor’s story may serve to conceal his shame, it also functions as a sign of the cover-up. Dostoevsky thus supplies readers with a trail that moves from the story’s overt to its latent content.

Dostoevsky first encrypts Fedor Karamazov’s desire for acceptance into his Diderot story. Then he exposes the shame dynamics that lead Fedor to conceal it. Anticipating rejection, Fedor aggressively provokes it. His verbal aggression acts out a defensive hostility. By attacking his audience with stories, Fedor Karamazov not only moves from passive to active; he also reveals part of what he intends to hide. By having Zosima identify shame as the source of Fedor Karamazov’s lying, Dostoevsky provides readers with the key to the old buffoon’s stories. By showing readers how to identify Fedor’s desire for acceptance, Dostoevsky creates a common ground between the sensuous
old buffoon and his authorial audience. Distracted by the scene’s scandal and metaliterary play, readers may overlook this area of commonality. Yet Dostoevsky announces it at the novel’s outset. At the end of Book One, Chapter One, which focuses on Fedor Pavlovich, the narrator declares: “In most cases, people, even wicked ones, are far more naive and simple-hearted than we generally assume. And so are we ourselves” (14:10;9). The shocking last sentence (Da i my sami tozhe) warns readers that Dostoevsky is going to breach the distance between characters, even wicked ones, and readers. Indeed, Dostoevsky reprises this idea polyphonically at the novel’s end as the townspeople discuss the defense lawyer’s speech at Dmitry’s trial. One person calls the speech “serious,” another “true.” A third then pipes up: “Us, too, he summed us up, too . . . at the start of the speech, remember, that we’re all the same as Fedor Pavlovich?” A fourth voice agrees, “At the end, too” (15:151;723). The seven hundred pages that separate these passages bespeak an authorial message. Fedor Karamazov may be gone, but Fedor Dostoevsky has not forgotten him.

Dostoevsky scandalizes readers by suggesting that we are all the same as Fedor Karamazov. The idea disrupts our unquestioning sense of self; it disorients us; it makes us self-conscious. This, I argue, is Dostoevsky’s goal: to surprise readers with shame, to expose shame as the post-lapsarian heritage we share with Fedor Pavlovich, with all of Dostoevsky’s characters, with all human beings. Shameless exhibitionism aggressively transgresses and collapses the intersubjective boundaries between characters, but also among characters, readers, and text. In behaving like a buffoon, Fedor Karamazov aggressively arouses shame in those positioned as witnesses. In writing this and other scandal scenes, Fedor Dostoevsky aggressively confronts his readers with shame. He also provides us with opposing models of response. In “An Inappropriate Gathering,” Dostoevsky opposes the responses of Miusov, who perpetuates the cycle of shame, to those of Zosima, who empathically reflects Fedor Pavlovich back to himself, giving him the opportunity to confront his shame and return to community. What Zosima does for Fedor Karamazov, Dostoevsky does for his authorial audience. He provides us with the opportunity to confront our shame—the shame we experience as we witness another’s shame. In having Zosima plunge beneath the surface to reveal to Fedor Karamazov that his shameless behavior springs from his shame, Dostoevsky shows us how we, like Miusov, perpetuate shame cycles. Fedor Dostoevsky thus gives us the opportunity to confront our shame and to know ourselves—not as self-sufficient subjects but as members of a social and metaphysical community. The idea that we are all the same as Fedor Karamazov also gives new meaning to the word “brothers” in the novel’s title. In this unconventional way, Dostoevsky dramatizes his social, political, and metaphysical message of human relatedness.
In fashioning scenes of shame, Dostoevsky engages an archaic experience that evokes anxiety. Even when Dostoevsky portrays shame as content and as motive (thus as plot mover), he arouses reader discomfort. When Dostoevsky uses shame as a narrative strategy, he takes the greater risk of losing some readers. In return, he gains access to those who remain. On the mimetic as well as synthetic levels, Dostoevsky exploits shame’s affective and cognitive synergy, heightening readers’ self-consciousness and thus engaging us emotionally as well as intellectually. He seduces readers by arousing our voyeuristic instincts. He taps shame’s paradoxical capacity to isolate and relate. He employs shame’s comic potential to create intimacy as well as to entertain. He also uses and demonstrates shame’s potential to link the ethical with the aesthetic.

