A rather remarkable incident occurs at the end of ‘The Disgraceful Scene’ (‘Skandal’), the final chapter of ‘An Unfortunate Gathering’ (‘Neumestnoe sobranie’) – Book Two, Part One of The Brothers Karamazov (Brat’ja Karamazovy). Fedor Pavlovič and his son Ivan are just about to depart from the monastery for the Karamazov house in town. Maksimov, an impoverished petty landowner from Tula is trying to mount Karamazov’s carriage – Fedor Pavlovič had invited him to come along. Suddenly, Ivan violently “punches Maksimov in his chest” and “sends him flying”: “No Ivan Fedorovič, usevšijsja uže na mesto, molča i izo vsej sily vdrug otpichnul v grud’ Maksimova, i tot otlelet na sažen’. Esli ne upal, to toľ’ko slučajno.”¹ The carriage starts off without Maksimov. Ivan’s conduct surprises his father – someone so corrupt that it seems like nothing could surprise him: “Nu čego že ty? Čego že ty? Začem ty ego tak?” (“Why, what are you doing? What are you doing? Why did you do it to him?”). Scholars have pointed out the importance of Ivan’s behavior for the course of the novel’s narrative of double parricide. Victor Terras in his Karamazov Companion recommends paying special attention to Ivan’s sudden violence: “The first ‘dissonance’ in Ivan’s behavior. It ought to be remembered”.² Robert L. Jackson in The Art of Dostoevsky describes the finale of ‘Skandal’ as the first instance of Ivan’s translating his latent hatred for his father not into the silence of an “observer”, but into violence:

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In the early scenes of the novel Ivan is characterized almost exclusively through inaction and silence [...]. Ivan, almost unnoticed by his reader, silently watches the buffoonery of his father in the early monastery scenes but does nothing to stop him. His angry blow directed at Maksimov at the moment he departs from the monastery reflects his suppressed hostility toward his father.3

A number of facts pertinent to the meaning of Ivan’s behavior may be recalled. Ivan arrives in the monastery together with his father – the narrative of ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’ is framed by the arrival/departure of the Karamazov carriage. It is worth mentioning that ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’ was published in Russkij vestnik (No. 2, 1879) as part of the first installment.4 Thus, the eight chapters of the Book – centering around the Karamazovs’ meeting with Zosima in the monastery – may be viewed as a narrative whole in its own right. A contextual method of analysis should prove effective in dealing with ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’. We will attempt viewing Ivan’s violence in the contextual light of the entire monastery episode.

As we mentioned above, throughout the eight chapters of Book Two Ivan mostly figures as a silent observer. Only once does he engage in a discussion – with Zosima and other elders on the subject of ecclesiastical court. As a result of this seminal discussion Zosima pronounces his prophetic words about the essence of Ivan’s tragedy:

Блаженны вы, коли так веруете, или уже очень несчаст-ны [...]. Потому что, по всей вероятности, не веруете сами в бессмертие души, ни даже в то, что написали о церкви и о церковном вопросе [...]. Не совсем штутили, это истинно. Идея эта еще не решена в вашем сердце и мучает его. Но и мученик любит иногда забываться своим отчаянием, как бы тоже от отчаяния. Пока с отчаяния и вы забываетесь – и журнальными статьями и светскими спорами, сами не веря своей диалектике и с болью сердца усмехаясь ей про себя... В вас этот вопрос не решен, и в этом ваше великое горе, ибо настоятельно требует разрешения.

(“You are blessed in believing that, or else most unhappy [...]. Because, in all probability you yourself don’t believe in the immortality of your soul, nor in what you have written in your article on Church jurisdiction [...]. You were not altogether joking. That’s true. The question is still bothering your heart; it is still unanswered. But, the martyr sometimes likes to divert himself with his despair, you, too, divert yourself with magazine
articles and discussions in society though you don’t believe your own arguments, and with an aching heart mock at them inwardly... That question you have not answered. And this is your great grief for it clamors for an answer.”

Although Ivan encounters Maksimov a number of times in the monastery scenes, no communication between the two develops. Finally, although Ivan is already clearly annoyed, to say the least, by Fedor Pavlović’s sacrilegious buffoonery well before the finale of ‘Skandal’, it is only in the concluding incident that he lets his anger “talk” and strikes Maksimov.

