Surprised by Shame
Martinsen, Deborah A.

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Martinsen, Deborah A.
Surprised by Shame: Dostoevsky's Liars and Narrative Explorers.
The Ohio State University Press, 2003.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/33144.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/33144

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1293575
chapter seven

Divided Selves

Listen, I say, General, if someone else said that about you, then on the spot I would remove my head with my own hands, place it on a large platter and bring it myself on the platter to all those who doubt: “Here you go. See this head? Thus with my own head I vouch for him, and I’d go through fire for him!” That’s how, I say, I’m prepared to vouch for you. (8:373)

— LUKIAN LEBEDEV, The Idiot

This I ask you: Is it true, great father, that somewhere in the Lives of the Saints it tells the story of some holy wonderworker whom they martyred for his faith, and when they finally cut off his head, he got up, raised his head, “kissed it lovingly,” and walked on for a long time carrying it in his hands and “kissed it lovingly”? Is this true or not, honorable fathers? (14:42;44–5)

— FEDOR KARAMAZOV, The Brothers Karamazov

Divided selves are not new in Dostoevsky’s work. Starting with The Double, Dostoevsky has mimetically portrayed and thematically spotlighted characters’ internal divisions. In Crime and Punishment, he underlines his protagonist’s inner conflict by giving him the name Raskolnikov, which means “schismatic.” In The Idiot and The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky goes a step farther: he inscribes doubleness into the self-representing rhetoric of his self-conscious, shameless liars, Lukian Lebedev and Fedor Karamazov.

Lebedev can be seen as an early prototype for Dostoevsky’s namesake. Like Fedor Karamazov, he is highly self- and audience-conscious. He studies his interlocutors’ physiognomies, plays the buffoon for his own ends, resents his social status, revenges perceived insults, and combines contradictory impulses within himself. Like Fedor Karamazov, he pursues materialist schemes yet suffers anxiety about the afterlife. And like Fedor Karamazov, Lukian Lebedev identifies both with a martyred saint and a secular sinner, thus revealing his divided soul.

As part of dialogues about belief, these two shameless liars allude to martyrs whose decapitated bodies bear witness to their faith. In positing
paradoxical images of bodiless heads talking or headless bodies walking and kissing their heads, these two comic liars reveal a fascination for literally divided selves that Dostoevsky uses to reveal their figurative self-division. Lukian Lebedev and Fedor Karamazov evoke these images to provoke diverse, even contradictory, responses of belief and disbelief from their character audiences. Fedor Dostoevsky creates these scenes not only to expose his characters’ souls and provoke his authorial audience’s moral responses but also to enhance our aesthetic pleasure.

Swan Prophet

In the passage cited above, Lebedev evokes the image of St. John the Baptist, an identification that reveals his prophetic pretensions. Lebedev delivers this line to General Ivolgin, who has just stolen 400 rubles from Lebedev’s wallet, a criminal breach of friendship that provides Lebedev with an opportunity for revenge. Lebedev goes to Prince Myshkin. Though convinced of the General’s guilt, he knows that the Prince will not permit him to accuse his friend outright. Accordingly, Lebedev adopts the stance of public prosecutor and argues his case. After eliminating Keller as a suspect, he identifies Ferdyschenko as the thief, yet he points the finger at Ivolgin. He drives the Prince crazy with his double-talk—swearing to Ivolgin’s innocence while revealing his guilt. For instance, Lebedev notes that when he woke the General from his “sleep of innocence” to inform him of the theft, the General blushed, turned pale, and then became incensed (all signs of guilt). Lebedev next declares that after he and Ivolgin had searched Keller, the General had demanded to be searched as well. Lebedev responds with the speech in my epigraph.

In his telling, Lebedev successfully assures the General of his loyalty but also arouses his gratitude, his guilt, and his shame. Ivolgin weeps and embraces Lebedev, calling him “the only friend who remains to me in my misfortunes!” (a line that he later attributes to his Napoleon). By arousing the General’s gratitude, Lebedev augments his own emotional importance, thereby increasing Ivolgin’s shame. In the face of such apparent loyalty, the General returns Lebedev’s money.