Shame is experienced intersubjectively, making it a rich ground for exploring ethical interactions. Shame is also experienced contextually, thereby lending itself to aesthetic evaluation, for shame is experienced when people or things are exposed, which literally means that they are out of place. Both the English verb “to expose” and its Russian equivalents, oblichat’, razobichat’, raskryvat’, indicate the placing out, disrobing, depriving of shelter, laying open, placing in an unsheltered or unprotected position of something or of someone (the Russian verb oblichat’ contains the root lik, or “face,” which stresses the human). This spatial aspect of exposure locates shamed persons aesthetically—in a dissonant or disharmonious relationship with their surroundings. This strong linking of the aesthetic with the ethical derives from a long tradition in Russia, where even language reinforces it. The Russian word for icon, obraz, also means “image,” while the Russian word for the ugly, disgraceful, disfigured, and scandalous is bezobrazie, or “without image.” At the personal, social, and metaphysical levels, individuals can relate respectfully and thus preserve this deep sense of aesthetic/ethical propriety, or they can violate boundaries, breaking down aesthetic/ethical structures.

Dostoevsky’s liars are excellent vehicles for studying shame and narrative because they are shamed, shameless, or both. In fact, in diagnosing shame at one’s identity or the desire to be other than who one is as a central motive for lying, Dostoevsky identifies lying as the rhetoric of shame. Furthermore, Dostoevsky’s liars not only fall into social cracks, making them out of place or misfits; they also feel out of place. Consequently, liars flirt with or violate social norms. Finally, lying and fictionalizing share much common ground, making liars apt agents for Dostoevsky’s metaliterary play. While Dostoevsky’s liars try to fit themselves into society by citing literature, Dostoevsky assimilates himself into the Western canon.

My inquiries into shame and lying overlap notably. I examine the content of lying as shame content made manifest. This illuminates each liar’s particular shame issues but also opens up a whole range of questions about shame,
rhetoric, misrepresentation, and narrative. Liars are self-fashioners, whose self-representing disclosures function simultaneously as unconscious self-exposures. Dostoevsky thus plays with narrative’s paradoxical ability to reveal and conceal. The authorially supplied surplus vision of Dostoevsky’s texts reveals a gap between the narrative abilities of character-narrators and author, a gap that reveals how character-narrators’ narcissism (a symptom of their shame) blinds them, but not their author (or his audience), to the larger thematic and metaliterary depths of their stories. Dostoevsky’s personalized (semi-embodied or embodied) heterodiegetic narrators also expose his homodiegetic character-narrators; the author, in turn, may expose his narrator as an exposurer. To write about lying allows Dostoevsky to write about fictionalizing. To expose readers to shame allows Dostoevsky to collapse the intersubjective boundaries between characters and readers.