A number of questions remain to be answered in connection with the violent finale of ‘Skandal’. Why did Ivan choose the landowner Maksimov as object of suppressed violence toward his own father, Fedor Pavlović? What was the unique concurrence of narrative circumstances (psychological, temporal, spatial, etc.) that brought about the Ivan-Maksimov encounter? Finally, what is the narrative function of Maksimov with respect to the Ivan-Fedor Pavlović conflict?

The Maksimov/Karamazov-senior episode, culminating in ‘Skandal’ where Fedor Pavlović manages to force Maksimov into assuming the role of the infamous lecher and debaucher Von Sohn, typifies Fedor Pavlović’s actions in The Brothers Karamazov. According to Jackson, Fedor Pavlović epitomizes ‘bezobrazie’, one of the central aesthetic and moral dimensions in the novel. In the core of Fedor Pavlović’s behavior lies his “remarkable” capacity to transform ethically, aesthetically, and metaphysically everything he encounters into the “monstrous” and “shapeless”, - in Russian – ‘obezobraživat’. Analyzing the meaning of ‘bezobrazie’ in the novel’s context, Jackson writes:

The centrality of the concepts of obraz (image, form, icon) and bezobrazie as antithetical moral and aesthetic categories in Dostoevsky’s thought cannot be overstressed. Obraz, for Dostoevsky is the axis of beauty in the Russian language. It is aesthetic form, and it is also the iconographic image, or icon, the visible symbol of the beauty of God. Aesthetically, bezobrazie is the deformation of ideal form. The humanization of man is the creation of form, the restoration of the image. All violence against man is a dehumanization, which is a deformation, in Dostoevsky’s view, of the divine image [...]. On the symbolic plane, the desecration of the icon (obraz, ikona) involves a crime of the most grave nature, an assault upon the very ideal and principle of divine – therefore, also, human – beauty. Fedor is guilty of precisely the crime of desecration.5
‘Obezobraživanie’, Fedor Pavlovič’s main doing in ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’ and throughout the entire novel, occurs on a number of levels. First, all Fedor Pavlovič’s actions are deeply immoral, antisocial, and antihuman. Examples of this category are everywhere in Fedor Pavlovič’s narrative – his criminal neglect of his sons, his degradation of his wives and of women in general, his unbridled sensuality, etc. Second, Fedor Pavlovič distorts the holiest ideas of humanity. Not only is nothing sacred to this man, but, essentially, sheer sacrilege is his religion. In the pivotal episode of ‘Over the Brandy’ (‘Za konjačkom’), a chapter, chronologically occurring after ‘Skandal’, Fedor Pavlovič recalls one of his instances of sacrilege, that of spitting on an icon of the Madonna:

Видишь, говорю, видишь, вот твой образ, вот он, вот я его сниму. Смотри же, ты его за чудотворный считаешь, а я сейчас на него при тебе плюну, и мне ничего за это не будет.

(“Here,” I said, “you see your holy icon. Here it is. Here I take it down. You believe it’s miraculous, but here, I’ll spit on it and nothing will happen to me!”)

Thus, Fedor Pavlovič simultaneously commits a double desecration, a double ‘obezobraživanie’. Not only are his actions deformative, but his words are verbal signs of this sacrilege, of ‘bezobrazje’. Verbal desecration, use of language as an active means of deshaping is central to Fedor Pavlovič’s depersonalized persona.

Instances of verbal desecration in ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’ can be classified according to their dominant linguistic device. The following groups may be distinguished: decontextualization, literalization, demetaphorization, pun-making, mistranslation, mispronunciation. Fedor Pavlovič’s “talent” for imitation, for a ruthless transference of meaning out of one context into an entirely different one, is emphasized as early as the beginning of ‘The Old Buffoon’ (‘Staryj šut’), chapter two of Book Two. There, Fedor Pavlovič is described as “obez’jana”, literally and figuratively “ape”. Later, Miusov labels the essence of Fedor Pavlovič’s verbal ‘bezobrazje’ as smearing with dirt anything he touches: “Vy bukval’no Maraete vse, k čemu ni prikosnetes’”. While “Maraete” renders the nature of desecration, it is “bukval’no” that connotes literalization, perhaps the most powerful device of verbal deformation/perversion, employed by Fedor Pavlovič in ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’. For example, in ‘Staryj šut’, Zosima asks Fedor Pavlovič to “make himself quite at home”: “Ne stesnjajtes’, bud’tе soveršennо kak domа. A glavnoе, ne stydites’ stol’ samogo sebja...” (“Do not trouble. Make yourself quite at home. And,
above all, do not be so ashamed of yourself...}). What Zosima wants is to put Fedor Pavlovič at ease, to make him feel “at home”. Yet Karamazov-senior immediately puts a literal meaning on Zosima’s words, taking the idiom “kak doma” to refer to his own, Karamazov’s, house. The beginning of Fedor Pavlovič’s tirade is so characteristic of his language usage that it deserves a full citation:

Совершенно как дома? То есть в натуральном-то виде? О, этого много, слишком много, но — с умилением принимаю! Знайте, благословенный отец, вы меня на натурального-то вид не вызываете, не рискуйте… до натурального вида я и сам не дойду. Это я, чтобы вас охранить, предупреждаю. Ну-с, а прочее все еще подвержено мраку неизвестности, хотя бы некоторые и ждали расписать меня. Это я по вашему адресу, Петр Александрович [Miusov; M.D.S.], говорю, а вам, святейшее существо, вот что вам: восторг изливаю! Он привстал и, подняв вверх руки, произнёс: — Блаженно чрево, посившее тебя, и сосцы, тебя питавшие, сосцы особенно!

(“Quite at home? To be my natural self? Oh, that is much too much, but I accept it gratefully. Do you know, blessed father, you’d better not invite me to be my natural self. Don’t risk it… I will not go so far as that myself. I warn you for your own sake. Well, the rest is still plunged in the mists of uncertainty, though there are people who’d be pleased to defame me for you. I mean that for you, Petr Aleksandrovič [Miusov; M.D.S.]. But as for you, holy being, let me tell you, I am filled with ecstasy”. He got up and throwing up his hands, called out, “Blessed be the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck – the paps especially.”)

Fedor Pavlovič simultaneously literalizes the idiom ‘to be at home’ and decontextualizes it. By equating ‘doma’ with his own home Fedor Pavlovič charges the space of Žosima’s monastery cell with the qualities of his own living space where he feels most “natural”. Fedor Pavlovič interprets the concept of “natural self” to mean losing all restraint, i.e. sheer ‘bezobrazie’.

The citation comes from the episode in which Jesus drives a demon out of a dumb man. In his tirade Fedor Pavlovič corrupts the words,
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called out by a woman in the crowd: “Happy the womb that carried you and the breasts that suckled you!” Responding, Jesus pronounces the following words, “No, happy are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11: 27-28). It seems worth recalling that in the Gospel narrative the dumb man is able to speak after Jesus has driven the demon out. The central structural opposition of the Gospel episode is that of being endowed with the Word (of God) vs. being dumb (possessed by Satan). And Jesus speaks to the people earlier in the episode precisely about the household, divided against itself because its members are possessed. It is not by chance that the notion of household (‘doma’) figures in Fedor Pavlovič’s words. In a fit of ‘bezobrazie’, Fedor Pavlovič reveals what appears to be the crux of the tragedy of the house of Karamazov – being possessed by Satan. It is indeed because Fedor Pavlovič begins to feel so much at home that he habitually commits another act of desecration in front of Zosima, a stronghold of faith in this episode. By adding “the paps, especially” he further extends the list of sacrileges committed against the image of the Madonna in his own household. Earlier, we have discussed the significance of spitting on the icon of the Madonna. Here, Fedor Pavlovič perverts the meaning of a homily addressed to the mother of Jesus by disfiguring it with his sardonic sensuality. Thus, in his “household” Fedor Pavlovič views the Madonna as a sexual object – clearly, an outrageous sacrilege high on his list of ‘bezobrazie’. It is important to recall that by talking first about spitting on the icon (verbal sacrilege) and then by actually doing so (sacriligious act) Fedor Pavlovič drives his wife, the mother of Ivan and Aleša, into a fit of ‘klikušestvo’: “ona toľko vskočila, vsplesnula rukami, potom vdrug zakryla rukami lico, vsja zatrjasla i pala na pol...” (“she only jumped up, wrung her hands, then suddenly hiding her face in them she began trembling all over and fell on the floor...”). ‘Klikušestvo’ is discussed in ‘Peasant Women Who Have Faith’ (‘Verujušie baby’), the chapter following ‘Staryj šut’. At the beginning of the former, a certain ‘klikuša’ is led up to Zosima for a blessing. Upon seeing the elder, she falls in a fit, closely resembling that of Fedor Pavlovič’s wife: “vdrug načala, kak-to nelepo vzvizgivaja, ikat’ i vsja zatrjaslas’, kak v rodimce” (“suddenly she began shrieking and writhing as though in the pains of childbirth”). The only difference between the two fits is that the ‘klikuša’ in ‘Verujušie baby’ calmed down as soon as Zosima blessed her (“ona totčas zatichla i uspokoilas”), while the severe attack continued in the case of Fedor Pavlovič’s wife, Aleša’s mother. Moreover, Fedor Pavlovič’s recollection of his late wife’s fit (i.e. only a verbal act on his part) causes Aleša’s fit. The latter strikes old Karamazov by its close resemblance of his wife’s fit. The narrator describes the scene of Aleša’s fit as follows:
Metamorphoses of 'Bezobrazie' in 'The Brothers Karamazov'