By telling this story, Lebedev intends to allay the Prince’s justified suspicion that he is accusing the General of theft. He thus engages in a rhetorical doubleness that confirms his sense of personal doubleness. At the very moment that he proposes to die for his friend, Lebedev is betraying him. By having Lebedev tell this story to the Prince, Dostoevsky reveals Lebedev’s calculatedness, hypocrisy, and cruelty and thus deprives him of reader sympathy. Moreover, by having Lebedev swear by his head, an action that Christ
specifically forbids in his Sermon on the Mount,⁠¹ Dostoevsky condemns Lebedev's rhetoric.

Dostoevsky also makes Lebedev the site of metaliterary play. First, Lebedev's rhetoric is double-voiced: he directs his speech simultaneously at two audiences—his homodiegetic audience, the General, and his heterodiegetic audience, the Prince. By embedding Lebedev's double-voicing in his own text, Dostoevsky discloses his awareness of narrative multivoicing.² He also roguishly reveals his narrator exposing Lebedev exposing General Ivolgin.

Second, by having Lebedev reduce figurative expressions to their literal meanings, one of Gogol's favorite devices, Dostoevsky reveals Lebedev's Gogolian roots. In this passage, Lebedev reduces the figural expression *ruchatišča golovoi*, meaning "to stake one's life," to its literal meaning, "to vouch with one's head." Dostoevsky thus exposes Lebedev as a parodic figure—he identifies with a prophet, a speaker whose rhetoric reaches beyond the literal to the figurative. Yet he acts as an antiprophet, as his rhetoric literalizes the figurative.

Lebedev's use of the image of St. John's head also conveys an awareness of his own duality, the alienation of his head from his heart. He even styles himself a "Talleyrand," the notorious statesman of the French Revolution who repeatedly switched sides yet survived. Nonetheless, as I show in the next chapter, Lebedev's nocturnal prayers for Mme. du Barry, a victim of the guillotine, demonstrate his intuitive desire for restoration to community.

Lebedev's absurd image of a body removing its head and carrying it on a platter anticipates Fedor Karamazov's story of the decapitated saint who carries his head in his hands and kisses it. Both Lebedev's and Fedor Pavlovich's stories have mimetic resonances: St. John the Baptist shames Herod's wife, and St. Denis shames his enemies because their tortures cannot stop him from talking! Furthermore, both characters tell stories about saints martyred for their religious beliefs: men of God, they challenge the state. Dostoevsky's liars thus invoke martyrs who value their souls over their bodies, thereby parodically echoing Dostoevsky's thematic linking of belief and ethics.

Lebedev's hyperbolic extravagance—a talking decapitated head—also echoes *The Idiot*'s apocalyptic thematics. However comically, Lebedev's story raises the issue of death's finality and thus the question of belief in God. Lebedev's story likewise links him with other characters in the novel. His fascination with execution (in this story and in the Countess du Barry's story) echoes Myshkin's as well as Ippolit's fascination with uncommuted death sentences. The image of a living corpse recalls Ivolgin's Kolpakov story. Whereas the stories Myshkin and Ippolit tell reflect the Prince's compassion and the dying youth's anguish, the stories Lebedev and Ivolgin tell parody
the novel’s thematics. These comic characters’ hyperbolic rhetoric undercuts their credibility. Dostoevsky’s metatliterary play, by contrast, augments readers’ aesthetic delight.

