

THE DEFILED AND DEFILING "PHYSIOGNOMY"
OF FYODOR PAVLOVICH KARAMAZOV¹

In a discussion some years ago entitled "The Sentencing of Fyodor Karamazov," I focused on the way in which the theme of *defilement* reached its culmination in "Over the Brandy" (*Za kon'iachkom*). Fyodor Pavlovich, in the presence of Alyosha and Ivan, recalls spitting on Sofia Ivanovna's icon of the Mother of God and saying to her, "Just take a look, you think this is [a miracle-making] icon, well right now before you I'm spitting on it, and nothing will happen to me!" In "Over the Brandy," as early in the novel, the theme of esthetic-religious defilement is linked with the theme of sexual defilement, but now with catastrophic consequences for Fyodor Pavlovich.²

Defilement, or crime, inexorably calls forth *vengeance*, or punishment. In "The Sensualists" (*Sladostrastniki*), the chapter immediately following "Over the Brandy," we have a dress rehearsal for the crime. The roles of the various characters, to be sure, will be shuffled in the final crime scene. Accident, chance, choice—conscious and unconscious—enter into the denouement; nothing is fated, nothing preordained; but the sentence is carried out. The murder did not have

¹ From *Word, Music, History: A Festschrift for Caryl Emerson*, eds. Lazar Fleishman, Gabriella Safran, and Michael Wachtel, *Stanford Slavic Studies* 29, 30 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005): 450-463.

² "To defile": to "trample," "make impure," "befoul," "soil," "contaminate," "debase," "dishonor," "sully" and, in the sexual realm, "to deflower," "ravish," "deprive of virginity." The notion of defilement is conveyed in Russian by "zagriaznit'," "oskvernit'," in French by "souiller," and in German by "besudeln"—among other words.

to happen, but it happened, and the happening carries with it a sense of tragic inevitability. As we are told in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, the "gods do not fail to punish those who trample upon holy things." In the words of the prosecutor who responds to a primordial, pre-Christian, ordering of things, "[Fyodor Pavlovich] received his due" (*on poluchil svoiu mzdu*).

Tragedy in the Christian universe of the *The Brothers Karamazov*, however, opens up a very different kind of knowledge and perspective than that suggested by the prosecutor's remark. Yet in spite of Fyodor Pavlovich's basic inner humanity, his personal drama is caught up in the evil of defilement and the ineluctable vengeance it provokes. Dmitry, Ivan, and Alyosha, and probably Smerdyakov, on the other hand, whatever the nature and degree of their complicity in the death of their father, in one measure or another, recoil from defilement.

The theme of sexual defilement emerges in the very first pages of the novel, particularly in the two chapters dedicated respectively to Fyodor Pavlovich's second marriage and to his third son, Alyosha. This theme marks Fyodor Pavlovich's relationship with Sofia Ivanovna, the mother of Ivan and Alyosha; it hovers on the margins of the monastery scenes and bursts forth in the encounter between Fyodor Pavlovich and Dmitry in "Why Is Such a Man Alive" (*Zachem zhivet takoi chelovek*). The theme of defilement culminates, literally, in Fyodor Pavlovich's rape of Lizaveta Smerdyashchaia, and figuratively, in his profanation of women and the icon of Mother of God in "Over the Brandy."

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur writes of the age-old "indissoluble complicity between defilement and sexuality."³ What is striking is the way Fyodor Pavlovich's consciousness of defilement gives evidence of what Ricoeur calls "primitive dread" or "ethical terror." Characterizing defilement (*la souillure*) in its archaic system of beliefs as "an act that involves an evil, an impurity, a fluid . . . a quasi-material something that infects as a sort of filth, that harms by invisible properties, and that nevertheless works in the manner of a force, in the field of our undividedly psychic and corporeal existence,"⁴

³ See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Translated from the French by Emerson Buchanan (New York: Beacon Press, 1967), 28. This work was originally published as part of the larger work: *Philosophie de la volonté. Finitude et culpabilité*. 2. *La Symbolique du mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1960).

⁴ Ricoeur, op. cit. 25–26.

