chapter three

Shame’s Legacy:
Fathers and Children

“You pity me,” he [Napoleon] cried, “you child, and perhaps yet another child, my son, le roi de Rome, pities me; the rest all, all hate me, and my brothers will be the first to sell me into misfortune!” I sobbed and threw myself at him; at that he couldn’t restrain himself; we embraced, and our tears mingled.” (8:416–7)

—GENERAL IVOLGIN, The Idiot

And I’ve been lying, decidedly my whole life, every day and every hour. In truth, I am a lie and a father of lies. Or rather, it seems, not a father of lies, I keep getting lost in texts, but a son of lies, and that will be enough.
(14:41;44)

—FEDOR KARAMAZOV, The Brothers Karamazov

Ваш отец дьявол; и вы хотите исполнять похоти отца вашего. Он был человекоубийца от начала и не устоял в истине; ибо он лжец и отец лжи.*

—John 8:44

As I have shown in chapters 1 and 2, Fedor Karamazov and General Ivolgin tell others’ stories as their own and are exposed for doing so. Fedor Karamazov responds aggressively, shamelessly passing along his shame. General Ivolgin responds in a more socially expected and acceptable manner, first by denying his plagiarism and then by fleeing. They thus exemplify the two basic types of Dostoevskian liars: the shameless and the shamed. Viewed singly, each has his own story. Viewed together, they expose Dostoevsky’s narrative strategies. This chapter juxtaposes two of their stories not only for what they reveal about their character narrators, General Ivolgin and Fedor Karamazov, but also for what they reveal about their creator, Fedor Dostoevsky.

* You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
General Ivolgin and Fedor Karamazov are both fathers of three legitimate children, yet during inspired exhibitionistic performances both identify themselves as sons. Naturally, their stories function as self-presentations, but they also function as Fedor Dostoevsky’s vehicles for engaging and problematizing the father-children thematics of the Russian literary tradition. While his narrators portray General Ivolgin and Fedor Karamazov as irresponsible fathers who drink too much, chase after women, and neglect their children, Dostoevsky reminds readers that these opprobrious fathers are also orphaned sons. Their self-chosen surrogate fathers—Napoleon and the devil—are quintessentially Dostoevskian and thus reveal Dostoevsky’s poetic hand. By introducing these legendary figures into his texts, Dostoevsky addresses sociopolitical, metaphysical, and metaliterary questions in a serious yet deeply funny manner. He also plays with shame’s paradox, employing these anecdotal identifications to articulate thematics of isolation and communion. Equally importantly, however, Dostoevsky deters facile judgments by showing both sides of shame’s legacy, thereby challenging readers to find sociopolitical solutions. These irresponsible fathers may pass along a legacy of shame, but they also receive one.

Both Napoleon and the devil are arch-enemies of Russia and of God, would-be usurpers, defeated enemies. Legendary figures of pride, they overstep the limits of their God-given powers. Defeated by the forces of brotherhood, they are banished from the communities over which they would rule. Linked in the popular imagination, Napoleon and the devil provide rich ground for an author concerned with conflicts between individual and community, mind and heart, atheism and belief. The Russian literary tradition had already associated Napoleon with the devil/Lucifer/Satan, demonizing Napoleon and linking historical and eschatological events. Dostoevsky taps into this ready-made association and links the moral/metaphysical with the sociopolitical. In viewing General Ivolgin and Fedor Karamazov in the context of Russian history as the sons of demonic fathers, Dostoevsky exposes their heritage as well as their legacy. In Dostoevsky’s novels, the demonic is associated with individualism, falsehood, deliberate dissociation from community, and discord. Fathers who choose a demonic identification pass on a legacy of selfishness and discord, helping to destroy their actual and metaphorical families. General Ivolgin’s and Fedor Karamazov’s exhibitionistic identifications thus have serious sociopolitical and metaphysical implications.

Father-son thematics dominate Ivolgin’s page boy story. In Ivolgin’s telling, he is ten years old and fatherless when he allegedly meets Napoleon—the most famous military leader of the century—who becomes his surrogate father. In Ivolgin’s narrative, the immediate mutual admiration between legendary hero and young general-to-be increases, culminating in near-adoption. Napoleon
first singles out the well-dressed young Ivolgin with his “eagle eye.” Upon learning that Ivolgin’s father was “a general, who died on the fields of the fatherland,” and thus in the Napoleonic campaign, Napoleon expresses his admiration for the Russian nobility in terms that reveal his ignorance of Russian reality—“J’aime les boyards.” As Russian readers would know, “boyar” was a class designation abolished by Peter the Great over a century earlier. With this detail, Dostoevsky reminds readers of Napoleon’s self-absorption and exposes Ivolgin’s narrative naïveté. As becomes increasingly evident, Ivolgin fabricates his Napoleon out of period clichés and narcissistic projection.