The Kissing Head

In this scene, Dostoevsky does not surprise readers with shame but shows how Lebedev consciously yet cautiously exposes the General by pretending to believe him. Fedor Karamazov, on the other hand, demonstrates no restraint. Like Lebedev’s story, Fedor Karamazov’s (see epigraph) parodically frames a discussion of belief. It is also addressed to two audiences: the Elder Zosima and his relative Miusov. The unnamed subject of Fedor’s story is St. Denis, patron saint of France and first bishop of Paris, eponym for the Enlightenment philosopher, Denis Diderot, who mocked him. The story’s most outrageous features, that he lifted his decapitated head and kissed it while walking, are part of his legendary life. By having Fedor Karamazov stress the kissing by mentioning it twice, Fedor Dostoevsky identifies the story as St. Denis’s. By choosing the moment when St. Denis walks head in hands, Dostoevsky also evokes an episode from Christ’s life. Both Christ and St. Denis were historical figures who reputedly rose from the dead and were seen shortly thereafter. Readers thus sense Dostoevsky’s authorial presence in the discussion that follows. While Fedor Karamazov raises poetic issues about the story’s source, its content, its effect on listeners, and its teller’s motive, Fedor Dostoevsky also highlights the novel’s thematics of belief.

Fedor Karamazov’s verbal challenge to the monks poses an even greater visual challenge to his audience and to Dostoevsky’s readers: Can a head chopped off at the neck kissing itself ever be visualized, or is it a miracle that can exist only in narrative form? The art world offers a visual solution: The Princeton Index of Christian Art contains at least half a dozen images of St. Denis decapitated at the tonsure (which would permit the head to kiss itself) in addition to those where he is decapitated at the neck. Yet Dostoevsky’s probable textual source for the image of St. Denis, Voltaire’s *La Pucelle d’Orléans*, suggests that Dostoevsky was not offering a solution. The footnotes to Voltaire’s mock epic report that St. Denis’s persecutors first hanged him, but he continued to preach, so they were forced to cut him down and chop his head off at the neck. The mimetic impossibility of a head kissing itself would not only appeal to Dostoevsky, it also suggests an equally impossible image—“The Nose.” In Gogol’s famous story, the disembodied Nose masquerades as a high-ranking bureaucrat, at one point praying “with a pious expression on its face.” For close to two hundred years now, readers have wrestled with the
mimetic impossibility of Gogol’s creation. By evoking “The Nose,” which also serves as an intertext for The Brothers Karamazov, Fedor Dostoevsky signals his leap to the metaliterary dimension, where Fedor Karamazov and his son Ivan also meet (see chapter 11).

While Fedor Karamazov addresses his inquiry to Zosima, once he reveals that he had heard his story from Miusov, who had heard it from a Frenchman in Paris, readers can see that Fedor introduces it to shame his relative. After all, Miusov had ridiculed him and called him a liar by declaring that his “stupid story” about Diderot “isn’t true.” By challenging the veracity of Miusov’s story, Fedor turns the table. Refusing to be outshamed, Fedor pays Miusov back with interest. He associates Miusov, the liberal westernizer, whom he calls a “Parisian” (14:35;38), with the Frenchman who told him the story. Earlier, Fedor Pavlovich identified himself with Diderot, another Frenchman, who, like Miusov’s Frenchman, was “a very learned man,” who “made a special study of statistics about Russia . . . [and] lived in Russia for a long time.” By equating both Miusov and himself with educated Frenchmen, Fedor Karamazov once again throws in Miusov’s face the things they share.

Fedor Dostoevsky, on the other hand, uses the Frenchman/Miusov and Diderot/Fedor Karamazov parallels thematically to emphasize Russians’ alienation from their people and from the sources of their faith. Both Miusov and Fedor Karamazov reveal their religious ignorance by retelling the story of a learned but ignorant Frenchman who attributed the story of St. Denis to the Lives of the Saints and claimed it was read aloud during the Orthodox liturgy. As churchgoing Russians like Dostoevsky would know, saints’ lives are not read during the liturgy. And while there is a Russian saint named Merkury of Smolensk who allegedly picked up his decapitated head and carried it, the kissing detail identifies the saint as St. Denis and the source as Voltaire’s mock epic, La Pucelle d’Orléans (15:531). Voltaire’s plot fits Dostoevsky’s thematics. In La Pucelle d’Orléans, the French king dallies with his mistress, leaving France’s defense to the young Joan of Arc. Fedor Dostoevsky thus has Fedor Karamazov evoke a work in which the father figure abdicates responsibility for his people, an appropriate thematic resonance for a novel in which the father abdicates responsibility for raising his sons. Finally, Fedor Dostoevsky undermines the authority of Diderot and Voltaire, the two Enlightenment atheists known for their frequent mockery of the legendary St. Denis, by associating them with the dissolute Karamazov patriarch.