Objectively, Ricoeur notes, it "infects by contact. But this infectious contact is experienced subjectively in a specific feeling which is of the order of Dread."⁵ "The origin of that dread is the primordial connection of vengeance with defilement."⁶

Dostoevsky discloses precisely this "dread" in Fyodor Pavlovich. We recall that in areas of "certain things of life" pertaining to his weak character, "he knew and feared much." Indeed, at times, and in the depths of depravity, the narrator writes, he "sometimes suddenly felt in himself a spiritual fear and moral shock (*dukhovnyi strakh i нравstvennoe sotriasenie*) that almost, so to speak, resounded physically in his soul. 'My soul just trembles in my throat at those times,' he would sometimes say." He needed somebody who "did not reproach him or threaten him with anything," and who in case of need "would defend him if need be — from whom? From someone unknown, but terrible and dangerous." In Dostoevsky's perception, Fyodor Pavlovich's "dangerous" enemies arise out of the very depths of his sexual depravity; they are there *before* the arrival of his sons and find objective embodiment in the later threat of Ivan, Dmitry, and Smerdyakov.

"Dread," writes Ricoeur in lines relevant to our discussion of Fyodor Pavlovich, is "already ethical dread, and not merely physical fear, dread of a danger which is itself ethical and which, at a higher level of the consciousness of evil, will be the danger of not being able to love any more, the danger of being a dead man in the realm of ends."⁷ It is this danger that is addressed in Fyodor Pavlovich's unexpectedly congenial relationship with Alyosha.

The early appearance of the "chaste and pure" Alyosha in Fyodor Pavlovich's "den of filthy debauchery" might have been expected to further intensify the tension between purity and defilement, form and disfiguration, "obraz" and "bezobrazie" in the opening pages of the novel, and completely undermine the relationship between Alyosha and his father. The reverse is the case: any potential for tension quickly dissolves into a friendly relationship: one that foregrounds both the purity of Alyosha's ethical character and unexpected sensitivities in what at first glance seems to be Fyodor Pavlovich's hopelessly corrupt nature.

⁵ Ibid., 29–30.

⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁷ Ibid.

Dostoevsky, however, brings this new view of Fyodor Pavlovich into focus only moments after his narrator has presented us with a portrait that would appear to utterly demolish the most charitable view of Fyodor Pavlovich, let alone any hope that he might be redeemed. In "The Third Son Alyosha," the narrator provides a verbal sketch of the so-called physiognomy (*fizionomiia*) of Fyodor Pavlovich:

I have already said that he was very bloated. His physiognomy by that time offered something that sharply testified to the character and essence of the whole life he had been living. Besides the long and fleshy bags under his small eyes; besides the multitude of deep wrinkles on his small, but fattish little face, there hung, in addition, beneath his pointed chin, a large Adam's apple, fleshy and oblong like a purse, which gave him a kind of repulsively sensual look. Add to this a long, lewd mouth, with puffed-up lips, under which could be seen small stumps of black, nearly rotten teeth. He sprayed saliva whenever he spoke.

[Ia uzhe govoril, chto on ochen' obriuzg. Fizionomiia ego predstavliala k tomu vremeni chto-to rezko svidetel'stvovavshee o kharakteristike i sushchnosti vsei prozhitoi im zhizni. Krome dlinnykh i miasistykh meshochkov pod malen'kimi ego glazami, vечно naglymi, podozritel'nymi i nasmeshlivymi, krome mnozhestva glubokikh morshchinok na ego malen'kom, no zhirnen'kom lichike, k ostromu podborodku ego podveshivalsia eshche bol'shoi kadyk, miasistyi i prodolgovatyi, kak koshelek, chto pridavalo emu kakoi-to otvratitel'no sladostrastnyi vid. Pribav'te k tomu plotoiadnyi, dlinnyi rot, s pukhlymi gubami, iz-pod kotorykh vidnelis' malen'kie oblomki chernykh, pochti istlevshikh zubov. On bryzgalsia sliunoi kazhdyi raz, kogda nachinal govorit'.]

What Paul Ricoeur refers to as the age-old "complicity of defilement and sexuality" is plainly visible in Fyodor Pavlovich's "physiognomy" as it is in his life at large. The narrator speaks of Fyodor Pavlovich's "repulsively sensual appearance." Indeed, there is no mistaking in the narrator's verbal sketch the sexualized character of Fyodor Pavlovich's defilement. His features seem like sexual organs metamorphosed into facial forms. His face insolently and shamelessly leers and sneers at the reader. His lewd mouth, black and rotten with decay, spits out at his interlocutors. "He sprayed saliva whenever he spoke." It is as if the very seed of man had become corrupt.

