Surprised by Shame
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chapter four

General Ivolgin:
Narratives of Shame and Identity

An innocent lie [nevinnnaia lozh'] for a good laugh, even if it’s coarse, doesn’t offend the human heart. Some people even lie a bit [lzhet-to], if you like, simply for the sake of friendship itself, to give pleasure to their interlocutor in that way. (8:411)

— GENERAL IVOLGIN, The Idiot

In Part Four of The Idiot, Dostoevsky’s narrator apologizes in Gogolian fashion for devoting so much attention to the secondary character General Ivolgin (8:402). Yet Ivolgin is secondary only in the novel’s plot, not in its metaliterary construction, where he joins ranks with Prince Myshkin as one of the novel’s most important storytellers. In this chapter I argue that Dostoevsky uses General Ivolgin to dramatize a story of shame. Fallen from the grace of good society, the General lies to conceal his shame, yet his stories reveal as much as they conceal. Ivolgin’s loss of social standing means he is excluded from the social discourse of high society. He is thus denied identity as a worthy social agent. Throughout the novel, Ivolgin attempts to return to his social position by talking his way back in. All of his stories manifest yearning for his pre-lapsarian social status; many of them also recapitulate the story of his fall. He tells most of his stories in the presence of Prince Myshkin, whom he sees as the empathic and social bridge back to his former social standing. Because his stories repackage his tale of exclusion without denying his responsibility for its occurrence, they prepare for his death-bed redemption.

Dostoevsky may also have expanded General Ivolgin’s role in The Idiot because his drama of shame serves as an analogue to Nastasia Filippovna’s. Comparing their stories thus elucidates Dostoevsky’s authorial message. While General Ivolgin and Nastasia Filippovna are fallen, they do not share equal responsibility for their falls. The novel only hints at Ivolgin’s wrongdoings—money missing from the regiment, an affair with Princess Belokonsky’s governess. The novel lays bare Nastasia Filippovna’s story, however. Seduced by her guardian, who promises marriage, she is thus betrayed by the man to whose care she has been entrusted. Ivolgin responds to his shame by
denial, blaming others for his fall. Nastasia Filippovna, by contrast, turns her shame inward, into self-hatred, and outward, into vengefulness. Excluded from good society, Ivolgin unaggressively drinks and tells stories, whereas Natasha Filippovna aggressively passes on her shame. As a man, General Ivolgin has hopes of restoration; as a woman, Nastasia Filippovna has none. General Ivolgin's shame story thus functions as a variant of the novel's central action.

Dostoevsky implicates readers in Ivolgin's drama of shame and the novel's moral action of exclusion and inclusion by positioning us as witnesses to his repeated exposure as a liar. He uses the progression1 of Ivolgin's stories to demonstrate how repeated exposure changes Ivolgin, granting him the possibility of restoration to community. Dostoevsky provides character audiences as models for the authorial audience. Finally, he exploits the parallels between lying and fiction as opportunities to reveal his own poetics and enhance the authorial audience's reading pleasure.

The Literary Tradition

In creating General Ivolgin, Dostoevsky outlines the relationship between shame and storytelling. Like Dostoevsky's other liars, who are products of the post–Petrine era and thus suffers from a massive cultural inferiority complex, Ivolgin lies to hide his shame-filled self-image. A fictional creation who reflects Russian reality, Ivolgin follows in the footsteps of Russian literature's ur-liar, Gogol's Khlestakov. Like Khlestakov, Ivolgin is ashamed of his actual identity and represents himself as other. “Consumers” of romanticism,2 Khlestakov and Ivolgin fashion themselves after representatives of the dominant, privileged culture. Like Khlestakov, Ivolgin wants what others around him value—social status and its companion goods. To represent himself as a man of power and privilege, Khlestakov boasts that his soup comes “direct by ship from Paris” and that he serves 700 rubles worth of watermelons; in like fashion, Ivolgin boasts of an unending dinner for 200 to 700 people. Such hyperbolic exhibitionism serves to enhance self-esteem while it aims to impress.

Narcissistically dependent on public approbation, both Khlestakov and Ivolgin believe that a speaker's importance lies in the eyes of his beholders. Both thus boast of whom they know but equally of who knows them. Khlestakov boasts that he's Pushkin's pal; Ivolgin boasts that he was Napoleon's confidant. In recounting his war stories, General Ivolgin also claims to be known by two of the era's most famous physicians and all of the Russian high command: “A man who has thirteen bullets in his chest . . . you don't believe? And yet meanwhile, for my sake alone, Pirogov telegraphed
Paris and quit besieged Sevastopol for a time, and Nelaton, the Parisian Imperial Surgeon with great difficulty obtained a leave in the name of science and showed up in besieged Sevastopol to examine me. The highest command knew about it: ‘Ah, it’s that Ivolgin who has thirteen bullets! . . .’ That’s how they talk, sir!” (8:108). This whopper demonstrates Ivolgin’s predilection for Khlestakovian hyperbole. Ivolgin tells it to prove his war heroism. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, uses it to reveal Ivolgin’s hyperbolic self-aggrandizement and thus to undermine his credibility with readers. Dostoevsky also introduces this patent lie to reveal Ivolgin’s sense of victimhood: thirteen bullets represents a lot of internalized punishment.

Ivolgin’s exhibitionist cover for internalized pain also highlights the meta-literary dimension of Dostoevsky’s novel. Ivolgin proves himself an unsconscious narrator who places himself at the center of history. He introduces historical verisimilitude—the siege of Sevastopol, the Russian surgeon Pirogov, the Parisian surgeon Nelaton—to support his hyperbolic claims. By borrowing such a well-known context, Ivolgin claims international renown and thus compensates for his current obscurity.

Dostoevsky introduces one of those verisimilar details to accentuate his novel’s metaliterary dimension. When Ivolgin refers to the Russian surgeon Pirogov, he speaks of a famous figure in charge of medical affairs during the siege of Sevastopol. When Dostoevsky puts the name Pirogov in Ivolgin’s mouth, he playfully draws readers’ attention to the Russian literary tradition, as a character named Pirogov is one protagonist of Gogol’s well-known story, “Nevsky Prospect.” For Dostoevsky, Pirogov epitomizes the split between public and private selves in the Russian national consciousness (21:124–25; 18:59). The name Pirogov thus signals a split between Ivolgin’s narrative awareness and Dostoevsky’s; it also signals different levels of audience awareness. Ivolgin assumes that his character audience will perceive Pirogov unambiguously as a symbol of Russian national pride. Dostoevsky counts on the dual consciousness of the authorial audience for whom the name Pirogov also emblemsizes Russia’s private shame. Ivolgin may be an “ingenuous” Khlestakovian narrator; Dostoevsky is not.

In fact, Ivolgin’s stories constantly remind Dostoevsky’s authorial audience of the Russian literary tradition, particularly the works of Gogol. Like Khlestakov, Ivolgin attempts to elevate himself through false self-representation; he also seeks the company of high society. Gogol’s and Dostoevsky’s ambitious characters desire, but do not attain, higher rank. They compensate for their impotence by fabricating compensatory self-images. Like Gogol’s Major Kovalev (“The Nose”) and his madman (“Diary of a Madman”), for example, Ivolgin believes he should be given a governor-generalship (8:81). These characters thus reveal their narrative naïveté, while their
creators reveal their authorial savvy. Most strikingly, Gogol’s and Dostoevsky’s liars are thorough narcissists. Andrew Morrison identifies shame as a painful feeling central to narcissistic disorders. He argues that “Narcissistic vulnerability is the ‘underside’ of exhibitionism, grandiosity, and haughtiness—the low self-esteem, self-doubt, and fragility of self-cohesion that defines the narcissistic condition.”6 Khlestakov is a low-level bureaucrat who represents himself as Pushkin’s colleague and friend; Ivolgin is a fallen general who represents himself as Napoleon’s page boy and a Crimean war hero. Selfishly absorbed in their own self-presentation, they act unthinkingly. Their creators, however, document their narcissistic behavior’s ethical consequences.

**Stories of Identity**

Ivolgin’s stories are essentially stories of identity: who I was, who I knew, what I did. By having Ivolgin’s stories originate in circumstances that recall his shame, Dostoevsky establishes the connection between shame and lying. Ivolgin’s first meeting with the Prince, for instance, is doubly shameful: the Prince comes to the Ivolgins’ as a potential boarder and thus as a reminder of the family’s economic fall, at a time when they are feeling the shame of Gania’s proposed marriage to Nastasia Filippovna, a “kept” woman. Ivolgin tells lies whenever he is reminded of his social exile: during Nastasia Filippovna’s visit, while visiting old haunts, while sitting in debtor’s prison, while attending the Prince’s birthday party, following his humiliation by Lebedev, and after his ejection from the Epanchin house. In these circumstances, the General understandably experiences an overwhelming desire to reestablish his self-worth.