For Dostoevsky, reading is a redemptive tool that stimulates ethical changes. His prose fiction “translates the interactive problems of ethics into literary forms.” While Dostoevsky does this in a variety of ways throughout his literary career, in his novels after Crime and Punishment he develops a narrative strategy that involves his readers’ immersing themselves in the experience of shame. In Crime and Punishment, Dostoevsky’s third-person narrator enters Raskolnikov’s fevered brain, thus generating reader sympathy for his antihero. Yet he retains the requisite omniscience for violently agitating readers’ moral sensitivity. Dostoevsky thereby evokes a dual response, making readers complicit with Raskolnikov, yet arousing our ethical qualms. By gradually revealing the psychology behind a shame-driven crime, Dostoevsky implicates readers in the text’s ethical action. But the exposure of shame does not fuel the action as it will in his later texts. After Crime and Punishment, Dostoevsky turns shame dynamics into narrative dynamics by exploiting shame’s unexpectedness, contagiousness, and paradoxicality. Shame is unpredictable and thus has no standard script. Shame is contagious and thus provokes painful responses from witnesses to shame (characters and readers alike) and from the shamed (characters). Shame is also cognitive, partially because the shamed and the witnesses to shame engage in the cognitive processes of heightened self-consciousness and evaluation. In his post-1866 novels, Dostoevsky exploits shame’s affective and cognitive synergy on the mimetic and synthetic levels. He unleashes shame’s paradoxical power both to isolate and to relate. Dostoevsky thus adds the peculiar synergy of shame dynamics to the recursive relations among author, readers, and text.

Dostoevsky explores and exploits disgrace-shame, the shame that follows exposure, but also keeps discretion-shame, the shame that helps prevent exposure, alive for characters and readers alike. He does this by targeting his readers’ internal divisions as well as our divided roles as members of the
narrative and authorial audiences. As James Phelan points out, narratives require that audiences judge characters. In the narrative audience, where we participate as observers of the text’s mimetic illusion and as addressees, we experience with the characters portrayed the full force of disgrace-shame. As members of the narrative audience, we respond to shame viscerally, much as the characters portrayed do. Like them, we tend to respond negatively to exposed shame. In the authorial audience, where we have a double consciousness of the text’s mimetic and synthetic dimensions, we witness and experience the disgrace-shame, yet with the cognitive engagement, surplus vision, and aesthetic pleasure that provide the distance necessary to separate act from actor. Dostoevsky supplies additional help for his authorial audience by providing shame-sensitive characters who model appropriate responses for us. These characters know or intuit that shame is a source of suffering. They can thus condemn the act without losing compassion for the actor.

This schema, however, does not account for the shame overflow released in the Dostoevskian text. Shame occurs in the intersubjective space between self and others. As discretion-shame, it defines and preserves boundaries between self and others. As disgrace-shame, it violates and collapses those boundaries. Whether shame involves actual exposure or the threat of exposure, it unleashes affective energies that linger long after the self has derived some comfort from the cognitive energies that have been harnessed to contain them. In adopting this authorial strategy, Dostoevsky takes a leap of faith. The epigraph to *The Brothers Karamazov* (John 12:24) expresses Dostoevsky’s larger authorial plan: his novels are like seeds. They participate in his organic metaphor for the ethical activity of reading. The lingering affect, I believe, acts as the germinating power of his texts. Given the proper soil, they cast off their cognitive shells and take root in readers’ guts.

Shame is central to Dostoevsky’s poetic power. He exploits shame’s visual, spatial, ethical, aesthetic, epistemological, and metaphysical dimensions, especially in *The Brothers Karamazov*, a novel that repeatedly refers to the biblical myth of shame’s origins, a myth that links cognition and affect. After Eve and Adam eat the fruit and their eyes are opened, they learn they are naked, and they cover themselves. Then they hide from God. This myth couples knowing and seeing as well as knowing and feeling. Eve and Adam see that they are naked, but they must also feel naked, since their first impulse is to cover themselves. In learning that they are naked, Eve and Adam become conscious of themselves; they develop objective self-awareness. The myth thus demonstrates shame’s intimate connection to identity. In sensing that nakedness is inappropriate to that environment, they intuit something about the world outside themselves; they develop a knowledge of standards, rules, and goals. Shame thus involves the cognition of their “real,” that is, their “fallen”
condition. In the Garden, Dostoevsky learns that shame heightens both cognitive and affective faculties, knowledge that he will exploit by using shame to manipulate readers’ emotions while engaging our intellects. Furthermore, the myth shows that the pain of exposure lingers. Even though Eve and Adam have covered themselves, they still feel naked. As it turns out, their attempts at concealment (an aesthetic response to shame) show God that they have eaten from the tree. Dostoevsky perceives and plays on the similarity between such visual cover-ups and verbal cover-ups. As I will show, the stories that his liars tell to cover their shame reveal as much as they conceal.