Like the famous painting of the pawnbroker in Gogol's "The Portrait" (1835), Fyodor Pavlovich's face enters, as it were, the world of the Karamazovs as a force for evil.⁸ Appearing at the very beginning of the novel, the narrator's sketch in itself sharply poses for the reader central moral-esthetic questions of the novel, most specifically the ethical and philosophical questions that Ivan will formulate in "Rebellion" (Bunt): is it possible to love one's neighbor, particularly if he is close-by? And most important, is the impossibility of loving one's neighbor (that is Ivan's view of the matter) due to "people's bad qualities" or is it due to their "nature" (*Vopros ved' v tom, ot durnykh li kachestv liudei eto proiskhodit, ili uzh ottogo, chto takova ikh natura*). Ivan, as we know, inclines toward the view that the *nature* of man stands in the way of love.

Among the brothers, it is Dmitry who responds most directly and vociferously to the uncleanness, the impurity, the filth of Fyodor Pavlovich's *physiognomy*. We may leave aside any unconscious responses of Smerdyakov to his father. His fastidious, obsessive cleanliness might be interpreted as an involuntary reaction to the filthy presence of Fyodor Pavlovich. Such a response, accompanied by an unconscious self-loathing, would not be surprising. Smerdyakov, after all, is the product of what would appear to be Fyodor Pavlovich's most vile act of sexual defilement—his rape of Lizaveta Smerdyashchaia.

It is Dmitry, however, who openly rebels at the face of his father: "I hate his Adam's apple, his nose, his eyes, his shameless snigger. I feel a personal sense of loathing! It's just this that I fear, I just won't be able to restrain myself" ("In the Darkness"). Or again, "I did not like his outward appearance," he says at the first preliminary hearing, "there was something dishonorable, boastful, a trampling on everything

⁸ In Gogol's story, a religious painter, desiring to introduce the "Prince of Darkness" into one of his religious epics, strives to paint the portrait of a moneylender with "scrupulous exactitude." He succeeds, but in a terrible way: "The dark eyes of the old man looked out in an extraordinarily lifelike, and yet dead way." The demonic power of the moneylender, that is, the Antichrist, continues to live in the portrait and to bring misfortune to all those who come into contact with it. The attempt to reproduce reality with "scrupulous" fidelity, in Gogol's outlook, has resulted in a morally and spiritually destructive "super" natural realism, one that has a disturbing and corrupting impact on the viewer in both moral and social aspects.

sacred, mockery, unbelief—vile, vile!" (*Mne ne nravilas' ego naruzhnost', chto-to beschestnoe, pokhval'ba i popiranie vsiakoi sviatyni, nasmeshka i bezverie, gadko, gadko!*)

Dmitry fully grasps the sexual foundation of his father's defilement. "Don't dare defile a most noble girl," he shouts to his father in the chapter "Why Is Such a Man Alive." "No, tell me, can one go on allowing him to dishonor the earth with himself?" Dmitry seconds Miusov, who earlier ("The Old Buffoon") remarks to Fyodor Pavlovich, "You literally defile everything you touch." Trample, defile, dishonor (*popiranie, marat', beschestit'*). The notion of Fyodor Pavlovich dishonoring the earth gives mythic dimensions to the archaic theme of sexual defilement, while at the same time it offers a corollary to the novel's epigraph: the corn of wheat dying in the ground yet bringing forth new life.

Ivan's response to Fyodor Pavlovich's, like everything else that pertains to his relations with his father, is marked by indirection and evasion. He does not respond directly to element of ugliness and disfiguration (*bezobrazie*). Yet his graphic picture in the chapter "Rebellion" of John the Merciful embracing and breathing into the foul and festering mouth of a person suffering from some terrible disease—a tableau that is the centerpiece to his moral-philosophical discourse on love of one's neighbor—constitutes an analogue to his father's physiogomy and the moral-esthetic issues it raises. The putrid and diseased mouth of Ivan's passerby and the vile and repellent mouth of Fyodor Pavlovich belong to the same order of images. The reader has already encountered the face of Fyodor Pavlovich and has looked at it with revulsion. The mouth is central to Ivan's thought: it is the locus of the kiss of love. Ivan, full of hatred, compels Alyosha (and the reader), as it were, to kiss the mouth of Fyodor Pavlovich and reflect upon the theme of love of one's neighbor!