Dostoevsky emphasizes the projected nature of Ivolgin’s Napoleon when the great general unexpectedly asks Ivolgin, “M’aimes-tu, petit?” This question betrays Ivolgin’s need for love and acceptance. The question also tackles the issue of national identity, an issue likewise raised early in Tolstoy’s War and Peace. How can a Russian patriot admire the world conqueror invading his country? Young Ivolgin’s response parodies the adult responses of Tolstoy’s characters prior to the invasion of Moscow: “The Russian heart is able to discern a great man even in the very enemy of the fatherland!” That is, strictly, I don’t remember whether I expressed myself that way literally . . . I was a child . . . but that was surely the meaning!” (8:413). Ivolgin’s response keys readers to the synthetic dimension of storytelling. Even though he is a naïve narrator, Ivolgin senses the discrepancy between what he said and what he meant. He thus acknowledges that he rephrases in the retelling. This acknowledgment bolsters Ivolgin’s claim to truth-telling, thereby beefing up his credibility early in his incredible tale. It also signals Dostoevsky’s authorial interest in narrative construction.

Dostoevsky emphasizes the humor of Ivolgin’s account by highlighting his narcissistic grandiosity. According to Ivolgin, his personal patriotic feelings represent national sentiment: “Napoleon was struck, he thought a moment and said to his retinue: ‘I love the pride of this child! But if all Russians think like this child, then . . . ’ he didn’t finish speaking” [8:413]. Ivolgin thus fashions himself a Russian patriot whose love of country spells Napoleon’s downfall. Two days later, Napoleon’s page boy dies. Ivolgin is invited to replace him and quickly becomes an intimate, an eyewitness to the nocturnal “moans of that ‘giant in misfortune,’” Napoleon’s sounding board at critical moments, and, finally, a second son. On the eve of the French retreat, Napoleon notices the tears in young Ivolgin’s eyes and recites the speech of my epigraph, a passage that ends with their mingled tears. Ivolgin’s story thus follows a progression: he is singled out and becomes a political consultant, then a son.

While the Russian scholar Inna Al’mi observes that the polarity—great man/small child—is a fixed motif of boulevard novels, Ivolgin’s story emphasizes the father-son nature of this relationship. Napoleon equates
young Ivolgin with his own young son and calls him “my child” (8:414). Ivolgin gains another general as his surrogate father. Yet this adoption story ends in separation and loss. As Napoleon leaves Moscow, he tells Ivolgin, “I don’t want to take you away from your mother and am not taking you with me!” (8:417). The separation ends disastrously for both: Napoleon’s retreat is the first step on his path to the “sultry isle” of exile; Ivolgin likewise goes into exile as he “was sent to officer training school, where I found only drilling, the coarseness of my companions, and . . . Alas! All has gone to ruin!” (8:417).

This double exile further draws readers’ attention to the constructed nature of Ivolgin’s Napoleon. Dostoevsky’s Russian readers would recognize the “sultry isle” of exile as a quote from one of Pushkin’s poems about Napoleon. The General unconsciously constructs his Napoleon from all the clichés of the period. Dostoevsky also permits a personal note to enter Ivolgin’s picture. Like Ivolgin, Dostoevsky attended and disliked officer training school, an unpleasant trial replete with shame-filled experiences. For both, officer training school represents exile from the comfort of home and, for Ivolgin, a fall from the childhood glory of being Napoleon’s page boy. Dostoevsky thus builds a pattern of rise and fall into Ivolgin’s two stories of exile. Ivolgin and his Napoleon successfully penetrate a foreign space, achieve recognition and respect, then, under circumstances beyond their control, return home and are sent into shame-filled exile. Dostoevsky displays his own authorial savvy while reflecting Ivolgin’s narrative naïveté. Ivolgin consciously chooses Napoleon as a father figure, but unconsciously chooses a figure whose story, and whose shame, recapitulate his own. More significantly, as Dostoevsky exuberantly demonstrates, Ivolgin projects his own personality traits onto the legendary hero.