In the myth, God also exiles Eve and Adam from the Garden of Eden so that they will not eat from the Tree of Life. The myth thus links transgression and exile, thereby enlarging its etiological scope. For once they develop objective self-awareness and awareness of the world’s standards, rules, and goals, human beings lose their spontaneous, unmediated relationship to self and world. The myth of the Garden thus accounts for the divided self—humans’ sense of separation from self, other, and God. Exile from Eden emphasizes metaphysical separation. The myth problematizes the issue of shame’s relationship with guilt by linking transgression, shame, and separation. Since the myth also differentiates between two kinds of knowledge—knowledge of good and evil, that is, knowledge of the world’s standards, rules, and goals, and knowledge of self, that is, objective self-awareness—it is tempting to correlate these with guilt and shame. Nonetheless, the myth, like all rich stories, defies such easy correlation. And so does Dostoevsky.

Shame relates broadly to human identity; guilt relates more narrowly to human action. Although affect theorists argue that guilt is a form of moral shame, all theorists agree that guilt involves a moral component. Shame arises when a person negatively evaluates his/her whole self in relation to an ideal self, thereby arousing feelings of inferiority or inadequacy. Guilt arises, in contrast, when a self acts so as to transgress against personal, moral, social, or legal norms. Self and object thus meld in shame, but are differentiated in guilt. Shame and guilt can be related, but need not be so. (Dmitry Karamazov does not feel guilty for his dirty socks and underwear, for example.) While shame has no fixed script, guilt often follows the sequence—transgression, punishment, redemption. In Christian scenarios, the transgressor repents and expiates the offense. No single action, however, can heal feelings of shame. Shame’s negative intensity also shields it from examination and discussion. Shame triggers more shame: individuals are ashamed at feeling shame. Shame’s fecundity and contagiousness explain the individual and social discomfort that engender social taboos surrounding it.

The myth of the Garden shows that shame works paradoxically: it both violates individual integrity and protects it. Its positive function,
discretion-shame, correlates with knowledge of good and evil; it is normative, as it defines social standards, rules, and goals. It thus reflects and sustains the individual and social ordering of the world. On the other hand, its negative function, disgrace-shame, correlates with knowledge of self. Disgrace-shame is a painfully experienced disintegration of the world, reflecting a break in the self’s relationship with self, others, or both. Both discretion-shame and disgrace-shame involve cognition and self-evaluation. Discretion-shame focuses on social norms and tends to foreground the preservation or repair of the appropriate; disgrace-shame focuses on self and tends to foreground the experience or control of narcissistic injury. Both functions reveal how high shame stakes are: they involve nothing less than one’s identity as a self-presenting agent. Because shame threatens one’s qualifications to present oneself in the public sphere, shame’s drama devolves through issues of inclusion and exclusion. Dostoevsky’s liars all experience the disgrace-shame of exclusion. Consequently, they either struggle to prove their worth as self-presenting agents or actively share their disgrace with others, or both.

On the mimetic level, Dostoevsky makes shame an ethical drama by activating the literal meaning of the Russian words that designate persons and characters: litso, deistvuiushchie litsa—“face,” “acting faces.” One need only think of expressions such as “losing face” and “saving face” to see how closely the whole person is identified with her or his face. Such expressions also highlight the recursive relationship between individual and social identity. We can lose or save face only vis-à-vis an other or others. The Russian word for modesty, propriety, or decorum, prilichie, literally “in the presence of face,” likewise emphasizes this recursive relationship. As Leslie A. Johnson shows, Dostoevsky hinges the ethical action of *The Idiot* on interactions between faces/persons. While Dostoevsky always paid much attention to faces, in *The Idiot* he introduces the metaliterary play on the word litso, which he keeps active in later works. Faces mark the external boundaries between self and others. Also, as centers for verbal and visual interactions, faces become a locus for identity. Readers as witnesses judge interactions between characters by interpreting words, facial expressions, and body language, determining from these clues whether characters violate or demonstrate respect for self and others.