"In order to love a person," Ivan famously declares in "Rebellion," "it is necessary that he be hidden, because the moment he shows his face—love is gone." The focus here on "litso," or face, or countenance, is central. Zosima and Alyosha, as we know, are fully conscious of how often the esthetic element constitutes an obstacle to higher love. "Active love . . . is a cruel and terrifying business" ("A Lady of Little Faith"), Zosima declares not many pages after the introduction of Fyodor Pavlovich's infamous physiognomy. "The face of man often prevents many people inexperienced in love from loving others," Alyosha replies to Ivan, citing Zosima ("Rebellion"). Though the face of

a person, of man, made in the image of God, may be repellent; though it may give evidence of a corrupted life, Zosima and Alyosha insist, it is never representative of the whole person.

Dostoevsky makes this very point at the beginning of the novel when his narrator refers to Fyodor Pavlovich's "physiognomy": "Physiognomy" is precisely "litso," "face." Dostoevsky's choice of the word "physiognomy" (*fizionomiia*) is significant. The Greek root of the word *fizionomiia* or physiognomy is "physiognomon" — "to judge a character by the features." The word derives from "physis" — "nature," "physique," "appearance" + "gnomon" — "interpreter." The art of physiognomy, then, is typically the art of knowing, discovering, judging temperament and character on the basis of a person's outward appearance, face, or features.⁹

⁹ The art or so-called science of physiognomic interpretation, as developed and popularized in the studies the Swiss writer and Protestant pastor, Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801), consisted in judging or interpreting character on the basis of a person's face or outward appearance (bodily movements, gestures, speech, etc.). The relationship between man's inner character and his features and movements is more or less fixed, according to Lavater. The beauty or hatefulness of a face stands in direct relation to the beauty and moral state of a human being: the better morally, the more beautiful, while the more morally bad — the more hateful. Man cannot escape his basic character, Lavater believed. He is as "free as a bird in a cage" (*frei wie der Vogel im Käfig*). For a recent discussion of physiognomy and character in nineteenth and early twentieth century literature, see Kirstin Breitenfellner, *Lavaters Schatten. Physiognomie und Charakter bei Ganghofer, Fontane und Döblin* (Dresden and Munich: Dresden University Press, 1999). Some of Breitenfellner's discussions on physiognomy bear on Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, in particular 158–162; 187–189, and 195–198. These discussions draw upon Horst-Jürgen-Gerigk's critical writings, in particular, "Der Mörder Smerdjakow. Bemerkungen zu Dostojewskijs Typologie der kriminellen Persönlichkeit," in *Dostoevsky Studies* (1986) 7:107–122, and "Dostojewskij: Der Kriminologe als Dichter," in Willi Hirdt, Ed. *Europas Weg in die Moderne* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1991), 19–39. There is no hard evidence that Dostoevsky read any of Lavater's work, but his complete familiarity with, and critical stance on, many of the Swiss writer's ideas on physiognomic interpretation cannot be doubted. Thus, in his remarks on academic genre painting in "Apropos of the Exhibition" (Po povodu vystavki) in his *Diary of a Writer* in 1873, Dostoevsky writes: "One must portray reality as it is," they say, whereas reality such as this does not exist and never has on earth because the essence of things is inaccessible to man; he perceives nature as it is reflected in his ideas, after it has passed

We cannot, however, fully know, interpret, or judge a human being, Dostoevsky insists, through a superficial glance at, or a surface, naturalistic depiction of, a person's face or features. To know esthetically is to know spiritually; to know spiritually is to see into a character. The narrator's physiognomic characterization of Fyodor Pavlovich, from the standpoint of Dostoevsky's poetics, is limited and lacking in insight—if taken out of the broader context in which it appears. While this "physiognomic" reading of Fyodor Pavlovich countenance contains much truth, it fails to encompass the whole truth of Fyodor Pavlovich's character. It does represent the physiogomy of Fyodor Pavlovich, however, as Ivan and Dmitry, and others, see it and respond to it.

The narrator's later "physiognomic" interpretation of Smerdyakov, in the chapter "Smerdyakov," however, suggests that he *can* successfully read a person's face or physical being. Remarking on Smerdyakov's habit sometimes of coming to a halt in the house, or in the yard, or on the street, and then lapsing into thought for as long as even ten minutes, the narrator observes: "A physiognomist, looking deeply into him (*vgliadevshis' v nego*) would have said that here there was neither thought nor reflection, but only some kind of contemplation. The key word and verb here is "vgliadet'sia"—to look intently, deeply, into something. In his *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language* (*Tolkovyi slovar' riusskogo iazyka*, 1935), D. N. Ushakov provided an instructive example of the use of this verb: "My vgliadelis' v ego litso i uzhe ne zamechali ego bezobraziia" (We looked into his face and did not notice its disfigured character).