Fedor Pavlovich attributes the story about St. Denis to Miusov to provoke his poor in-law. He intensifies his taunting by claiming that “you, Petr Alexandrovich, shook my faith with this funny story. You didn’t know it, you had no idea, but I went home with my faith shaken, and since then I’ve been
shaking more and more. Yes, Petr Alexandrovich, you were the cause of a great fall!” (14:42;45). By emphasizing the story’s effect on him, Fedor Pavlovich highlights the narrative dynamics of audience response. According to the age-old inspiration principle, miracle stories arouse wonder; believers consequently affirm their faith while skeptics scoff. Dostoevsky underscores the perversity of Fedor’s unexpected response by providing Alesha’s more normal one. Alesha’s faith is shaken by the lack of a miracle, not the story of one. Here as elsewhere, Fedor Karamazov violates both social and narrative norms.

Fedor Karamazov’s pun on the expression “shaken faith” also resonates thematically in the text. Like Gogol (see earlier) or Aesop (see chapter 9), he reduces the figurative to the literal. Like Dostoevsky, he indulges in hyperbole. Like Diderot (with whom he identifies), Fedor plays with the religious use of figurative language. Diderot had argued that, taken literally, Christ’s words “this is my body” are as absurd as the story of St. Denis kissing his own decapitated head (15:531). In Dostoevsky’s novel, atheists are literalists.

Fedor Karamazov’s accusation that Miusov has caused “a great fall” allies Miusov (like himself) with the devil and the thematics of temptation, which figure in scenes where tempters—the Grand Inquisitor, Ivan, Smerdjakov, and Kolia—ply their craft upon Christ, Alesha, Iliusha, and the unnamed peasant. By introducing the image of the fall, Fedor returns to his obsession with shame and guilt. Dostoevsky also invokes the image of falling and rising from the novel’s epigraph. Stories are like the seeds of Dostoevsky’s biblical epigraph; they fall on all kinds of ground and may wither or bear the most unexpected fruit. Fedor Karamazov’s response to Miusov’s story about St. Denis may be perverse, but Fedor Dostoevsky introduces it to establish the power of storytelling. The two stories Fedor Karamazov tells about miracles (Diderot’s conversion and St. Denis’s head) haunt him because they reflect his preoccupation with salvation and the afterlife.

Dostoevsky reinforces the scene’s metaliterary play when he has Miusov defend himself by calling the St. Denis story “just table talk.” Though Miusov would not know it, saints’ lives are read aloud during meals at the monastery. Dostoevsky thus contrasts monastic meals and sacred stories with secular meals and nonreligious stories; he also includes both sacred and secular stories in his own composition. By double-voicing Miusov’s reference to “table talk,” Dostoevsky situates this story in a literary tradition that associates eating and storytelling, food for body and food for soul.

Miusov’s “table talk” defense also recalls another martyr discussed at a table, whose story links the physical body with religious belief—the story of Foma Danilov. After dinner, Grigory tells Fedor and Ivan the story of “a Russian soldier stationed somewhere far away at the border who was captured by Asians and, being forced by them on pain of agonizing and immediate death
to renounce Christianity and convert to Islam, would not agree to change his faith, and endured torture, was flayed alive, and died glorifying and praising Christ” (14:117;127). Fedor Karamazov then “remarked that such a soldier ought at once to be promoted to saint, and his flayed skin dispatched to some monastery: ‘You’ll see how people will come pouring in, and money, too.’ Grigory scowled, seeing that Fedor Pavlovich was not at all moved but, as usual, was beginning to blaspheme” (14:117;127). Significantly, these two dinnertime stories about martyrs demonstrate Fedor Karamazov’s perverse response. Both stories become occasions for blame or blasphemy, thereby mingling the secular and the sacred, like Dostoevsky’s own novel. Moreover, since St. Denis reputedly carried his head to the monastery outside Paris that bears his name, both stories associate monasteries with pilgrimages. Finally, both stories raise the issue of miracles which Ivan and Alesha both explore later in the novel.