In what follows, I examine four of Ivolgin’s stories as a progression: his Kolpakov story, his “I knew you when” story, his lapdog story, and his Napoleon’s page boy story. In these stories, the General re-presents events with himself as hero in hopes of gaining audience approval and acceptance. Since audience response contributes to his sense of self, Ivolgin tells lies whenever an opportunity to impress an audience presents itself. Significantly, until his death scene, Ivolgin’s audience always includes Prince Myshkin, a member of the titled nobility as well as a model listener. As Ivolgin tells his stories, Dostoevsky’s narrator reveals the character audience’s responses. Following their example, the narrative audience experiences either shock at Ivolgin’s shamelessness or pain at his shame. The authorial audience is also positioned to see what Bakhtin calls the “surplus” of Ivolgin’s stories—their analogic function—and to enjoy their hyperbolic excess. Like Prince Myshkin, we chuckle madly when we read a good whopper.
The Cover-Up: General Ivolgin and Private Kolpakov

General Ivolgin tells his first extended lie in The Idiot about Private Kolpakov. Though ostensibly told as an episode of Prince Myshkin senior's biography, the Private Kolpakov story functions as a veiled autobiography of General Ivolgin himself. A naive character-narrator, Ivolgin presents himself as a family friend and offers Prince Myshkin information about his father's life and death. The novel's narrator uses the Kolpakov story to expose Ivolgin's narrative unreliability by showing his audience the incredulous responses of Ivolgin's character audience. Dostoevsky uses the story to highlight the novel's metaliterary dimension by employing, both in Ivolgin's Kolpakov story and in Ivolgin's own story, a plot pattern familiar in the Russian tradition: theft, humiliation, death, and resurrection.

The storytelling occurs shortly after General Ivolgin meets Prince Myshkin. Ivolgin first claims a personal connection with Myshkin by declaring that he had held him in his arms many years earlier. He presents himself as a potential father figure by telling Myshkin that he had wanted to marry Myshkin's mother. He implies narrative reliability by stating that he and Myshkin's father had been close friends. Ivolgin then rewrites the story of Myshkin's father's death. When the Prince observes that he had never ascertained the reason for his father's pre-death trial, Ivolgin rejoins:

“Oh, that was the Private Kolpakov case. Undoubtedly the Prince would have been acquitted.”

“Is that so? Do you know for sure?” the Prince asked with marked curiosity.

“How else!”—exclaimed the General. “The court was disbanded. Nothing was decided. The case is impossible! The case, one might say, is mysterious. Staff-Captain Larionov, the company commander, dies. The Prince is temporarily appointed to carry out duties. Good. Private Kolpakov commits a theft,—footwear from a buddy—and drinks it up. Good. The Prince—and note, in the presence of a sergeant-major and a corporal—dresses him down and threatens him with a cat-o-nine-tails. Very good. Kolpakov returns to the barracks, lies down on his bunk, and fifteen minutes later dies. Fine. But the case is unexpected, almost impossible. One way or another, Kolpakov is buried. The Prince reports it, and then Kolpakov is crossed off the rolls. What could seem better? But exactly half a year later, at the brigade inspection, Private Kolpakov appears—as if nothing had happened—in the third company of the second battalion of the Novozemliansky infantry regiment, of the very same brigade and the very same division!”

“What!” exclaimed the Prince, beside himself with amazement.
“That’s not so! That’s a mistake!” Nina Aleksandrovna suddenly turned to him, looking at him almost in anguish. “Mon mari se trompe.”

“But, my friend, se trompe, that’s easy to say, but go solve a similar case yourself! Everyone was stunned. I would be the first to say ‘on se trompe.’ But unfortunately, I was a witness and participated in the commission myself. All the confrontations in court showed that it was the very same, absolutely the very same Private Kolpakov, who half a year earlier had been buried with a regular parade and with a drumroll. The case is really rare, almost impossible, I agree, but . . .”

“Daddy, your dinner is served”—announced Varvara Ardalionovna, entering the room.

“Wonderful! Superb! I’ve gotten hungry indeed . . . But the case, one might say, is even psychological. . . .” (8:82–3)

In this story, Ivolgin represents himself as part of the investigatory commission, and thus a judge, but he also naively identifies with both Prince Myshkin senior and Private Kolpakov, the characters being judged.

In choosing the role of judge, Ivolgin asserts his former military rank. He confirms his authority by presenting himself as an eyewitness, an identity that flags shame’s role in his storytelling. The shame experience characteristically includes the factors of seeing and being seen. The shamed person feels exposed and vulnerable before the gaze of others. Ivolgin constantly feels judged, that is, exposed. By representing himself as a judge, that is, an authority figure who sees and adjudicates, Ivolgin reverses roles, removing himself from the shameful position of being seen and judged. In lying, Ivolgin conceals a painful psychic reality (weak, exposed self) and creates an ideal alternative (powerful, uniformed other).

While Myshkin’s father is literally on trial, Ivolgin feels as though he has already been tried and convicted, a position he immediately expresses to Myshkin: “I, you see for yourself, I have suffered, because of a tragic catastrophe; but without a trial! Without a trial! [Bez suda]!” (8:81). By presenting himself as a victim of circumstances, Ivolgin denies responsibility for his fall. But his story reveals a more ambiguous picture: Ivolgin postulates a scenario in which an action’s consequences can be undone. Myshkin’s father plays the role of mortifier—he literally shames Corporal Kolpakov to death. But Kolpakov returns from the dead, a circumstance that, for Ivolgin, undoes Myshkin senior’s crime. Ivolgin’s judgment that Myshkin’s father would be acquitted because his “victim” did not die clearly expresses his own desire to be exonerated and acquitted.

Ivolgin later identifies with Myshkin senior by claiming that they had been brothers in service. When Nastasia Filippovna arrives, Ivolgin compares himself,
Myshkin’s father, and General Epanchin to the Three Musketeers. For himself, Ivolgin chooses the role of Athos, the universally admired aristocrat and natural military leader (whose sole weakness, born of woman and shame, is wine). He likens General Epanchin to Porthos, the physically imposing musketeer given to sartorial vanity and luxurious living. And he assigns Myshkin’s father the role of Aramis, the attractive youth torn between chivalry and church service. In identifying with the titled nobleman Athos, Ivolgin stresses his former social standing. In evoking the musketeers, Ivolgin conjures up an idealized portrait of heroic devotion to king and country. But he also invokes the famous motto “All for one and one for all,” a motto that emphasizes the brotherly sharing of prosperity and poverty alike. Ivolgin thus expresses solidarity with Myshkin senior while protesting his abandonment by General Epanchin.

Ivolgin reveals a naive identification with Private Kolpakov when he says “he was crossed off the rolls,” literally “excluded from the lists” (iskliuchaiut iz spiskov). The narrator reinforces this identification by saying the same of Ivolgin—“he was excluded” (on byl iskliuchen). Dostoevsky hints that Ivolgin’s identification with Private Kolpakov may extend to his crime—stealing from a buddy to drink. Both Kolpakov’s and Ivolgin’s stories follow a pattern—the crime of theft leads to exposure, then to mortification, then to exclusion. While the text never explicitly explains Ivolgin’s retirement (though theft to cover debts is a recurrent motif in Dostoevsky’s oeuvre), the Kolpakov story prefigures Ivolgin’s later theft of 400 rubles from Lebedev to repay his debt to the Captain’s widow. Ivolgin may have been forced into retirement and thus excluded. Yet the story he tells prefigures his own: Ivolgin’s next crime is a theft, which literally leads to mortification. By having the Kolpakov story recapitulate and prefigure the story of General Ivolgin’s life and death, Dostoevsky displays his narrative skill: Ivolgin naively tells the Kolpakov story to cover over his own, while Dostoevsky artfully designs an analogue story.

Ivolgin’s lapdog story, as a plagiarism, likewise demonstrates Ivolgin’s artlessness and Dostoevsky’s masterful creation of yet another analogue story. The Kolpakov story suggests a reason for Ivolgin’s shameful loss of military identity. The lapdog story suggests one for Ivolgin’s shameful loss of social status (another unexplained loss). If the break with the Epanchins occurred at the time of his retirement, as the lapdog story implies, then Ivolgin loses several valued roles simultaneously: his active generalship, his social position, and his traditional paternal role. As he tells his stories, Ivolgin no longer provides for his wife and children but lives as a supervised dependent. He lies to regain his place in society.

Significantly, Ivolgin presents Private Kolpakov’s resurrection as a reincorporation into community. In Ivolgin’s words, he is “absolutely the very same Private Kolpakov.” Ivolgin’s story thus reveals his own desire for restoration:
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he longs to rejoin the ranks of high society and to regain his social and paternal authority. The tale told by Ivolgin reveals a naive and transparent narrator: he distances himself from the wrongdoers in his story by outranking them and naively identifies with them by portraying them as victims. The tale told by Dostoevsky, on the other hand, reveals a self-conscious storyteller, masterfully controlling structure and thematics. The numerous Gogolian references in Ivolgin's story situate it in a literary context unsuspected by the boastful general. The name Private Kolpakov, for instance, echoes those of both Captain Kopeikin (Dead Souls) and Major Kovalev (“The Nose”). Private Kolpakov's story even follows the pattern of theirs: public humiliation, death to the world, restoration to life and community. Dostoevsky ensures his authorial audience's pleasure at identifying the Gogolian reference by having Ivolgin quote directly from the end of “The Nose”: “but the case is unexpected, almost impossible” (sluchai neozhidannyi, pochti nevozhmozhnyi). The Kovalev reference also suggests pretence as Kovalev obtained his rank in the Caucasus, a signal for Russian readers that he is possibly a pretender. In alluding to Kopeikin, Dostoevsky parodies Ivolgin's efforts to be recognized and rewarded for his services. Captain Kopeikin proved his war heroism in Dead Souls by losing limbs in service of tsar and country. Ivolgin attended a military academy and would have become a general in due course. His hyperbolic war stories, however, cast doubt on his heroism. Readers may wonder whether he was ever wounded, but we are certain he has not suffered thirteen bullets in his chest. His war stories, like his other stories, may be seen as Ivolgin's way of coping with the trauma of his fall.