In the case of Smerdyakov, the narrator's physiognomic reading is, without doubt, on firm ground. His wisdom at this point, however, is borrowed: he does not provide us with his own analysis

through his senses. Accordingly, more scope must be given to the idea, and the ideal should not be feared. A portraitist, for example seats his subject to paint his portrait; he prepares, he studies the subject carefully. Why does he do that? Because he knows from experience that a person does not always look like himself and therefore he seeks out 'the principal idea of his physiognomy,' that moment when the subject most resembles his self. The portraitist's gift consists in the ability to seek out and capture that moment. And so what is the artist doing here if not trusting first his own idea (the ideal) more than the reality before him? The ideal is also reality, after all, and just as legitimate as immediate reality. (Dostoevskii, PSS, 21:75)

of Smerdyakov's peculiar habit of contemplation, but presents it to the reader by analogy with the "contemplator" in Ivan N. Kramskoy's well-known painting, "The Contemplator" (*Sozertsatel'*, 1878).¹⁰ The physiognomist ("A physiognomist . . . would have said") in essence turns out to be a well-known Russian painter. The narrator conveys to the reader thoughts evoked by Kramskoi's portrayal of a contemplative type.¹¹ At the conclusion of his discussion he states that Smerdyakov "probably was just one of those contemplators" depicted by Kramskoy. It is the artist, painter, or writer, finally, who looks into the character of such contemplative types as Smerdyakov and finds them complex and multidimensional.¹²

The narrator's verbal portrait of Fyodor Pavlovich at the opening of *The Brothers Karamazov* might be called the mask of evil. It does not, however, turn out to be the true portrait of old Karamazov, that is, the in-depth verbal portrait that the novel will provide. Dostoevsky, it might be said, has heeded a prescription for the painter and poet provided by the literary icon of his youth, Friedrich Schiller. In his *Reflections on the Use of the Vulgar and Low Elements in Works of Art* (*Gedanken über den Gebrauch des Gemeinen und Niedrigen in der Kunst*, 1802), the German poet, dramatist, and philosopher argued that artists need not fear to

¹⁰ By having his narrator essentially borrow his physiognomic interpretation from Kramskoy, Dostoevsky guards his narrator from the charge of being inconsistent in these two physiognomic readings.

¹¹ Dostoevsky himself, as James L. Rice points out, may have heard and incorporated in his text analyses of Kramskoy's painting. For a discussion of Dostoevsky's relation to Kramskoy's painting, "Sozertsatel'," and to interpretations of it that relate to the passages we have discussed, see Rice, *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art: An Essay in Literary and Medical History* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishers, 1985), 252–259.

¹² For views that challenges the generally negative perception of Smerdyakov, see Lee D. Johnson's "Struggle for Theosis: Smerdyakov as Would-Be Saint" and Vladimir Golstein's "Accidental Families and Surrogate Fathers: Richard, Grigory, and Smerdyakov" in *A New Word on The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson, with an introductory essay by Robin Feuer Miller and a concluding essay by William Mills Todd III (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 74–89 and 99–106. For other views on Smerdyakov, see also Horst-Jürgen Gerigk's essay on Smerdyakov (noted in footnote 8 of this chapter), as well as Gary Saul Morson's "Verbal Pollution in *The Brothers Karamazov*" (1978) reprinted in *Critical Essays on The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. Robin Feuer Miller (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), 234–242.

show us their heroes under a contemptible exterior, provided that they have already given expression to their inner world:

But what is allowed the poet is not always permitted to the painter. The former merely brings objects before the imagination; the latter, on the contrary, brings objects before the senses. So it is not only that the impression of the painting is more alive than that of the poem, but also that the painters with their natural symbols cannot make the interior spirit [das Innere] so visible as the poets do with their arbitrary ones, and yet—only the interior spirit can reconcile us with the exterior.¹³

Dostoevsky illustrates Schiller's point when he allows his narrator to present the reader with what amounts to a naturalistic portrait of Fyodor Pavlovich. Dostoevsky does not fear, as it were, to show us his hero under a "contemptible exterior" because he is fully capable of showing the reader the full inner being of Fyodor Pavlovich. In the final analysis, we can say that it is only Dostoevsky's in-depth revelation of Fyodor Pavlovich's "interior spirit" that ultimately, and in the light of the novel's whole moral-spiritual direction and denouement, reconciles the reader with Fyodor Pavlovich's contemptible exterior, that is, with his mask.