Audience Response

In this scene, both Fedors carefully attend to audience response. Fedor Karamazov aims his stories at Miusov and Zosima, and Fedor Dostoevsky details both men’s reactions. Fedor Karamazov watches Miusov’s and Zosima’s responses because audience response conditions his sense of self. He focuses on Miusov, because Miusov represents the social class that rejects him, and Fedor Pavlovich is revenging himself with Aesopian wit and one-upmanship. He focuses equally on Zosima, because he seeks a nonjudgmental response.

Fedor Dostoevsky directs his readers’ attention to Miusov’s and Zosima’s responses, because they emblemize the social drama being enacted. Miusov and Zosima represent larger constituencies on the Russian sociopolitical and religious scene. An educated liberal who subscribes to Western secular ideas, Miusov lives largely abroad, venerates decorum, and distances himself as much as possible from Fedor Karamazov, his relative by marriage. Though once a member of the same class, Zosima rejected that life and turned to Russian Orthodoxy, devoting himself to the care of people’s spiritual lives. He urges Fedor Pavlovich to return to community.Fedor Karamazov’s drama of identity thus plays out in polarized social, emotional, and religious field—individualism versus universal brotherhood, mind versus heart, atheism versus faith. In his journalism, Dostoevsky advocates bridging the post–Petrine gap between the Russian educated classes (represented here by Miusov) and the Russian people. Zosima represents the ultimate synthesis that Dostoevsky advocates: he combines Western education with Russian spiritual values. As Fedor Karamazov self-consciously plays the fool in Zosima’s cell, he expects particular responses from his audience. From Miusov he expects rejection
and vituperation. From Zosima he expects acceptance and wisdom. Fedor Karamazov gets what he expects.

Zosima’s half-hour departure from the cell ushers in a conversation between the two senior monks and Ivan Karamazov; the subject is Ivan’s argument in favor of the Church subsuming the state within itself. Though a seeming digression, the argument bears on Fedor Karamazov’s drama, because it foregrounds the issue of how the individual should relate to the community. In a civil order, Ivan notes, criminals are punished corporally or they are sent to prison. In an ecclesiastical order, criminals are punished by their consciences. As Zosima later points out, in Ivan’s exposition the Church “never loses communion with the criminal” (14:61;65), which allows the Church “to bring the excommunicated back, to deter the plotter, to regenerate the fallen” (14:61;66). Ivan’s theory thus counterposes the Church’s compassion, which stresses social bonds, to the state’s punitiveness, which weakens them. Though Ivan’s theory concerns criminals, it resonates in the novel with Miusov’s and Zosima’s treatment of his father. Shamed by Fedor Karamazov’s words and deeds, Miusov acts like a secular authority: he tries to exclude Fedor Pavlovich and to punish him by exposing him. Yet his tactic only inspires Fedor Pavlovich to redouble his efforts; Miusov thus exacerbates the behavior he hopes to curtail. Zosima foresees this dynamic with his own argument regarding exile and corporal punishment: “All this exile to hard labor, and formerly with floggings, does not reform anyone, and the number of crimes not only does not diminish but increases all the more” (14:59;64). Zosima rejects the state’s punitive measures and treats Fedor Pavlovich with compassion, appealing to Fedor’s conscience. Zosima thus demonstrates the principles he preaches: he never humiliates or abandons Fedor Karamazov. By keeping dialogue alive, Zosima maintains the link necessary “to regenerate the fallen” (even if the fallen, like Fedor Karamazov, do not accept his offer).