Dostoevsky further exploits the Russian literary tradition by having Ivolgin's Kolpakov story steal the plot of Gogol's “Overcoat,” which involves a theft, mortification by a powerful superior in the presence of a witness, and reported resurrection. Kolpakov allegedly steals footwear (sapozhnyi tovar), an overt authorial reference to the name of Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin (bashmak = shoe). But while Bashmachkin, Kolpakov, and Ivolgin are humiliated by powerful others before witnesses, Gogol's character is also the victim of theft, whereas Kolpakov and Ivolgin are (or become) thieves. By having Ivolgin's Kolpakov story recapitulate Akaky Akakievich's but with this difference, Dostoevsky allows Ivolgin to betray his victim mentality. Ivolgin's Kolpakov story not only deflects attention from Kolpakov as thief and focuses on Kolpakov as victim; it also undoes the effects of Kolpakov's humiliation: Kolpakov is no longer singled out and exposed to view but reincorporated into the ranks. Ivolgin's story thus projects his own dearest wish—to regain his rank and social status and thus his own protective covering.

Ivolgin naively recapitulates Gogol's humiliation-death-resurrection pattern with another revealing difference. Unlike Akaky Akakievich, who returns...
as a ghost to haunt the conscience of his unjust superior, Kolpakov returns as “the very same Kolpakov.” Unlike Dostoevsky, who consciously recalls yet another story of humiliation, death, and resurrection, Ivolgin emphasizes social restoration. Kolpakov returns from the dead and undoes part, but not all, of the effects of Myshkin senior’s crime: Kolpakov is restored to the ranks, but not to the same regiment. Kolpakov’s theft is also overlooked, but not undone. Ivolgin’s story thus contains a subtle admission of his persistent guilt.

Dostoevsky, on the other hand, draws readers’ attention to the story of Christ. For instance, he has his narrator note that General Ivolgin tells stories to his drinking companions in debtor’s prison about the siege of Kars and about “the risen soldier” (pro voskresshego soldata) (8:156). The word “risen,” an adjective conspicuously absent from the General’s story, signals Dostoevsky’s authorial hand. In having his narrator allude to the transcendent Christ, Dostoevsky reminds his readers of Ivolgin’s worldly concerns as well as the novel’s religious thematics, for in Dostoevsky’s work lack of belief in Christ leads to narcissistic self-enclosure. Ivolgin’s story lacks Christian vision because Ivolgin lacks it. Though identical to Dostoevsky’s, his story lacks salvatory potential.

After Ivolgin tells his Kolpakov story, the narrator encourages his readers to view the General skeptically. His wife’s embarrassed response (“mon mari se trompe”) exposes Ivolgin’s unreliability, yet he manifests no shame. He even refutes the charge of unreliability by claiming eyewitness status. While readers may feel twinges of empathic embarrassment for his wife, we feel none for him. Following the narrator’s lead, we see General Ivolgin as an embarrassment.

The General with the Lapdog

Among General Ivolgin’s lies, two are immediately exposed. The first is the lapdog story. The second turns out to be true: Ivolgin claims that he held Aglaia Epanchina in his arms when she was a child. Both are told in the presence of the Prince and a full company: the first at the Ivolgins’, the second at the Prince’s. Each is primarily intended to engage and impress the beautiful young woman present—Nastasia Filippovna and Aglaia Epanchina, respectively. These rival beauties play opposite roles in the ongoing drama of Ivolgin’s exposure—Nastasia Filippovna exposes the General as a liar; Aglaia Epanchina defends him against the charge. Both exposed lies test the General and represent steps in his road to self-confrontation.

The lapdog story is framed by Nastasia Filippovna’s visit to the Ivolgin apartment. Her visit is unexpected, its purpose transparent: Nastasia Filippovna
intends to humiliate Gania. Gania, his mother, and his sister see this clearly; the General does not. Although moments earlier he had declared to the Prince that Gania’s engagement to an “ambiguous” (dvusmysleniaia) woman was bringing shame on his wife and daughter, once she arrives he tries to impress her. First he boasts of his heroic military past. Next, he claims to be the “victim of slander and bullets.” Then he identifies himself with the French Enlightenment, Western culture, and liberal politics: “In every other way I live like a philosopher, I walk, I stroll, I play checkers in my cafe, like a bourgeois who’s retired from business, and I read the ‘Indépendance.’” (8:92).

Finally, General Ivolgin tells his lapdog story: he had been smoking in a train compartment, two women with a lapdog enter, one of them throws his cigar out the window, so he throws the lapdog out the window (for the full text, see chapter 2). The company applauds, the General swaggers, but Nastasia Filippovna challenges him, asking how the woman responded. Ivolgin then supplies his version of the Epanchins’ break with him:

“Her? Well, there’s the whole root of the problem,” the General continued, scowling, “without saying a word and without the slightest bit of warning, she up and slapped me on the cheek! A savage woman; of an absolutely savage background!”

“And you?”

The General dropped his eyes, raised his eyebrows, raised his shoulders, compressed his lips, moved his hands apart, hung fire and suddenly pronounced:

“I got carried away!”

“And badly? Badly?”

“For God’s sake, not badly! A scandal ensued, but not badly. I only swatted at her, simply to swat. But Satan himself wiggled his way in: the light blue one turned out to be an Englishwoman, the governess or even some kind of friend of Princess Belokonsky’s house. And the one in black was the eldest of the Belokonsky princesses, an old maid of thirty-five or so. And it’s well-known what kind of relationship obtains between General Epanchin’s wife and the Belokonsky house. All the princesses in a faint, tears, mourning for the beloved lapdog, six princesses’ squeals, the Englishwoman’s squeals—the end of the world! But, of course, I went repentantly, begged forgiveness, wrote a letter, not accepted, neither me, nor the letter, and with the Epanchins quarrels, expulsion, persecution!”

“But excuse me, how can that be?” Nastasia Filippovna asked suddenly. “Five or six days ago I read in the ‘Indépendance’—I always read the ‘Indépendance’—exactly the same story! But decidedly exactly the same! It happened on one of the Rhenish railroads, in a coach, with a Frenchman
and an Englishwoman. The cigar was torn away exactly the same way, the lapdog was thrown out of the window exactly the same way, finally, it ended exactly the same way as with you. Even the dress was light blue!” (8:93–5)

The General clearly tells the lapdog story to entertain and impress others. In adapting it to explain his social ostracism, he initially presents himself as a forceful figure defending his personal dignity. His story is accepted and applauded, but his triumph is short-lived. Familiar with the story, Nastasia Filippovna asks for the outcome, thereby forcing him to reveal his humiliation. Then she unmasks him as a plagiarist. This scene thus echoes the scene in Gogol’s play *The Inspector General* where Khlestakov tries to impress the mayor’s wife and daughter by claiming both that he is the popular writer Baron Brambeus and that he authored the widely read novel *Iurii Miloslavskii* (written by Zagoskin). When they challenge his authorship, he tells another lie. In Gogol’s play, both women accept the cover lie. In Dostoevsky’s novel, the woman does not. The difference highlights Dostoevsky’s goals—to portray Nastasia Filippovna’s aggressive response as an example of passed-on shame.

Ivolgin’s resemblance to Khlestakov underscores his victim mentality. Like Khlestakov, Ivolgin reallocates blame. Blithely ignoring the fact that he has not paid his bill for two weeks, Khlestakov accuses the innkeeper of starving him. Ivolgin portrays his travel companions as proud violators of the social contract by implying that he would have extinguished his cigar had they asked. Yet he betrays shame as he admits that he struck a woman, thereby violating a social taboo.

Ivolgin’s stolen story naively reveals his moral awareness. He does not deny his wrongdoing but redresses it. His exhibitionism is the flip side of his narcissistic vulnerability and shame. His social assertiveness (smoking) and proud silence provoke the initial reaction. His excessive response reflects the extent of his narcissistic vulnerability. Like Dostoevsky’s underground men, Ivolgin cannot bear nonrecognition. No longer garbed in military regalia, the external sign of his rank and place in society, he is extremely vulnerable to slights. Instead of turning the other cheek (as Myshkin does), he violates a serious social taboo, which results in his banishment.16

In this scene, Dostoevsky diminishes the distance readers feel between ourselves and Ivolgin after the Kolpakov scene, when Ivolgin remained unshamed. This time he is clearly shamed. Though he tries to defend himself by denial, no one believes him. Yet Ivolgin’s shame at being exposed creates some sympathy where there was none. Dostoevsky here reveals shame’s positive force. A character capable of shame reveals his human frailty and thus breaks down the distance between himself, other characters, and Dostoevsky’s readers.
Dostoevsky explicitly establishes shame’s positive power when Ivolgin next lies, in yet another attempt to return to high society’s embrace. At the Prince’s, Aglaia Epanchina, partly to pique her mother, covers for the General. After calling his friend Lebedev a fraudulent interpreter of Revelation, Ivolgin introduces himself to Aglaia:

“I can’t help but warn you, Aglaia Ivanovna, that it’s all charlatanry on his part, believe me,” quickly and suddenly put in General Ivolgin, who had been waiting as if on pins and needles, desiring with all his might to begin a conversation somehow. He sat himself next to Aglaia Ivanovna, “of course, a country house has its rights,” he continued, “and its pleasures, and the device of such an uncommon introduction [intrusa] to interpret Revelation is an undertaking, like any other, and even a remarkable undertaking, mind-wise, but I . . . You, it seems, are looking at me with surprise? General Ivolgin has the honor of recommending himself. I held you in my arms, Aglaia Ivanovna.”