Dostoevsky's poetics of insight rests comfortably, of course, in the matrix of his religious worldview. "Man is created in the image and likeness of God" (*I sotvoril Bog cheloveka, po obrazu Svoemu, po obrazu Bozhiiu sotvoril ego*) (Gen. 1:27), Zosima remarks. "Obraz" (image, form, but also icon) is the "axis of beauty in the Russian language."¹⁴ Strictly speaking, a *bezobraznyi obraz* (ugly form, ugly icon) is a contradiction in terms both in the Russian language and in Dostoevsky's higher esthetic-religious outlook. Man's "obraz," man's image, his likeness to divinity may be marred, as with an old icon, but the sacred image retains its essential link with divinity. Alyosha echoes this view in plain language when he says to Fyodor Pavlovich in the chapter "At his

¹³ See Friedrich Schiller, *Kleiner prosaische Schriften von Schiller. Aus mehreren Zeitschriften vom Verfasser selbst versammelt und verbessert.* v. 4 (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 1802), 324-325.

¹⁴ "L'image, dans la langue russe, est l'axe de la Beauté." See Lydie Krestovsky, *La laideur dans L'art a travers les ages* (Paris: Seuil, 1947), 36.

Father's," "You're not a bad person, but distorted" (*Ne zloi vy chelovek, a iskoverkannyi*).

In Romans, St. Paul challenges the notion of absolute uncleanness: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself." Paul goes on to acknowledge the relativity of human judgment, however, declaring that "to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (Rom. 14:14).

Ivan, Dmitry, and Alyosha, like most of the readers of *The Brothers Karamazov*, find themselves in the ranks of the majority for whom uncleanness is unclean, impurity—impure, a bad smell—a bad smell. People can't see other people's suffering, Ivan argues in "Rebellion," because the other person has "a bad smell" or "a foolish face." Ivan inclines to the view, however, that man's looks and smells may betray his nature. For a moment, as we know, even Alyosha's faith is shaken by a bad smell.

Dmitry shares Ivan's sensitivity to looks and faces. Yet for all of his violent reaction to his father's face, there is nothing about his view of his father or of people in general to suggest that the superficial impression of a face gives evidence of a person's whole nature. He fears the impact of Fyodor Pavlovich's "exterior" or "outward appearance" (*naruzhnost'*). "I'm afraid that [Fyodor Pavlovich's] *face at that very moment* will suddenly become hateful to me" (*Boius', chto nenavisten on vdrug mne stanet svoim litsom v tu samuiu minutu*), he declares in the chapter "In the Darkness." Dostoevsky italicizes the words "*svoim litsom v tu samuiu minutu*." His emphasis on these words—Dmitry's emphasis, let us remember—is crucial to an understanding of why he, Dmitry, *might* kill his father. Yet those same italicized words are equally crucial to an understanding of why he might *not* kill his father. As his stress on the word "litso" and "naruzhnost'" and the momentary effect of the appearance of his face suggests, Dmitry does not at root take mere surface features to be the whole person.

Dmitry's situation at the window may be compared with Father Zosima's after he had struck his servant. After his "crime"—that is Zosima's word—he recalls thinking that his servant is "a man, just like I, made in the image and likeness of God". Dmitry, to be sure, does not utter these words as he stands at the window and observes his father; nor is he remotely thinking about Genesis 1:27 or theology in general. He is a man, however, who in the days leading up to the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich obsessively preoccupies himself with moral and esthetic questions; he is a person who, one

might say, suffers them through; and these tormented questions, openly confronted and contemplated, lay the groundwork for the *answer* he will give as he stands by the window and observes his father.