On the synthetic level, Dostoevsky involves readers in the ethical drama of shame by collapsing the intersubjective boundaries between characters and readers. Portrayed shame derives its peculiar affective and narrative power from three basic properties of the shame experience: disruption, disorientation, and painful self-consciousness. Shame is sudden and unpredictable; it comes upon shamed persons unawares, exposing them—to themselves, to others, or to both. Following unexpected exposure, shamed persons cannot control the autonomic responses that betray shame: pounding of heart, averting of eyes,
contracting of posture, sweating, blushing. Because these involuntary responses often further expose shamed persons, they further disrupt their sense of self and relation to the world. A person possesses a coherent sense of self and the world only when his or her experience itself is coherent by virtue of predictably recurring elements (an entirely random, unpredictable flow of events cannot be intelligible). To the extent that shame introduces unexpected exposure, disrupted expectations, and the like, it renders experience, and thereby a sense of self and of the world, less coherent. Shamed persons, however inarticulately, are aware of this disruption and pained by it: they perceive, more or less clearly, that their sense of self—hence their identity—is at risk. As a corollary, shame devastates the sense of connection to others. Shame engenders painful self-consciousness that in turn produces the desire to hide, disappear, die, or otherwise rid the self of the pain (all forms of alienation), yet it can also produce the desire to rejoin the community in such a way as to heal the pain.

Just as predictably recurring events enable a person to form a coherent sense of self and the world, so narrative predictability orients readers in the fictional world. Portrayed shame, on the other hand, disrupts readers’ expectations and sense of personal inviolability. Shame is always unexpected. It disorients and rouses self-consciousness in the shamed person and witnesses alike. When Dostoevsky surprises his readers with shame, readers experience a similar disruption, disorientation, and self-consciousness. We see and feel shame—which we, like Dostoevsky’s liars, and most human beings, try to avoid. Dostoevsky thus reveals our complicity in the status quo. He exposes our desire to keep the covers up.

As Dostoevsky knows, the pain of exposure lingers. Even once the authorial audience has separated from its plunged-into-the-action-and-affect role as narrative audience, pain’s memory remains. Moreover, visual memory frequently accompanies the affective memory. Dostoevsky includes the persisting affect and image in his redemptional plan. Like Dante in his Divine Comedy or like St. Augustine in his Confessions, Dostoevsky knows that while authors can model a salvational path for their readers, they cannot force readers to follow. St. Augustine and Dante portray character-selves who are internally divided but who eventually follow the voice of conscience rather than their physical or political instincts. Dostoevsky retains such internal divisions and projects them outward onto characters’ sociopolitical and metaphysical relationships. Like his redemptively minded forebears, Dostoevsky also attempts to stir readers’ desire to follow the authorially approved path by appealing to readers’ internal divisions, particularly to readers’ sense of shame experienced as conscience (knowledge of right action).

In moving from the portrayal of shame as subject or motive or both to the use of shame as a narrative strategy, Dostoevsky capitalizes on the parallels
between the act of reading and the action of the Fall. The forbidden fruit has nutritional, aesthetic, and epistemic appeal: it is good for food, appealing to the eye, and desired as a source of knowledge. When we read, we feed our souls, participate in an aesthetic experience, and learn—about both the world and ourselves. In reading Dostoevsky’s late novels, we witness others’ shame, thus recapitulating in our post-lapsarian world a sudden fall from innocence to knowledge. Our eyes are open and we see and feel our separation from self and others. In short, we experience the shame of exposure. We are thus given the opportunity to know ourselves, to confront our shame positively, and to return to community, which, for Dostoevsky, means a return to God.