“Most pleased. I know Varvara Ardalionovna and Nina Aleksandrovna,” muttered Aglaia, trying with all her might not to burst out laughing.

Lizaveta Prokofievna flared up. Something that had long been boiling in her soul suddenly demanded release. She could not stand General Ivolgin, with whom she had been acquainted, only very long ago.

“You’re lying, my dear man, as usual with you, you never held her in your arms,” she lashed out at him indignantly.

“You’ve forgotten, Mummy, he did, for God’s sake, in Tver,” Aglaia suddenly affirmed. “We lived in Tver then. I was six then, I remember. He made me a bow and arrow and taught me how to shoot, and I killed a dove. Do you remember, we killed a dove together?”

“And he brought me a cardboard helmet and a wooden sword then, I also remember!” Adelaida cried out.

“I also remember it,” affirmed Aleksandra. “You even quarreled then about the wounded dove, and you were placed in separate corners. Adelaida even stood there in her helmet with her sword.”

The General, in announcing to Aglaia that he had held her in his arms, had said it just so, simply to start a conversation and only because he almost always began conversations with young people in that way, if he found it necessary to get acquainted with them. But this time it happened, as if on purpose, that he had spoken the truth and, as if on purpose, even himself had forgotten that truth. So that when Aglaia suddenly now confirmed that they had shot a dove together, his memory lit up at once, and he remembered it down
to the last detail, as it frequently happens that in one's declining years one remembers something from the distant past. It's difficult to convey what in this memory might have acted so strongly on the poor, and as usual, slightly inebriated general, but suddenly he was extraordinarily affected.

"I remember, I remember it all!" he exclaimed. "I was a staff-captain then. You—such a tiny thing, so cute. Nina Aleksandrovna . . . Gania . . . I was . . . received at your place. Ivan Fedorovich . . . "

"And now you see where you've gotten to?" the general's wife rejoined. "It means that you still haven't drunk up all your noble feelings since it's affected you so strongly. But you've tortured your wife. Instead of guiding your children, you're sitting in debtor's prison. Get out of here, my dear man, go somewhere, stand behind a door in a corner and have a cry, recall your former innocence, maybe God will forgive you. Go then, go, I'm telling you seriously. There's nothing better for straightening yourself out than to remember the past with repentance."

But it was no use telling him that the speech was in earnest: the General, like all other continuously inebriated people, was very sentimental and, like all inebriated people who've fallen too far, could not easily endure memories from a happy past. He stood and quiescently turned toward the door, so that Lizaveta Prokofievna immediately felt sorry for him.

"Ardalion Aleksandrich, my dear man!" she called after him, "wait a moment. We are all sinners. When you feel that your conscience reproaches you less, come see me, we'll sit and have a chat about those old times. Maybe, after all, I am fifty times more sinful than you myself. Well, good-bye for now, go, there's nothing for you here . . . ," she suddenly feared that he would return. (8:202–4)

This lie revealed as true introduces the concept of memory. As Belknap notes, in The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky associates memory with love, attention, and family, just as he associates forgetting with neglect and debauchery, an emotional loading that obtains in this scene of The Idiot. Memory carries the charged affects of remembered relationships. Aglaia's act of generosity deeply touches the General. After her mother accuses him of lying, Aglaia redeems him. She not only affirms the truth of his words, she presents him positively as a warm, caring man who gave her a happy memory. Yet the memory cuts both ways for General Ivolgin. He feels shame's double edge: the poignancy of loss and the warmth of belonging. Aglaia's memory restores to him a forgotten part of himself. Her mother, Mme. Epanchina, identifies positive memories from the past as agents of change. She contrasts Ivolgin's current inebriation with his past honor, generously noting his noble
feelings and counseling him to use them to remember and repent. She reminds him of divine forgiveness, advises him to forgive himself, and offers him an empathic bridge.

When Lebedev tries to avenge himself against Ivolgin’s charges of charlatanry by denigrating the departing General, Mme. Epanchina forestalls him. She has set the General on the road to self-confrontation—the necessary agent for healing shame. For shame is about the self, about identity, and she has reminded him of his former self. Like her daughter, she extends a generous hand. By acknowledging the good that remains, she offers him a chance to reform himself in his own past image. Unlike Lebedev, who sees the General’s drinking as the problem, Mme. Epanchina sees his inebriation as a symptom of underlying shame. She hopes that remembering his nobility will help heal the General’s shame. But she also realizes that he needs a helping hand. She empathically acknowledges the traces of good in him and offers him that which he seeks most—restoration to the community of good society.

Both scenes of exposure, the scenes with Nastasia Filippovna and Aglaia, differ dramatically in their nature, reception, and endings. The lapdog scene dramatizes an exposed plagiarism; the memory scene dramatizes a lie exposed as true. Nastasia Filippovna is a merciless audience; Aglaia Epanchina and her mother are merciful. Nonetheless, the two scenes portray Ivolgin as an older man trying to impress a young woman. Both stories feature a weapon, a death, and discord. In both stories the phallic extensions of the General’s self—the cigar, the bow and arrow—cause the death of an innocent creature (the dove emphasizes this innocence). The memory scene demonstrates Ivolgin’s feckless disregard for the consequences of his actions. He teaches Aglaia to shoot and thus to kill.

The two scenes establish a progression leading to the General’s self-confrontation. In the first, Nastasia Filippovna cruelly forces Ivolgin to confront his fabricated self. In the second, Mme. Epanchina urges him to compare his current and former selves, hoping memory of the latter will heal him. Moreover, in pointing Ivolgin to a moment when his actual and ideal selves coincided, Mme. Epanchina acts as the novel’s social conscience.

The narrator also rouses reader sympathy for Ivolgin in this scene. His unaffected joy and pain softens Mme. Epanchina, whose ire turns to empathy. She thus serves as a guide for the narrative audience. We feel the initial distance between ourselves and Ivolgin shrink yet again. The old braggart’s sincerity is touching—like Mme. Epanchina, we feel sorry for him, but we don’t want him to get too close.

By the next scene portraying a lie, Ivolgin has become more self-conscious. He enacts a scene of self-awareness at being caught in a lie similar to the one...
that the *Diary* writer describes in his article on lying. When General Ivolgin tells Prince Myshkin his story about being Napoleon’s page boy, he gets carried away—and catches himself.

**Napoleon’s Page Boy**

Ivolgin’s extended lie about being Napoleon’s page boy fills almost an entire subchapter of *The Idiot* (IV:4). In addition to being one of the funniest passages in Dostoevsky’s *oeuvre* (Prince Myshkin laughs for a full ten minutes after the General leaves), the page boy story highlights the novel’s father-children and isolation-community thematics, emphasizes the novel’s metaliterary dimension, and lays bare the dynamics of audience response.

Dostoevsky carefully frames the scene. As the narrator makes clear, Ivolgin’s story represents the General’s response to an eyewitness account of the Napoleonic occupation of Moscow published in the journal *Russian Archive*. Since Myshkin had recommended the article to Ivolgin, he is the General’s natural audience, but not his first. When Ivolgin schedules a private interview with Myshkin, a listener with “a heart,” he obviously wants to avoid interruption by the unnamed but clearly indicated Lebedev, who “understands nothing” and is “completely, completely incapable of understanding! One must have a heart to understand!” (4:404). Whatever the original purpose of Ivolgin’s meeting with Myshkin, it becomes the occasion to retell (and embellish) his story and thus counteract Lebedev’s insulting response to it.

Ivolgin’s interview with Myshkin begins with a discussion about memoirs and eyewitness accounts that flags the novel’s metaliterary dimension. Ivolgin dismisses the journal account of the Napoleonic occupation as “crude and, of course, nonsensical. Perhaps even a lie [lozh’] at every step” (8:410). After the Prince defends its simple-heartedness, praising any eyewitness account as a “treasure,” Ivolgin asserts, “In the editor’s place, I wouldn’t have published. As far as memoirs of eyewitnesses generally go, a crude, but amusing, liar [lguu] is more quickly believed than a worthy person who’s been in service” (8:410). The General thus raises issues of narrative reliability and audience response, issues of ongoing narrative interest in Dostoevsky’s novel. A naive narrator, Ivolgin unwittingly offers a spectacular irony which distances Ivolgin from the narrative audience, which is familiar with his unreliability. Moreover, it compounds the unaccustomed distance between Ivolgin and his own audience, the Prince. The formality of the interview, as well as Myshkin’s awareness that for several days Lebedev has been tormenting Ivolgin about the stolen money, discomfits the Prince. Myshkin feels “somehow strangely shy, as though his guest were porcelain, and he feared to break him at any minute.” The narrator stresses the singularity of this situation: “earlier
he’d never been shy with the General, it had never even occurred to him to be shy” (8:409). Dostoevsky has created a situation that demonstrates the importance of audience response to a speaker’s sense of self: Myshkin understands that Ivolgin’s honor is at stake.