Fyodor Pavlovich's outer appearance revolts Dmitry. That exterior, he says at the first preliminary hearing, "trampled on everything sacred," it embodied "mockery" and "unbelief." "But now that he's dead," he continues, "I think differently . . . I regret that I hated him . . . It's not so much repentance . . . [but] I myself am not good . . . I myself am not so very beautiful (*sam-to ia ne ochen' krasiv*), and therefore did not have the right to consider him repulsive, that's the thing!" (*vot chto!*) ("The Torments of a Soul")

At the highest level of ethico-religious perception, Zosima sees in his servant a person made in the image and likeness of God. Dmitry sees himself mirrored in Fyodor Pavlovich's moral turpitude and ugliness: a first step on the part of Dmitry in the direction of a deeper awareness of himself and the other. His use of the word "krasiv" (beautiful) is important: it marks, once again, his heightened awareness (in the spirit of the poet Schiller whose poetry he fondly recites) of moral and esthetic questions. This awareness enters into Dmitry's unconscious decision not to kill his father.

Dmitry's deep spiritual-religious consciousness surfaces in the third preliminary investigation: "'In my opinion, gentlemen, in my opinion, this is how it was,' he quietly said. 'Whether it was someone's tears, whether my mother prayed to God, whether a bright spirit kissed me at that moment—I don't know, but the devil was conquered [The Third Torment].'" Dmitry, then, views his action or inaction at the window as the culmination of what he earlier described as an inner struggle in himself between God and the devil.

"God . . . watched over [or "guarded"] me at the time (*Bog . . . storozhil menia togda* ["In the Darkness"]), Dmitry later says in explanation of why he did not kill his father. "Storozhit'" is to "guard, or watch over the safety of someone," but also to "be on the watch for somebody." Dmitry was on the watch for Grushenka, while God, as he sees it, was watching over his safety. In Dostoevsky's Christian universe, however, it is not God who watches over us and determines our actions, but God who gives us the freedom to watch over ourselves and to save ourselves. That is exactly what Dmitry is doing in the time-span of the novel. He had spent the two days before the murder of his father—so the narrator tells us—"literally casting himself in all

directions, 'struggling with his fate and saving himself,' as he put it later." (*On zhe v eti dva dnia bukval'no metalsia vo vse storony, 'borias' so svoeiu sud'boi i spasaia sebia', kak on sam potom vyrazilsia* ["Kuzma Samsonov"]). In his encounter with his father at the window, he saves himself. Not God, one might say, but a residual striving in Dmitry for a moral-spiritual ideal saves him.

Very much to the point here are the programmatic verses he utters (the first to be recited by Dmitry in the three "confessional" chapters, and ones that he himself has composed) in "Confession of a Passionate Heart," in verse, and then again in the chapter "A Sudden Decision" that immediately follows his encounter with his father at the window, "Glory to the Highest in Heaven, Glory to the Highest *in me!*..." (*Slava Vysshemu na svete, Slava Vysshemu vo mne!*... [my italics—RLJ]).¹⁵ Dostoevsky's trailing ellipses point to the special importance of the words "in me." Dmitry, finally, is deeply conscious of the *whole picture*.¹⁶ The Dmitry who declares that "God sees [the] whole picture in me" ("The Confession of a Passionate Heart. In Anecdote")—that is, God sees the *whole* human being in him, is capable of intuiting the whole human being in others.

What happens to Dmitry at the window was, indeed, a *happening*, or to borrow a notion and phrase of the German writer Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838) in his novella, *The Strange Story of Peter Schlemihl* (*Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, [1814])—"an event in place of a deed" (*ein Ereignis an die Stelle einer Tat*).¹⁷ Chamisso's Peter Schlemihl differs from Dostoevsky's Dmitry in almost every aspect. Yet a comparison of the way each man relates to his respective "event"

¹⁵ Dmitry's lines, as the editors of the thirty volume Russian edition of Dostoevsky's work note, echo words from Luke 2:13–14: "I vnezapno iavilos' s Angelom mnogochislennoe voinstvo nebesnoe, slaviashchee Boga i vzyvaiushchee: slava v vyshnikh Bogu, i na zemle mir v chelovekakh blagovolenie!" (And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: / "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men!") See PSS, 15:541.

¹⁶ See my discussion of the significance of the concept of "whole picture" in my essay, "Alyosha's Speech at the Stone: 'The Whole Picture'," in *A New Word on The Brothers Karamazov*, op. cit., 234–253.

¹⁷ Cf. Adelbert von Chamisso, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, Vorwort von Horst-Jürgen Gerigk (Heidelberg: 1998), 55.

serves to bring out the specific character of Dmitry's happening, what happened, and the way he related to it.