In Ivolgin’s story, for instance, Napoleon compares himself to Joseph and asks for reciprocal admiration, actions that reflect Ivolgin’s feelings. In having Napoleon liken himself to Joseph betrayed by his envious brothers at a time when he is isolated, Ivolgin comments on his own situation. Like Joseph and like the Napoleon he fashions in his own image, Ivolgin is histrionic and self-centered. He is also exiled from his brothers as a result of his own actions, yet, like his Napoleon, he blames others. Attributing his fall from the good graces of high society to a scandal about his relations with the Belokonskys’ governess, Ivolgin feels betrayed by his former colleagues and friends, particularly by General Epanchin, his former brother-in-arms. In having Napoleon seek his approval, Ivolgin reveals his own desire for admiration and acceptance into the dominant community.

This scene also reveals Dostoevsky’s metaliterary play. Ivolgin tells this story to Prince Myshkin, a sympathetic listener who, moreover, also lost his father at an early age. The egotistic Ivolgin regards Myshkin in the same way that Ivolgin’s Napoleon regards the young Ivolgin—as a representative of the
Russian aristocracy whose acceptance he seeks. In Dostoevsky’s framing, Ivolgin’s story recapitulates his own situation. Ivolgin’s Napoleon and Ivolgin the storyteller are both egotistic individuals seeking the approval of young sons of dead generals whom they narcissistically perceive not as individuals in their own right but as representatives of a class that can give them admiration and approval.

In having Ivolgin choose Napoleon as his surrogate father, Dostoevsky reveals the retired general’s alienation from his Russian roots. Instead of identifying with his own father or with the victorious Russian tsar Alexander I, Ivolgin identifies with the defeated world conqueror who was demonized in Russian and European culture. By identifying with Napoleon but acting like a Russian patriot, Ivolgin emblemizes the Russian divided self, torn between Western culture and Russian spiritual values. In Dostoevsky’s handling, his internal division also reflects a metaliterary conflict; Ivolgin is a realistic character torn between forms of romantic longing: on the one hand, admiration for the alienated, individualistic hero whose ambitions cause large-scale discord and death, and, on the other, desire for brotherhood, expressed in another cliche—his identification with Alexandre Dumas’s dashingly patriotic musketeers. Ivolgin’s admiration for two foreign literary models signals his alienation from Russia. His choice of Napoleon expresses a shame of origins.

The exposure scene, which I discuss in the next chapter, works out a model of shame and exile. Ivolgin becomes carried away, realizes that the Prince cannot believe him, and flees in shame. Ivolgin then takes control of his shame-filled situation by projecting blame outward and breaking off relations with the Prince, thereby exiling himself under the guise of injured honor.

A decade later, while writing *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky ups the ante. In his portrayal of Fedor Karamazov, another father orphaned in his youth, Dostoevsky emphasizes the metaphysical dimension of alienation from Russia. As Fedor Karamazov histrionically proclaims himself first father then son of lies, thus allying himself with the devil, Dostoevsky adds new depths to his novel’s father-children thematics. While commentators on this passage have focused on its poetics of misquotation, they have not examined the filial import of Fedor Pavlovich’s hyperbolic statement. However comic, his declaration calls attention to origins—sociopolitical, metaphysical, and literary.

On the mimetic level, the narrator of *The Brothers Karamazov* treats Fedor Pavlovich as the Karamazov paterfamilias. He notes without comment that Fedor Pavlovich was orphaned in his youth and then sponged off the gentry until his marriage to Dmitry’s mother, Adelaida. Readers thus know that he was born into a poor gentry family. The narrator does not once mention Fedor Karamazov’s father, but the text bears two traces of him. First, by Russian practice, Fedor bears his father’s name, Pavel, as his patronymic Pavlovich. Second, since
Fedor Pavlovich becomes a sponger, readers assume that he was left penniless at his father’s death. The ghost of Pavel Karamazov thus haunts the text in his son’s name and poverty. In this way Fedor Dostoevsky indicates that Fedor Karamazov receives from his father what he gives to his sons: a legacy of shame.