Ivolgin’s derogation of the *Russian Archive* memoir contributes to the meta-literary layering of Dostoevsky’s novel. As Robin Feuer Miller points out in her groundbreaking study of narration in *The Idiot*, the novel’s narrator becomes increasingly unreliable as his text unfolds. As the narrator moves away from his initially sympathetic portrayal of Prince Myshkin, the gap between narrative and authorial audiences widens. In the end, while the narrative audience distances itself from the Prince, the authorial audience remains loyal to him. As Miller argues, “Dostoevsky . . . had designed a narrative style and a plot that would allow the reader, often through the very act of disagreeing with the narrator’s assessment of events, to participate in the moral action of the novel.” One of the narrator’s strategies to establish his own credibility is to discredit others’ stories. Yet this is the very strategy General Ivolgin uses! Ivolgin dismisses Pavlishchev’s version of Prince Myshkin’s father’s death. Likewise, he dismisses Lebedev’s 1812 story as well as his credentials as an interpreter of Revelation. By adopting the strategy of a character whose credibility he undermines, Dostoevsky’s narrator undermines his own. In a dazzling narrative parallel, Dostoevsky establishes the authority of his sympathetic authorial vision of Prince Myshkin by discrediting his narrator’s story in the same way that the narrator discredits Ivolgin’s. Author exposes narrator as narrator exposes character.

The opening frame of the page boy story not only signals this narrative parallel but also highlights the issue of authorial intentionality. To allay the General’s suspicions about his readiness to believe him, the Prince mentions a contemporary autobiographer who begins his memoir with the story of being an infant fed by French soldiers during the occupation. The book, easily recognized by Russian readers, is Herzen’s *My Past and Thoughts*. Dostoevsky thus frames Ivolgin’s page boy story with a discussion of artistically constructed historical accounts, which emphasizes issues of narrative reliability, audience response, and narrative construction. Ivolgin’s conscious choice of audience for his story, coupled with the narrator’s observations about the Prince’s sensitivity, highlights questions of audience response. Ivolgin’s choice of subject permits Dostoevsky to weave together mimetic, thematic, and meta-literary issues—for Napoleon was more than a historical figure, he was a legendary hero self-consciously created by himself. Unlike Herzen, who considered his book “the reflection of history in someone who accidentally got in its way,” Ivolgin places himself at the center of history. If the commentators are correct, Ivolgin criticizes the account of a civilian servant at the Novodevichy
Convent, the story of a marginal person at the periphery. Not content to have Napoleon pointed out to him, Ivolgin has Napoleon single him out. He thus represents himself as a physically small but historically central figure. Ivolgin tries to conceal the shame of his fall by fabricating a glorious past. Furthermore, in contrast to Herzen, who portrays himself as a representative of his age, Ivolgin adopts both the romantic view of himself as a unique individual and the realist view of himself as a representative of Russian national sentiment. Ivolgin thus outdoes rival accounts, portraying himself as Napoleon's sounding board. While Napoleon and Davout are considering their next move, “Suddenly Napoleon's glance falls on me by chance, a strange thought glimmers in his eyes. 'Child!' he says to me suddenly, 'what do you think: if I adopt Orthodoxy and free your slaves, will the Russians follow me or not?' 'Never!' I cried out indignantly. Napoleon was startled. 'In the eyes of this child shining with patriotism,' he said, 'I have read the opinion of the entire Russian people. Enough, Davout! It's all fantasies! Lay out your other plan'” (8:415). The other plan is the French army's entrenchment in Moscow, waiting for spring to break the Russian encirclement. In Ivolgin's account, Davout supports this. Once again, Napoleon turns to the young Ivolgin: “'My child! . . . what do you think of our intention?' It goes without saying that he asked me the way that sometimes a person of the greatest intelligence, at the last moment, flips a coin. Instead of to Napoleon, I turn to Davout and say as though inspired: 'Take yourself off, General, for home!' The project was destroyed. Davout shrugged his shoulders and, leaving, said in a whisper: ‘Bah, il devient superstitieux!' And on the next day the departure was announced” (8:416).

Ivolgin claims truth value for his story on grounds of historical accuracy: the French retreated from Moscow. In claiming responsibility for that retreat, Ivolgin leaves the path of historical verisimilitude but follows another generic convention. He portrays himself as a main character in a romantic historical novel, like those of Dumas père. He thus shows his Khlestakovian origins as a consumer of romanticism.

Ivolgin also attempts to establish his credibility by disregarding yet another story. Clearly alluding to a story Lebedev has told him, he rejects it according to strictly historical grounds of verisimilitude. He objects to Lebedev's claim that a French cannon blew his leg off by declaring that Lebedev would have been too young in 1812. When the Prince agrees, noting that Lebedev clearly has two intact legs, the General comically dismisses this fact as less relevant than his own claim that Chernosvitov had not yet invented his wooden leg: “As far as the leg in sight—that's still, let's suppose, not completely unbelievable. He asserts that it's a Chernosvitov leg . . . ’ ‘Ah yes, with a Chernosvitov leg, they say, one can dance.' ‘I know for sure, sir. Cher-
nosvitov, after inventing the leg, at that time ran to show me first thing. But
the Chernosvitov leg was invented incomparably later. . . . And besides he
claims that even his deceased wife in the course of their entire marriage didn-
\^t know that he, her husband, had a wooden leg” (8:411). Ivolgin rejects
Lebedev’s story because it proposes an alternative hero. He ignores the
Prince’s support because mentioning Chernosvitov allows him to refocus
attention on himself.

In fabricating Lebedev’s rival story, Dostoevsky draws on the tale of Cap-
tain Kopeikin from Gogol’s Dead Souls. The man who tells the tale wants to
claim that the main character of Gogol’s novel, Chichikov, is Captain
Kopeikin, but someone observes that Chichikov isn’t missing any limbs. The
teller rebukes himself for losing track of this detail but tries to hedge by allud-
ing to the current state of perfection attained by artificial limbs.

In concocting Ivolgin’s Chernosvitov story, Dostoevsky also parodies his-
tory. He knew the actual Chernosvitov, a radical thinker who belonged to
both Petrashevsky’s and Speshnev’s circles. In fact, Dostoevsky probably used
him as one prototype for Peter Verkhovensky in Demons. In having Ivolgin
claim that the notoriously secretive Chernosvitov (12:219–20) rushed to
share his invention, Dostoevsky playfully shows his friends in the know how
Ivolgin lacks sensitivity to others’ personalities. Moreover, though Dostoevsky
had other real-life models for General Ivolgin, he transferred Chernosvitov’s
love of eloquence and Gogolian hyperbole (12:220) to Ivolgin, thus empha-
sizing Ivolgin’s Gogolian roots.

Gogol also figures in Ivolgin’s Napoleon story. After he published his
“Overcoast,” dress coats gained a metalinguistic reference in the Russian tradition
that Dostoevsky playfully inscribes into his mimetics and thematics. Ivol-
gin’s sartorial awareness, for example, signals his realism as well as Dosto-
evsky’s thematics of identity. Ivolgin claims that Napoleon notices him be-
half of his nice clothes (8:413); he also remarks that he decided to
become Napoleon’s page boy not only because he felt personal sympathy for
Napoleon, but because he was offered “a sparkling uniform, which means a
lot for a child” (8:414). Keenly aware of clothing’s importance as an indica-
tor of social identity, Dostoevsky frequently jots the words “uniform” and
“gloves” in his notebooks to signify the assumption of roles in the public
sphere; one dons the clothing and thereby assumes the role. Characters in The
Idiot are acutely clothing conscious. Lebedev, for instance, has two dress
coats. When Prince Myshkin reappears in Petersburg after his six-month
absence, Lebedev leaves the room to put on his shabby dress coat, thus adopt-
ing a role of poverty. When Ivolgin lovingly describes the page boy uniform,
he thereby demonstrates that he has succumbed to the era’s enthusiasm for
institutionalized military parades.
Dostoevsky creates much of the humor in Ivolgin's page boy story by having him so thoroughly and subjectively rewrite history. Ivolgin's Napoleon becomes Ivolgin's alter ego. In Ivolgin's story, Napoleon's greatest suffering resulted not from the military nightmare of occupying Russia as winter approached, but from Emperor Alexander's silence. When the Prince notes that Napoleon wrote letters to Alexander, Ivolgin elaborates: “Strictly, we don't know precisely what kind of proposals he wrote, but he wrote every day, every hour, and letter after letter! He was horribly agitated” (8:414). In Ivolgin's account, Napoleon directs most of his energy to the single goal of gaining recognition from the Russian Emperor. Ivolgin is historically accurate: Alexander removed himself from Moscow, thus making any personal communication impossible. Consequently, Napoleon, the most celebrated general of the century, could not obtain an audience with his foe. Alexander’s hereditary rank undoubtedly exacerbated Napoleon’s sense of being snubbed. Ivolgin's account stresses the extreme humiliation Napoleon suffers at Alexander's hands.

Dostoevsky thus has Ivolgin reflect his own story in the story he tells. As a result of his rejection by high society, particularly the hereditary nobility, Ivolgin finds himself in a position similar to that of his Napoleon. In response, he first sets out on his Napoleon's path: he writes letters. He also calls on those who reject him (which Napoleon cannot do). Like his Napoleon, he is very agitated. When his epistolary efforts fail, however, he resorts to another means of verbal compensation—lying. He constantly exaggerates his importance and fabricates a host of supporting stories. Like his Napoleon’s letter writing, Ivolgin's lying can be seen as a frantic attempt to obtain recognition from a silent, rejecting, significant other.