In Chamisso's story, Peter Schlemihl has given up his "shadow" to a "gray stranger," the devil in disguise, in exchange for an unlimited source of gold. The stranger nonetheless seeks the ultimate prize: the soul of Schlemihl. At a critical moment in Schlemihl's life, when he is about to lose his beloved to a scoundrel who would ruin her; when he himself is about to be exposed as an adventurer and imposter without a shadow—at this moment the "gray stranger" offers to get him out of all his difficulties in exchange for a *signature in blood*. Torn between his affection for, and moral commitment to, the girl, and his loathing for the demonic "gray stranger," he reaches for the parchment to sign, but at that moment falls into a deep faint (*eine tiefe Ohnmacht*). "I lay there for a long time as though in the arms of the dead." An "event"—a positive one in the view of Schlemihl—has taken the place of a decision.¹⁸ Yet the event also discloses his fundamental passivity.

For all his romantic characteristics, Schlemihl's own views of the happening reveal him as a child of the Enlightenment. The event, he explains, had taught him to "respect necessity, and what is greater than a deed that has been done, an event that has occurred, its [necessity's] property!" (*Ich habe erstlich die Notwendigkeit verehren lernen, und was ist mehr als die getane Tat, das geschehne Ereignis, ihr Eigentum!*) Even more, he has learned to "revere that necessity as a wise providence that pervades the whole great mechanism in which we are enmeshed as mere driving and driven wheels; what must be, must happen; what was to happen, happened; and not without that providence which I finally learned to revere in my own destiny and in the destinies of those that interlocked with mine."¹⁹

Schlemihl's "providence" (*Fügung*) is a kind of divine fate; his is a fate-ruled universe. His ethics are markedly deterministic. The ideological dynamics of Dmitry's own "event" and of his view of it are basically the reverse of Schlemihl's, though Dmitry only gropes toward an understanding of what took place at the window. What is clear is that Dmitry's universe is not a machine and his Providence is one that leaves man free to make his own decisions. Dmitry has inclinations toward fatalism. He remarks after the murder of his father, "I understand that

¹⁸ Ibid., 56.

¹⁹ Ibid., 55–56.

for such people like me, a blow is need, a blow of fate, to catch them as with a noose, and bind them by an external force” (*Ponimaiu teper’, chto na takikh, kak ia, nuzhen udar, udar sud’by, chtob zakhvatit’ ego kak v arkan i skrutit’ vneshnei siloi* [“They Carry Mitya Away”]). What is important, however, is that at a crucial moment in his struggle with his “fate” — with his own sense of fatality, with “unknown ideas,” and with crude materialistic-philosophical conceptions of man — the balance tips in the direction of his *not* killing his father. In the final analysis, Dmtri knows something that Schlemihl does not know.

There is no miracle in the fact that Dmitry does not kill his father, though Dostoevsky’s asterisks throw a temporary veil of mystery over the event. How we act at any given moment depends not only on the circumstances of the moment, but on what we bring to that moment. Dmitry’s unconscious decision *not* to kill his father finds support in the dialectic of his moral, spiritual, and nascent religious consciousness; it finds sustenance in a consciousness or conscience that is continually alive to the complexities and interaction in human behavior and consciousness of the sacred and the profane, *obraz* and “bezobrazie”, the man and the mask. This unconscious choice not to kill his father is a *blow to fate*. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it in an essay, “Fate,” “If Fate is so prevailing, man also is part of it, and can confront fate with fate [. . .] If there be omnipotence in the stroke, there is omnipotence of recoil.”²⁰

“Man is a mystery,” wrote the seventeen-year-old Dostoevsky. “It is necessary to divine it” (*Chelovek est’ taina. Ee nado razgadat’* [28:1:63]). “Razgadat’” — “to divine,” “to guess at the meaning of something,” “to get to the bottom of something”; that is what the novelist has done in *The Brothers Karamazov*; that is what Dmitry does intuitively at the window; that is what the reader does when revisits and reviews the fateful “physiognomy” of Fyodor Pavlovich at the opening of the novel and recognizes both its power and its limitations as a true portrait. “There’s no art to find the mind’s construction in the face,” complains Duncan, King of Scotland, in *Macbeth* (I: 4). There’s no art, except the artist’s art of seeing, which points to the second meaning embedded in Shakespeare’s line and to Dostoevsky’s own “physiognomic” vision.

²⁰

See *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 340–341.