The scene in Zosima’s cell following Fedor Karamazov’s Diderot anecdote illustrates the differences between the secular and ecclesiastical approaches. Fedor Karamazov, as the narrator points out, never commits a civil crime; rather he violates social taboos: “a little push, and in no time he would reach the utmost limits of some abomination—only an abomination, by the way, never anything criminal, never an escapade punishable by law. In that respect he always managed to restrain himself, and even amazed himself in some cases” (14:80;87). By telling the Diderot anecdote in Zosima’s cell, Fedor Karamazov violates the sanctity of place, thereby inspiring narrative commentary:

Indeed, something altogether impossible was taking place in the cell. For perhaps forty or fifty years, from the time of the former elders, visitors had been
coming to this cell, but always with the deepest reverence, not otherwise. . . .

Even many “higher” persons . . . even some of the freethinkers . . . considered it their foremost duty—to a man—to show the deepest respect and tactfulness through the audience, and the more so as there was no question of money involved, but only of love and mercy on the one side, and on the other of repentance and the desire to resolve some difficult question of the soul or a difficult moment in the life of the heart. So that this buffoonery displayed by Fedor Pavlovich, with no respect for the place he was in, produced in the onlookers, at least in some of them, both astonishment and bewilderment.

(14:39–40;42)

In short, Fedor Pavlovich violates both social and ecclesiastical norms. Miussov responds by alienating Fedor; Zosima, by accepting him.

**Alienation and Union**

The figures of both Diderot and St. Denis emblemize this opposition of secular banishment and sacred union. Diderot was a political martyr, exiled by the secular state. St. Denis is a spiritual father martyred by temporal authorities, a fact that situates his story at the crossroads of church and state, an area of intense scrutiny in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the legend, St. Denis responds to the literal alienation of his head from his body and the figurative alienation of his body from the state’s body with figurative acts of union. First, he picks up his head—thus holding together that which has been sundered. Next, he kisses it.

The idea of St. Denis kissing his head may haunt Fedor Karamazov because it suggests a solution to his own problem of self-alienation. After all, Zosima diagnoses the source of Fedor Pavlovich’s scandalous and semiblasphemous behavior as shame (14:41;43). But his lying is a symptom whose habitual practice exacerbates Fedor’s problem. Zosima thus exhorts Fedor Karamazov to stop lying, then respect himself and join in the brotherly communion of love on earth. Fedor Karamazov then asks him about St. Denis, a figure who implies self-acceptance. St. Denis’s repossessing of self also signals a victory over his executioners, a refusal to accept the state-mandated alienation of head from body. Fedor Karamazov’s self-proclaimed obsession with the literal absurdities of this image thus signals a subliminal awareness of its figurative implications.

As a patron saint of France and first bishop of Paris, St. Denis also evokes the novel’s father-son thematics, which resonate strongly in this scene. Set in Zosima’s cell, this scene brings together Alesha’s spiritual and physical fathers. But Fedor Pavlovich questions his own paternal status when he
declares himself “a son of lies.” Dostoevsky the author thus introduces his *Diary* writer’s obsession with broken families. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky posits attachment to a spiritual community as the solution to family breakups. In the St. Denis legend, the body carries its head to a place outside Paris where a monastery is founded—thus establishing a religious enclave in a secular world. In Dostoevsky’s novel, the hero is sent out of the monastery into the secular world where he creates a community of brothers.

Though Fedor Karamazov does not mention the saint’s name, Fedor Dostoevsky undoubtedly counted on his authorial audience’s recognition of the legend. Two of the anecdotes he attributes to Fedor Karamazov in Zosima’s cell are about Parisians named Denis—the atheist *philosophe* and the martyred bishop—a deliberate strategy in a novel about atheism and faith. Both anecdotes involve the question of religious belief and the imagery of resurrection. And Fedor Karamazov aims both particularly at a westernized landowner and a holy elder.