Young Ivolgin proposes a way out of his father figure’s shameful and isolating dilemma: “One night, when we were alone, I threw myself at him in tears (oh, I loved him!): ‘Beg, beg forgiveness from Emperor Alexander!’ I cried out. That is I should have expressed myself: ‘Make peace with Emperor Alexander,’ but as a child I naively expressed my whole thought” (8:414). Ivolgin’s two formulas reveal two approaches to reconciliation. The child’s “naive” expression, “beg forgiveness,” calls for a private, personal interaction that requires humility. The adult Ivolgin's rewrite, “make peace,” allows for more impersonal interaction, potentially mediated, that would reduce the humiliation inherent in Napoleon’s position. The second approach might also cushion potential rejection by providing a third party to blame. Nonetheless, both are routes to the same end: reconciliation. If we regard the Napoleon in Ivolgin's story as an alter ego, a great general isolated from his natural companions by his own prideful actions, then the two formulas read as alternative scripts for reconciliation. Following the lapdog incident, Ivolgin impulsively begged forgiveness both by letter and in person. He thus followed the naive,
unmediated path that his child persona urges on Napoleon. Telling the story gives him a chance to rewrite his script, however, so he does. His second suggestion, “make peace,” indicates that, following adult reflection, he would try a path that requires considerably more diplomacy and potential mediation. He thus describes a script that reflects his current efforts to court Prince Myshkin.

What deters Ivolgin’s Napoleon is the domino effect. While he might accept suppliant status vis-à-vis Alexander, he refuses to be humbled before his European counterparts: “oh my child, I am prepared to kiss Emperor Alexander’s feet, but on the other hand the Prussian king, and again the Austrian emperor, oh, to these an eternal hatred, and . . . finally . . . you don’t understand anything about politics!” (8:414). In historical terms, Alexander is at least Napoleon’s equal, if not in some ways his superior. (One need only think of the picturesque meeting of Alexander and Napoleon at Tilsit in 1807, when the two were simultaneously rowed to the tented raft in the middle of the Nieman to negotiate.) Napoleon can humiliate himself before the emperor of the vast kingdom that had subdued his troops but cannot grovel before those whom he has conquered. Ivolgin’s story thus reveals his own social snobbery. Ivolgin fabricates this extended version of the Napoleon story following his break with Lebedev, who insists on equality between storytellers. Ivolgin perceives the blatant falsity of Lebedev’s 1812 story as an act of disrespect. Like his Napoleon, Ivolgin can grovel before the Belokonskys and Epanchins, his former social equals, but he cannot make peace with Lebedev, his social inferior.

Ivolgin’s story also highlights Napoleon’s isolation. Surrounded by his retinue, he is nonetheless far from his family and his native France. After their mutual embrace, the general-to-be inserts himself into history by suggesting that Napoleon write to the former empress: “Write, do write a letter to Empress Josephine!” I sobbed out to him.” Napoleon’s response touches on some of Dostoevsky’s favorite themes—memory and love: “Napoleon shuddered, thought a bit and said to me: ‘You’ve reminded me of the third heart who loves me; thank you, my friend’” (8:417). The Prince applauds this advice: “You acted wonderfully . . . among evil thoughts you directed him to a good feeling” (8:417). The Prince’s response reaffirms the positive roles of memory and love in the novel. Significantly, in this account, the European adult suffers from evil thoughts while the Russian child connects him to positive memories and emotions. Dostoevsky thus boldly inscribes his authorial message along with some of his favorite oppositions—Europe vs. Russia, adult vs. child—into Ivolgin’s clichéd, sentimental story. The Russian child proposes love as consolation: Europe’s greatest contemporary general may have lost his Russian campaign, but he still has his wife and son. This part of the
story also reflects Ivolgin's sense of his own position. Following his break with Lebedev, Ivolgin returns home from voluntary exile at Lebedev's. The suffering General's own unconscious (the child in him) thus offers him consolation. He may have lost his friend Lebedev, but he still has his wife and children.

Ivolgin's Napoleon story culminates in a farewell scene between the defeated world-conqueror and the ten-year-old Russian patriot. As Ivolgin tells it, Napoleon turns to him and says: “I don't want to take you away from your mother and am not taking you with me! . . . but I would like to do something for you.” He was already sitting on his horse. ‘Write me something in my sister's album as a memory,’ I uttered, getting timid because he was very upset and gloomy. He turned, asked for a pen, took the album. ‘How old is your sister?’ he asked me, pen in hand already. ‘Three years old,’ I answered. ‘Petite fille alors.’ And he jotted into the album: ‘Ne mentez jamais! Napoléon, votre ami sincère”’ (8:417). This invented interchange between a political visionary and a small-time fantasizer, like Ivolgin's Kolpakov and lapdog stories, indicates Ivolgin's growing recognition of his own weakness for lying.

This scene's comic self-consciousness also reveals Dostoevsky's authorial hand. In Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, Napoleon represents the political visionary for whom the ends justify even the most violent means. He is thus a master of lozh’—deliberate, self-interested lies. By having Ivolgin attribute the advice “Never lie!” to Napoleon, Dostoevsky emphasizes how Ivolgin's narcissistic projection distorts the legendary givens. He also has Napoleon, that self-creator of public image, assume the role of yet another self-created figure—Cervantes' Knight of the Mirrors. Just as Samson Carrasco takes on the role of lovesick knight errant to reflect Don Quixote back to himself, so Dostoevsky has Ivolgin attribute words to his Napoleon that reflect his growing self-awareness. This story thus reflects the beginning of Ivolgin's self-cure. Even though he is lying, the process of storytelling leads to a glimmer of truth. Ivolgin creates Napoleon in his own image. In recapitulating scenes of Napoleon's shame, Ivolgin confronts his own.

The story of Ivolgin's parting from Napoleon also echoes the scene in Gogol's Inspector General where Khlestakov writes in the mayor's daughter's album. Just as Khlestakov proposes verses that are inappropriate to his audience,29 so Napoleon's command seems particularly inappropriate for a three-year-old girl. He thus proves as inflexible as Ivolgin himself, for Ivolgin is unable to abandon his public persona even in the private sphere. What gifts did he bring the Epanchin girls, after all, but weapons? Dostoevsky also entertains readers with Ivolgin's incongruous juxtaposition of public and private. Albums are repositories of public words in private places. Napoleon is not in a drawing room, however, but on a horse. Ivolgin's claim that his three-year-old sister has an album, which he happens to have with him, heightens the
scene’s humor and strains audience credulity. Ivolgin’s claims for the document’s authenticity reinforce the comic hyperbole, “That page, in a gold frame, under glass, hung all her life at my sister’s in the drawing room, in the most conspicuous place, until her very death—she died in childbirth; where it is now—I do not know . . . ” (8:417).30

Finally, by having his child persona ask for a written token of remembrance, Ivolgin shows an awareness of how words connect people. Napoleon’s/Ivolgin’s shame may not be undone, but the wounds can be healed by communication. Dostoevsky’s authorial hand is never more present than when he emphasizes the ties that bind.

Shame and Sympathy: Audience Response

General Ivolgin’s lying illustrates the two extremes of narcissism: shame and grandiosity. In stating that Napoleon asks for his advice in “the way that sometimes a person of the greatest intelligence, at the last moment, flips a coin” (8:416), Ivolgin unwittingly characterizes his own narcissistic sense of self. The Russian words for flipping a coin—orel (heads) and reshka (tails)—literally mean “eagle” and “grating.” Napoleon thus turns to Ivolgin as either an eagle (the king of birds, associated in folktales and legends with royalty, historically associated with the Russian imperial emblem and with Napoleon) or as a grating (an inanimate object, usually of a baser metal, which functions as a barrier). Eagle and grating, glory and ignominy, flight and imprisonment, are two sides of the same coin. They are also two sides of Ivolgin’s shame experiences: he flees shame by drinking; borrowing money to drink leads to his imprisonment. Ivolgin (the oriole) thus acknowledges his dual self-image.

Ivolgin’s lying allows him to rewrite history featuring his ideal. He becomes transported by his self-fashioning, however. Before a sympathetic audience, his grandiosity and exaltation know no bounds: “Oh Prince!” exclaimed the General, intoxicated with his story to the point that, perhaps, he already could not stop himself even before the most extreme imprudence,—you say: ‘That all happened!’ But there was more, I assure you, there was a lot more! All that is only the miserable, political facts. But I will tell you again, I was witness to the nocturnal tears and moans of that great man; and that no one has seen, except me!” (8:416). Ivolgin’s claim to exclusive knowledge of the era’s most famous figure reflects his desire to feel important. His eyewitness claim allows him to undo his own shame by witnessing someone else’s. By inscribing features of Ivolgin’s Kolpakov story into his Napoleon story, Dostoevsky emphasizes Ivolgin’s narrative naïveté while craftily displaying his own mastery. He also cannily deepens his psychological portrait of Ivolgin. Once again Dostoevsky magnifies his novel’s mimetic and metaliterary dimensions in a single stroke.
As the Prince’s response makes clear, Ivolgin’s sense of self depends on audience response. Sensitive to the General’s fragility, the Prince reassures him:

“You entertained and . . . finally . . . it’s so interesting; I’m so grateful to you!”

“Prince!” said the General, again squeezing his hand until it hurt and looking fixedly at him with gleaming eyes, as though suddenly coming to his senses and as though stunned by some unexpected thought, “Prince! You are so kind, so open-hearted, that I even feel sorry for you sometimes. I look at you with tenderness; oh, God bless you! Let your life begin and flourish . . . in love. Mine is over! Oh, forgive me, forgive me!”

He exited quickly, covering his face with his hands. The Prince could not doubt the sincerity of his distress. He likewise understood that the old man had exited intoxicated by his success; but he had the presentiment nonetheless that he was one of that order of liars who, although they lie to the point of sensuality and even to the point of self-oblivion, nonetheless even at the very highest point of their intoxication still suspect to themselves that in fact they are not believed, and even that they can’t be believed. In his current situation, the old man might come to himself, be ashamed beyond measure, suspect the Prince of immense compassion for him, take offense. . . .