On the thematic level, Pavel, the Russian form of Paul, is a first name that for Russian readers evokes the image of a murdered tsar. Son of Catherine II (the Great), Paul I was murdered in the castle he had built to protect himself. The murdered Paul was also the son of Peter III, a tsar likewise murdered by conspirators, who then placed Peter’s German-born wife Catherine II on the throne. Just as important for Dostoevsky’s novel, Paul I was an autocrat who established male primogeniture but distrusted his first-born son Alexander I (who was popularly believed to have known of the conspiracy to kill his father). Finally, Paul I was a strict disciplinarian who restored compulsory service and corporal punishment for nobles, thereby, like Fedor Karamazov and Dostoevsky’s father, giving rise to the shame and resentment that motivated his murder. The ghosts of Paul I and Peter III, both murdered in their bedchambers, haunt Russian history as well as Dostoevsky’s novel.

Paul’s spectral presence also haunted Dostoevsky’s youth. Dostoevsky attended the Military Engineering Academy in St. Petersburg, an institution housed in the former Mikhailovskii Castle, the site of Paul I’s murder. As memoir literature reveals, a survivor from that period still lived in the building and told stories, particularly of the night when Paul was killed.8 No student of Dostoevsky could possibly imagine that the young Dostoevsky did not number among his most avid listeners. Furthermore, while living at the site of a regicide, Dostoevsky learned of his own father’s murder. Into Fedor’s patronymic Dostoevsky thus thematically inscribed a whole tradition of patricide/regicide.

Dostoevsky also thematically loads Fedor Pavlovich’s last name. Kara, the first part of the name “Karamazov,” derives from the Russian word for “punishment” and the Turkish word for “black.” Dostoevsky signals his readers that the Turkish root is operative in Book Four, Chapter Six, when Snegirev’s feeble-minded wife addresses Aleshia Karamazov as “Mr. Chernomazov” (chernyi being the Russian adjective for “black”). The Turkish kara would have been widely known to literate Russians as early as 1804 when the Serbs, led by “Black George” (Karageorgii), challenged the regnant Turkish power. An active journalist, Dostoevsky followed the situation in the region. He also would have known Pushkin’s 1832 cycle of poems, Songs of the Western Slavs,10 including the one that explains how Kara George got his nickname “The Black” (Chernyi): by killing his father, who planned to betray him to the Turks. The father-son conflict depicted in Pushkin’s poem thus adds the thematic element of parricide to Dostoevsky’s name choice.
But Pushkin would not have been Dostoevsky's only source linking the word *kara* with parricide. The Russian expression *karachun emu* means "death to him" and had a personal resonance for the Dostoevsky brothers. In his memoir account of their father's death, Andrei Dostoevsky notes its use. On the day of his death, their father, who was known for his arbitrary discipline, had been particularly abusive to his peasants. One peasant responded impudently and then, fearing the further consequences, called out to his companions, "*Rebiata, karachun emu*" (Fellows, death to him!). The murder of Dostoevsky's father thus recapitulates the regicide. Fearful of the arbitrary power (*proizvol*) of their leader, the subordinates enact a Freudian scenario in which they unite and kill the father figure. While Freud focuses on the guilt that binds the brothers-in-crime, shame provides an equally potent connecting thread for Dostoevsky. Paul I and Dostoevsky's father both imposed humiliating and painful punishments on those under their care. By association, Dostoevsky inscribes parricide into Fedor's last name as well as his patronymic.