Significantly, Miusov’s and Zosima’s responses to Fedor Karamazov reverberate with the novel’s thematics about alienation. Fedor Pavlovich responds to Zosima’s invitation to “feel completely at home” by confessing that he plays the buffoon because he anticipates audience ridicule and social rejection (14:41;43–4). Dostoevsky thus reveals how Fedor Karamazov takes control of shame-filled situations: to defend himself from social rejection, he provokes it by playing the fool. This dynamic explains his teasing hostility toward Miusov throughout this scene. Miusov not only represents that rejection but demonstrates it. Nonetheless, Fedor Karamazov’s invocation of Diderot and St. Denis demonstrates a subliminal self-awareness. Fedor Pavlovich’s self-conscious identification with Diderot indicates a latent desire for an alternative script—a penetrating wisdom that would slay the blasphemer and give birth to a new man. His St. Denis story further emphasizes Fedor Pavlovich’s awareness that he can influence audience response. As Fedor Karamazov tells his stories, Fedor Dostoevsky constantly contrasts the responses of Miusov, the westernized Russian who exacerbates Fedor Pavlovich’s sense of alienation from society and self, with the responses of Zosima, the Orthodox healer who propagates love and self-acceptance. Dostoevsky thus models an empathic response that can cure shame.

The image of St. Denis gains greater thematic power through association with images of decapitation in Dostoevsky’s work.9 It particularly exemplifies many forms of alienation and thus fits into the *Diary* writer’s polemics on *otorvannost’* (alienation) and *obosoblenie* (dissociation),10 if we understand *otorvannost’* and *obosoblenie* not just as alienation from one’s native soil and dissociation from self and others, but, like Dostoevsky, as social, psychologi-
cal, and metaphysical dynamics. Images of decapitation signify externally imposed alienation of head from body but can also signify different kinds of alienation of head from heart, which can spring from such external sources as ideology or from sources such as shame, which operates both internally and externally. Thus, for instance, Alesha acts like his spiritual father Zosima as he tells his biological father, “I know your thoughts. Your heart is better than your head” (14:124;134). Images of decapitation can also signify the alienation of the individual from the body politic. Ivan thus argues that if the Church were to subsume the state, such alienation would cease because “the Church would excommunicate the criminal and the disobedient and not cut off their heads” (14:59;63).

Fedor Karamazov’s use of the image of St. Denis’s head suggests both the alienation of head from heart and reunion through love and self-acceptance. Dostoevsky prepares his authorial audience to understand this thematic message through his mimetic focus on the father-son plot. Alesha’s presence seems to provoke a spiritual crisis in his father. Fedor Pavlovich receives unexpected, positive responses from his son that have begun to work some internal changes. In addressing his Diderot and St. Denis stories to Zosima, Fedor Karamazov consciously tests his son’s teacher. Fedor Dostoevsky thus suggests Fedor Karamazov’s subliminal awareness of his spiritual illness. As Zosima tells Fedor, “You’ve known for a long time what you should do; you have sense enough: do not give yourself up to drunkenness and verbal incontinence, do not give yourself up to sensuality, and especially to the adoration of money, and close your taverns; if you cannot close all of them then at least two or three. And above all, above everything else—do not lie” (14:41;44). Zosima speaks the words Fedor Karamazov needs to hear to change his life. He acts out the role Fedor Karamazov scripts for him with his story of Diderot and Metropolitan Platon. In Fedor Karamazov’s story, conversion comes through the power of the word. Zosima thus proves the ideal audience: he listens and hears the covert message behind Fedor Pavlovich’s provocative Aesopian tale. Zosima may guess that Fedor Pavlovich will not change his ways, yet he offers empathy, thereby modeling a response for his character audience. Fedor Dostoevsky calls attention to Zosima’s empathic response, thus creating a model for his authorial audience to emulate. Alesha follows Zosima’s lead and sees connections to those who differ from him. Readers must do the same and read with empathy, not pride, with our hearts as well as our heads.

By inscribing metaliterary play into moments of scandal, Dostoevsky provides some aesthetic relief from the anxiety aroused. Both Lebedev and Fedor Karamazov double-voice their stories, directing them simultaneously at two audiences. Unknowingly, they thus reveal their own contradictory longings.
for revenge and belonging, Dostoevsky portrays their divided selves by having both refer to decapitated saints. Their choice of saints, however, reveals Dostoevsky's psychological canniness as well as his thematic concerns. The images of St. John the Baptist and St. Denis of Paris, two saints who reputedly raised their heads with their own hands, are images of violence containing within themselves images of healing—paradoxical or miraculous images of life in death.