His presentiments came to pass. (8:417–18)

As this passage demonstrates, Ivolgin lacks a sense of measure, a deficiency that Dostoevsky elsewhere identifies as quintessentially Russian. Ivolgin gets so carried away by his story’s success that he oversteps a limit that awakens his self-consciousness. “[A]shamed beyond measure,” Ivolgin ruptures ties with the Prince, thereby isolating himself. Less than a day later, the General flees his house with his son Kolia, confesses that he has caused his wife misery, and suffers a stroke in the streets. While confessing, Ivolgin repeatedly calls his son “le roi de Rome,” a return to his identification with Napoleon and the novel’s father-children thematics. Like his Napoleon, Ivolgin consoles himself in a moment of humiliation, defeat, and exile with thoughts of his young son’s loyalty.

As General Ivolgin tells his stories to different groups of people, three patterns of audience response emerge: sympathetic belief, sympathetic disbelief, antipathetic disbelief. Ivolgin tells his Kolpakov story to a fairly sympathetic audience, yet as he finishes, his embarrassed wife protests “mon mari se trompe.” When he tells his lapdog story, Nastasia Filippovna exposes him brutally. When he declares that he had held Aglaia in his arms, Mme. Epanchina proclaims him a liar, but Aglaia and her sisters defend him. Seeing the General’s emotional reaction to his reawakened memories, Mme. Epanchina...
relents and extends a hand of reconciliation, leaving the General to his own conscience. The Prince acts as a sympathetic audience for the General's Napoleon story, but the General gets so transported that he is ashamed and breaks with the Prince. Finally, on the day of his stroke, the General tells a story whose truth is hostilely challenged by two sons—his own son Gania and his mistress's son Ippolit. These patterns of response increase the novel's verisimilitude while modeling a range of responses for Dostoevsky's readers. By having his least sympathetic characters respond most hostilely, Dostoevsky promotes sympathy and discourages shaming.

The shame Gania inflicts upon his father drives Ivolgin out of the house. After Gania seconds Ippolit's suggestion that Captain Eropegov, the subject of Ivolgin's story, never existed, Ivolgin curses his house and flees. Gania compounds his father's shame by shouting after him, “And don’t steal!” Tormented by Lebedev, expelled from her house by Mme. Epanchina, taunted by Ippolit and Gania, the General runs into the street, followed by his faithful son Kolia. In his last lengthy speech, General Ivolgin recapitulates the charges against him, denies them, pities himself, but then, for the first time in the novel, thinks of someone other than himself. He expresses pity and love for his wife and repents the grief he has caused her:

“There was no Eropegov! No Eroshka Eropegov!”—he exclaimed in a frenzy, coming to a halt in the street. “And that’s my son, my very own son! Eropegov, the person who substituted as a brother for me for eleven months, for whom I at a duel . . . Prince Vygoretsky, our captain, said to him over a bottle: ‘You, Grisha, where did you get your Anna [a medal], what do you say to that?’—‘On the battlefields of my fatherland, that’s where I received it!’ I cry out: ‘Bravo, Grisha!’ Well, a duel resulted then and there, and then he got married . . . to Maria Petrovna Su . . . Sutugina and was killed on the battlefields. . . . A bullet ricocheted off the cross on my chest and straight into his forehead. ‘I’ll never forget this as long as I live!’” he cried and fell on the spot. I . . . I served honestly, Kolia; I served nobly, but disgrace—disgrace pursues me! You and Nina will come to my grave . . . ‘Poor Nina!’ I used to call her that, Kolia, long ago, at the beginning still, and she so loved . . . Nina, Nina! What have I done to your fate! For what can you love me, patient soul! Your mother has an angel's soul, Kolia, do you hear, an angel’s!” (8:419)

In expressing his outrage and shock at Gania's betrayal, General Ivolgin illustrates the narrative dynamics of audience belief. Ivolgin's story demonstrates that belief in others is necessary for social interactions; Dostoevsky's story adds that belief in God is necessary for life itself. Significantly, the scene
starts with an altercation between the General and Ippolit, whom Ivolgin calls “an atheist,” who is “dying from malice and lack of faith” (8:395). Though put into the mouth of a frenzied old man, the charge that Ippolit’s insolence results from his atheism expresses a Dostoevskian hobbyhorse—that religious belief is a positive moral force on earth. These charges also express the concomitant idea that lack of belief in God dissolves the bonds of community.

Ivolgin’s story specifically addresses the issue of disbelief and its consequences. First of all, he confirms Eropegov’s existence by providing his biography. In his telling, their superior officer, Captain Vygoretsky, a prince by birth, doubts Eropegov’s bravery. Eropegov defends his honor and Ivolgin seconds him, in both word and deed, thus recalling Ivolgin’s earlier self-identification as a musketeer. Ivolgin compares Eropegov to a substitute brother; he also acts as his second in a duel, thereby living up to the musketeer motto. Furthermore, Ivolgin represents his friend as a patriot and war hero, like Ivolgin himself, a detail that echoes Ivolgin’s contention that his own father died fighting for his country. Thus a thematic appears, however comically, in Ivolgin’s stories—belief mandates action. Belief in friends, family, and country dictates the active defense of those ideals, even at the risk of one’s life. And, as Dostoevsky shows, belief works both ways. Others’ belief in one contributes to one’s honor and identity.

In his telling of Ivolgin’s story, Dostoevsky develops this thematic: he further implies that belief in God mandates active love for one’s fellow human beings. As both Lebedev and Mme. Epanchina claim (see chapter 8), belief in God creates the possibility of human community. Ivolgin’s story describes the results of doubting and mockery: Prince Vygoretsky’s doubts lead to a duel. Ivolgin defends his friend, an act of brotherly love. Ivolgin’s speech may seem digressive and foolish, but its inner logic correlates with one of Dostoevsky’s most cherished themes. In his telling, Ivolgin portrays himself as indirectly responsible for Eropegov’s death—a bullet ricochets off Ivolgin’s service medal and kills his friend. Ivolgin thus re-presents the experience of war—events outside of his control that lead to death and loss. The detail of Ivolgin’s service medal works two ways, however. First, it evidences Ivolgin’s tendency to boast—even in this narrative, he cannot resist making himself at least the equal of his fallen comrade by having an equal decoration and taking equal risks. Second, with this tragicomic detail, Ivolgin takes indirect responsibility for his friend’s death. His narrative thus embellishes his self-image but does not deny his responsibility. Ivolgin (a man who claims to have thirteen bullets in his chest) should have died, but as a result of his war heroism, he wears a medal that protects him. His friend dies instead. Ivolgin further emphasizes the situation’s ambiguity by claiming that he served honestly and nobly but
that “disgrace pursues” him. He blames events outside his control for his disgrace and loss. In similar fashion, Ivolgin's medal represents his noble service but causes his friend’s death. His admission of indirect responsibility for the loss of his friend then prepares the way for his admission of full responsibility for his wife’s losses. This detail thus touches another Dostoevskian hobbyhorse—the responsibility of each for all.

Eropegov’s tragicomic death cry, “I’ll never forget this as long as I live!” evokes yet another Dostoevskian trademark—memory. This cry could almost be Ivolgin’s. He tells a story to his sympathetic son Kolia to undo the trauma of his son Gania’s hostile disbelief. He dies defending himself against Gania’s charges. Ivolgin’s last word is the name of Eropegov’s wife—a name that (along with Eropegov’s) he had difficulty remembering earlier. The attempt to remember a name from the past leads him to thoughts of his own honorable past, to his current disgrace, and to his wife, Nina Aleksandrovna, his faithful companion through good times and bad. This memory, and his repentance before her, redeem him in Dostoevsky’s authorial eyes.

As the culmination of a progression, this story harks back to Ivolgin’s other stories and their audience reception. Ivolgin’s memory of his wife recalls Ivolgin’s Napoleon story and the incident that earns Prince Myshkin’s praise—reminding Napoleon of his wife. At a moment when Ivolgin feels cast out and rejected by his brother figure Lebedev and his own son Gania, he remembers someone who loves him. He has thus internalized the story he told the Prince. No young Ivolgin (even though one is present) reminds him; he remembers himself. He does exactly what Mme. Epanchina prescribed for him—he remembers the past with repentance. He remembers the past merits that earned his wife’s early love and compares them with his current shame; he repents in her name.

Though Ivolgin dies from shame, it is not all externally imposed. The dynamic is thus complex. The immediate cause of his stroke is the shame visited on him by Gania and Ippolit following so closely as it does the shame visited on him by Lebedev. But he has also internalized a dose of shame, which is signaled by his break with the Prince. Ivolgin feels exposed after his Napoleon story, not because the Prince has been a hostile audience, but because he overindulges and then examines himself. His pre-stroke story and confession of guilt to his faithful son Kolia further evidence his self-confrontation. Ivolgin takes two steps necessary for overcoming shame and rejoining community: he focuses attention outside of himself, and he acknowledges both his guilt (responsibility for others) and his shame (the fact of his fall). This deathbed acknowledgment, in turn, increases authorial audience sympathy for the General.
The Homeopathic Dose

In *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky demonstrates that shame can give rise to lying, but also to healing. As Miller points out in her paper “Dostoevsky and the Homeopathic Dose,” Dostoevsky prescribes like to cure like.32 Ivolgin lies because he is ashamed of himself. He has lost his identity as a military authority, a socially respected figure, and a head of household. His lying recalls his past status but also contains recognition of his fall. Both Mme. Epanchina and Lebedev prescribe doses of shame to cure Ivolgin, whose blameworthy actions are themselves rooted in shame. Mme. Epanchina prescribes a minute dose of shame applied internally as preparation for social reintegration. Lebedev, on the other hand, treats the General with a liberal dose of externally applied shame.33 He shames Ivolgin before and after the General returns his money (thus undoing his crime), first by swearing he believes his friend, then by pretending the money was not returned. This ruse drives the General crazy. The Prince tries to appease his pain, but Ivolgin’s sense of shame forces him to flee. Further shamed by Gania, the General collapses. Confronted externally and internally by his own shame, the General dies—literally and figuratively mortified.