Fedor Pavlovich's last name also bears the stamp of paradox, thereby forecasting any easy judgment of him. As the narrator tells us in the opening section of the book, some said that Fedor Pavlovich rejoiced at the death of his first wife, others said that he cried like a small child. This leads to the narrator's earlier discussed comment: "It may very well be that both were true, that is, that he both rejoiced at his liberation and sobbed for his liberator—all at the same time. In most cases, people, even wicked ones, are much more naive and simple-hearted than we generally assume. And so are we ourselves" (14:10:9). Just as Fedor Pavlovich contains opposites, so do the connotations of the second part of his last name. The many derivatives of the Russian root *maz* include the verb *mazat'*(to cover with oil, smear, anoint, soil, stain, swindle, paint) and the noun *maz'* (oil, ointment, grease, ooze). From these, in turn, Russian gains words such as *mazilka* (a bad painter), *mazulia* (someone who oils or soils; a bad painter), and *mazurik* (a rogue, swindler). The combination *kara* and *maz* thus evokes a broad array of associations, many negative, and many active in Dostoevsky's portrait of the Karamazov patriarch. Yet in Dostoevsky's work, most symbols cut both ways. A bad painter may be a *mazilka*, but an icon painter is a *bogomaz*. Bad painting suggests a source of shame, but also the covering over of shame. The image of black ooze suggests filth, but also fecundity. Blackness reminds readers of the baser parts of human nature associated with Karamazovism—vileness and lechery—but Karamazovism also suggests a thirst for life. Blackness is associated with the devil, but, as Ksana Blank points out, black and white also complement one another; each gains definition by contrast. Dostoevsky thus inscribes Fedor Pavlovich's paradoxical complexity into his last name.
Fedor Pavlovich Karamazov's first name points to the synthetic dimension of Dostoevsky's character as Fedor Dostoevsky names the Karamazov \textit{paterfamilias} after himself. (For more on this, see chapter 9, where I elaborate on the kinship between the two Fedors and two black writers—Aesop and Pushkin.) Adding greatly to his mimetic and thematic richness, Fedor Pavlovich's synthetic function enhances readers' aesthetic enjoyment of Dostoevsky's text. Fedor Pavlovich, for instance, declares, “I keep getting lost in texts” (\textit{eto ia vsë v tekstakh sbivaius'}). While this statement mimetically reflects the narrator's introduction of him as “one of the most muddleheaded madcaps of our whole district” (\textit{odnim iz bestolkoveishikh sumasbrodov po vsemu nashemu uezdu}), thus as someone who can get mixed up while reading, Dostoevsky's unusual choice of words suggests that Fedor Karamazov's identity crisis has a metaliterary and a metaphysical dimension as well. As Vetlovskaya points out, in creating \textit{The Brothers Karamazov}, Dostoevsky followed Dante’s use of the time-honored symbol—world as book, and its reverse, book as world. The verb \textit{sbivat'sia}, used in the expressions \textit{sbivat'sia s dorogi, sbivat'sia v chtenii}, denotes the action of misplacing or miscalculating. One can slip, lose one's footing, lose one's way, lose one's place. By slipping up “in texts,” Fedor Karamazov identifies texts as paths and thus as loci of error for him. He gets lost in the written word, goes astray. Indeed, as his words testify, he \textit{has} gone astray. He has sided with the devil and lies against Christ and truth. As a son of the devil, Fedor Pavlovich anticipates the Grand Inquisitor, the unholy father of his son Ivan's story. Both Fedor Karamazov and the Grand Inquisitor are paternal figures who go astray in the Scriptures, allying themselves with the father of lies and his followers rather than with God and his son. By having Fedor Karamazov get lost in a holy text, Fedor Dostoevsky affirms the ethical importance of right reading.

Fedor Karamazov's statement about straying forms one part of his blatant blasphemy. In calling himself a father/son of lies, Fedor Pavlovich obviously distorts the biblical text. But to what end? Fedor Karamazov intends to shock his audience. Fedor Dostoevsky, on the other hand, provides a scandalous cover for the shocking notion that Fedor Karamazov is not only a father, but a son, and thus a brother. Following Meerson's rule of thumb that Dostoevsky preserves the import of biblical passages only when he taboos them, thereby working on his readers' unconscious processing, I will not dwell on the passage from John that Fedor distorts, a passage in which Christ divides his followers from the devil’s. Instead, I look at what Dostoevsky adds.

By having Fedor Karamazov identify himself as a son, Dostoevsky locates Fedor Karamazov as the progeny as well as the progenitor of a broken family, an increasingly frequent phenomenon in nineteenth-century Russia. On the mimetic level, Dostoevsky thus provides a partial explanation for Fedor
Karamazov’s unfitness as a father: he had either no model or a poor model. By reminding readers that Fedor Karamazov is a son as well as a father, Dostoevsky also expands the meaning of the word “brothers” in his novel’s title. As Meerson argues, Fedor Karamazov’s three legitimate sons are ashamed of their association with Smerdiakov; they thus taboo mention of him as the fourth “brother.” By making Fedor Pavlovich the Karamazov family patriarch, Dostoevsky provides a place for him among fathers/rulers in readers’ consciousness. But Fedor Pavlovich riotously renounces his place and declares himself a son. Dostoevsky thus scandalizes us into revisiting our views. He uses his character’s scandalous words to surprise, disorient, and make us self-conscious. We regard Fedor Pavlovich as a father, not as a son: we regard Smerdiakov as illegitimate and ill-educated, thus as a servant not a brother. In shocking us, Dostoevsky forces us to realize how we collaborate in the status quo, how we exclude shame-filled and shameless characters like Pavel Fedorovich Smerdiakov and Fedor Pavlovich Karamazov from our sense of universal brotherhood. Fedor Dostoevsky challenges such facile positions. By having him call himself a “son,” Dostoevsky includes Fedor Pavlovich in his theological vision of universal brotherhood.