Lebedev suggests to the Prince that if he shames Ivolgin sufficiently, the General will return to his wife and family. The General’s death proves him wrong. Mme. Epanchina, on the other hand, holds that primary responsibility for a person’s actions lies with that person. She diagnoses compassionately. She understands that shame needs no external witnesses; conscience suffices. She recommends a minute dose of self-applied shame, an acknowledgment and acceptance of shortcomings, as a corrective to shame-based behavior. And, like her relative the Prince, she proffers an empathic bridge.

All of the General’s lies carry the seeds of his redemption, because they reveal that he recognizes, howeverly latently, that he bears responsibility for his actions. The Kolpakov story shifts attention away from Kolpakov’s initial guilt but does not deny his crime. The lapdog story shifts blame but does not deny social transgression. The Napoleon story idealizes Ivolgin’s pre-military school childhood but ends with Napoleon’s admonition “Ne mentez jamais.” The Eropegov story portrays Ivolgin as a true friend, yet one indirectly responsible for Eropegov’s death. The General flees his actions and his defective, shame-ridden self by verbal self-fashioning, yet his stories reveal awareness of the cover-up and thus his conscience. Sitting in Dostoevsky’s authorial audience, we see that while Ivolgin’s conscience mortifies him, it also redeems him. One must be capable of feeling shame to be saved.
Authorial Strategy

A secondary character in the novel, General Ivolgin figures prominently in its metaliterary construction. Ivolgin is a storyteller, like Dostoevsky himself. In representing Ivolgin’s stories, Dostoevsky raises issues about the construction of narratives. The page boy story represents a new stage in Ivolgin’s storytelling. For the first time, Ivolgin is sensitive beforehand to audience response. He divides the world into listeners “with a heart,” such as Myshkin, and those who are without heart and thus “completely incapable of understanding,” such as Lebedev. In Dostoevsky’s last novel, Fedor Karamazov likewise polarizes audience response as he anticipates Elder Zosima’s sympathetic response and his relative Miusov’s hostile response.

Although the General is occasionally more sensitive to his audiences, his narcissism curbs his narrative efficacy. Dostoevsky emphasizes Ivolgin’s limits by having his ideal audience, Prince Myshkin, also be an ideal storyteller. As Miller writes: The Prince “constantly consolidates the events of his life into an object (or form) which he can then give as a gift, a gift of insight; he changes his own life into art. All the stories he has told have derived from his own experiences, yet he has transmuted them into symbolic myths.” Ivolgin’s enterprise differs significantly from Myshkin’s, mostly because he lacks insight. Ivolgin’s Kolpakov story most blatantly exemplifies this deficiency: Ivolgin tells a story of restoration, not resurrection. By underscoring the lack of transcendence in Ivolgin’s account, the narrator not only marks the novel’s thematics of death and resurrection but also reveals Ivolgin’s shortcomings as a narrator. Obsessed with his own identity problems, Ivolgin cannot see the mythic pattern behind his story. His narcissism degrades his narrative skill. Because he insists on mimetic truth he overlooks mythic truth.

Ivolgin’s stories are stories about identity—his identity. Dostoevsky’s stories are not only stories about human identity; they are also stories that express, create, and transform human identity. While Dostoevsky the author may disagree with his narrator’s final stance on Prince Myshkin, thus forcing the authorial audience to judge for themselves, he and his narrator see eye to eye about General Ivolgin and can thus guide reader response. Ivolgin increases in importance as he moves from being shameless to being shamed. Ivolgin also increases in importance because his story serves as a variant of the novel’s main plot. Ivolgin is not only a storyteller but also a social type—a fallen general. His lying allows him to fashion a praiseworthy self-image, but it also exposes him to critical scrutiny. The activity of lying dynamically illustrates one of the novel’s themes—community vs. isolation. While Ivolgin’s lying shows that he wishes to be included in a community, it also shows that
he has been excluded. Furthermore, it threatens him with yet greater isolation: Ivolgin’s self-absorption blinds him to audience as other and thus increases the distance between him and them.

Nonetheless, in the course of the novel, Ivolgin’s lying functions therapeutically. As Dostoevsky’s *Diary* writer says, “there’s nothing more pleasant than to talk about one’s illness, if only one finds a listener; and once one begins to talk, it’s already impossible not to lie; it even cures the patient” (21:118). Ivolgin’s lying exemplifies repetition compulsion. All of his stories are about honor and loss of honor. Ivolgin covers the same ground over and over; his lying reframes and repeats the trauma of his lost status. The process of storytelling, however, helps cure him of the disease he suffers most from—“narcissism” in today’s parlance, “self-enclosure” in Dostoevsky’s. Seen as a progression, Ivolgin’s stories illustrate his developing self-awareness and concomitant awareness of others. For most of the novel, Ivolgin denies responsibility for his actions; he represents himself as a positive hero who has become a victim of contingency. Nonetheless, his stories contain seeds of recognition that he has done wrong.

Once Ivolgin can admit his guilt and face his shame, he rejoins his family and dies in its midst. Dostoevsky the author devotes so much space to Ivolgin’s story because it dynamically illustrates the authorial thematics of isolation and community and the responsibility of each for all. Although a secondary character, Ivolgin contributes centrally to the authorial exploration of metatextual issues such as the nature and purposes of fiction, the relationship of truth to fiction, the function of inserted narratives, and the dynamics of audience response. Ippolit’s and Gania’s hostility to Ivolgin’s Eropegov story, like Nastasia Filippovna’s hostility to the lapdog story, shifts readers’ sympathies. Entertained by the General’s outlandish stories, we are grateful, as the Prince is, for a good laugh. We are angered by Ippolit’s and Gania’s hostility, even though we recognize that it arises from their own shame. After all, Ivolgin has humiliated Ippolit by becoming his mother’s irresponsible lover, and he has humiliated Gania by his current dissolution and loss of social position. These sons, like Nastasia Filippovna, pass on their shame, exposing the father who betrayed them. Yet, in Dostoevsky’s novel, a father’s judgment does not excuse that of his children. Dostoevsky takes a plot line from another literary text to arouse readers’ compassion for this shame-filled father. Like Lear, Ivolgin curses his family as he flees from them. Like Lear, he goes partly mad. And like Lear, Ivolgin admits responsibility for his own fall and thus for his family’s suffering.

Though readers know Ivolgin is a liar and an alcoholic, a man who has ruined himself and his family, two of the novel’s most positive characters—his wife and younger son—love him and stand by him. As Dostoevsky’s narrator
notes in discussing Ivolgin, “Let’s not forget that the reasons for human action are usually countlessly more complex and diverse than we always explain them afterwards, and they are rarely definitively outlined” (8:402). In deepening Ivolgin’s character, Dostoevsky implicates his readers in the general’s drama of lying and exposure in five acts. He reels us in affectively, as witnesses to another’s shame, cognitively, as appreciators of the novel’s metaliterary art, and ethically. In such a mimetically complex world, we cannot pass simple judgments.

Viewing Ivolgin’s story as a shame drama that ends fairly well casts light on Nastasia Filippovna’s tragic end. Like the General, Nastasia Filippovna is fallen. Like him, she experiences social shame and exclusion. Unlike the General, Nastasia Filippovna is a woman. Her fall occurs in late adolescence; therefore, she never has the social experiences that formed the General: being part of a social class, a military unit, a family. In short, gender politics affect her fate. She does not have an equal repository of memories of community to draw upon as she struggles with her social shame. She cannot return to her family because she does not have one. Throughout the novel, Nastasia Filippovna is greatly moved by the Prince’s repeated attempts to undo her shame through his generous acts of love and acceptance. Yet Nastasia Filippovna remains focused on public opinion. She cannot envision a social world that accepts her. Like the General, she repeats her self-lacerating trauma. Unlike the General, she ultimately chooses self-destruction.

Yet, just as Dostoevsky complicates reader response to Ivolgin, so he complicates our response to Nastasia Filippovna. She does not immediately succumb to self-destruction. She vacillates before running away with Rogozhin. She attempts to gain a positive sense of self by reciprocating the Prince’s compassion. She tries to give him happiness by promoting his marriage to Aglaia, the woman he loves. Like Myshkin, she comes to idealize Aglaia, whose initial openness to correspondence with her encourages Nastasia Filippovna’s hope of acceptance. But Aglaia cannot and does not live up to the expectations of those who idealize her. She is a flesh-and-blood woman whose jealousy Nastasia Filippovna interprets as condescension, which reignites her sense of shame. Once shame reenters the picture, all is lost.

Shame, as Dostoevsky shows, arises unexpectedly, disorients all in its wake, and kindles a painful self-consciousness that can, in the long run, lead to change, but that, in the short run, usually leads to greater pain and shame. While confronting shame has the potential to heal, it can also ravage and destroy. Tied as it is to identity, shame can be a matter of life and death.