In having General Ivolgin and Fedor Karamazov choose Napoleon and the devil as father figures, Dostoevsky adds another twist to his novels’ shame dynamics. Ever the psychologist, Dostoevsky reveals the shame content of his liars’ grandiose claims. In choosing a French surrogate father, Ivolgin compensates for his Russian national inferiority complex. In choosing a famous world conqueror, Ivolgin compensates for his sense of obscurity and powerlessness. He chooses a hero whose success and subsequent ignominy recapitulate his own, then he projects himself onto his hero. Though General Ivolgin intends to hide his shame with his story, its excesses expose him. He flees in shame. Yet there is no scandal. Prince Myshkin, his sole listener, fears a final break but laughs after the general departs. His aesthetic appreciation of Ivolgin’s story domesticates Ivolgin’s shame. He is not scandalized, nor are readers.

The shame dynamic works differently in The Brothers Karamazov. Fedor Karamazov openly acknowledges his shame, but he aggressively and scandalously shares it with others. He thus generates a level of audience discomfort that is not easily dispelled. Dostoevsky also broadens the metaphysical scope of his last novel and associates shame with the devil. In both the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels, the devil is associated with temptation. Dostoevsky’s characters, particularly Ivan, constantly refer to the temptation of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. Moreover, Ivan has a devil who resembles his father and thus reminds him of his shame (see my chapter 11). Father Ferapont sees medieval-type devils who tempt him. Fedor Karamazov claims he may house a low-caliber devil. Zosima identifies
shame as the source of Fedor Pavlovich’s buffoonery. Fedor concurs, “That’s why I’m a buffoon, a buffoon out of shame, great Elder, out of shame” (14:41;43). The epithet “buffoon” (shut) is associated with the devil in the Russian tradition. The devil, in Dostoevsky’s portrayal, is a parasite. Fedor Pavlovich, likewise, is a parasite: he expropriates his first wife’s money and becomes a moneylender, a tavern keeper, and a seller of forests. He thus lives off others, like the devil. But Dostoevsky has a sociopolitical as well as a metaphysical agenda in his novel. In making Fedor Pavlovich such a bad father, Dostoevsky raises questions about justice, social order, and responsibility. A bad father, Fedor Karamazov is selfish and destructive; he tends to his own pleasure and neglects his duties to his wives, children, and other dependents. He so relinquishes responsibility for himself that he requires the paternal care of his servant Grigory. With this portrayal of narcissistic paternity, Dostoevsky obliquely criticizes all bad fathers, including negligent landowners and tsars, parasites on the constituencies they are obligated to protect. In tackling the father-children thematics of the Russian literary tradition, Dostoevsky raises crucial questions about fatherhood as well as brotherhood. His Christological poetics leave no doubts about his position on sociopolitical organization.

In reading, we view General Ivolgin and Fedor Karamazov as fathers. By having them comically remind us that they are also sons, Dostoevsky deters automatic perception and judgment. These men may be bad fathers, but they are also deprived sons. Dostoevsky further complicates readers’ response in both novels by providing alternative scenarios that demonstrate the role of free will in response to social shame. General Ivolgin’s sons respond differently to their shame-filled father. Gania blames and shames him; Kolia protects him. So with Fedor Karamazov’s sons. Dmitry blames and beats his father; Ivan distances himself from him; Alesha loves him; Smerdiakov kills him. Smerdiakov’s act, motivated by a desire to gain Ivan’s approval and thus overcome his own shame, can be seen as a desire to rid both himself and Ivan of the shame of origins. But violence, as Dostoevsky demonstrates, generates more violence. Shame can be cured only by love, not by violence. Ivan’s encounter with his devil represents his struggle to confront his shame positively (see my chapter 11). Alesha also works to dispel shame and create community among brothers. In addition, he finds a spiritual father, who teaches that love and acceptance heal shame.

In these two stories of fathers as sons, Dostoevsky mimetically points to our common post-lapsarian legacy: we are all children of the fall. By introducing Ivolgin’s Napoleon and Fedor Karamazov’s devil as father figures, he introduces metalinguistic fun into the sociopolitical and metaphysical thematics of his great novels. He thus provides humorous relief from the scandalous spectacles he portrays.