[...] с Алешей вдруг повторилось нечто очень странное, а именно с ним вдруг повторилось точь-в-точь то же самое, что сейчас только он рассказал про 'кликушу'. Алеша вдруг вскоchил из-за стола, точь-в-точь как по рассказу и мать его, всплеснул руками, потом закрыл ими лицо, упал как подкошенный на стул и так и затрясясь вдруг весь от истерического припадка внезапных, сотрясающих и неслышных слез.

([...] suddenly something very strange happened to Aleșa. Precisely what he was describing in the 'klikuša' was suddenly repeated with Aleșa. He jumped up exactly as his mother was said to have done, wrung his hands, hid his face in them, and fell back in his chair, shaking all over in an hysterical convulsion of violent, silent weeping.)

Thus, the sheer power of Zosima’s words, charged with divine truth in the context of the crucial opposition in Book Two, is capable of stopping a fit of ‘klikušestvo’. On the contrary, not only Fedor Pavlovič’s verbal act of sacrilege, but also his recollection of this verbal act, his memory of the past ‘bezobrazie’, has a fatal power to throw people into fits.

When anatomizing the nature of ‘klikušestvo’ in ‘Verujuščie baby’, the narrator offers an interpretation of this phenomenon that conflates both popular beliefs and scientific explanations. From a medical standpoint, ‘klikušestvo’ is described as a severe female illness, caused by the unbearable life of women in Russia:

([...] что это страшная женская болезнь [...] свидетельствующая о тяжелой судьбе нашей сельской женщины [...] от изнурительных работ [...] от безысходного горя, от побоев, и проч., чего иные женские натуры выносить по общему примеру все-таки не могут.

([...] that it is a terrible illness to which women are subject [...] due to the hard lot of our peasant women [...] arising from exhausting toil [...] and from the hopeless misery, from beatings, and so on, which some women are not able to endure.)

According to popular beliefs, ‘klikuši’ are possessed by the demons, while blessing and other religious rituals have the power to drive the ‘unclean spirit’ out of them. Remarkably, Fedor Pavlovič earlier explains to Zosima that an unclean spirit inhabits him, “ja šut korennoj, s roždenija, vse ravno, vaše prepodobie, čto jurodiviyj, ne sporju, čto i duch nečistiyj, možet, vo mne zaključaetsja, nebol’šogo, vpročem, kalibra...” (“I am an
inveterate buffoon and have been so from my birth, your reverence. It’s as though it were a craze in me. I daresay it’s an unclean spirit within me. But only a little one”). In the light of the above, Fedor Pavlović’s humiliation of his wife, the mother of both Ivan and Aleša, may be read as thrusting upon her the verbal signs of evil. By forcing his wife to hear his verbal sacrilege, Fedor Pavlović caused her fit. Dostoevskij is no mystic, and the context of ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’ translates “possessed by the unclean spirit” into “in the power of ‘bezobrazie’”.

It is not by chance that Fedor Pavlović is frequently referred to as “štut” (“buffoon”, “jester”, “classical fool”) in Book Two. From a socio-linguistic point of view, a ‘štut’ is someone who has a great power of verbal expression and is protected, one way or another, from the dangerous consequences of his verbal activity. Part of the tragedy of Fedor Karamazov lies in his fundamental ‘obezobraživanje’ of the speech norms of the society. But what is even worse, he does not realize the fatal and ruinous consequences of the verbal crimes that he commits. The desecrating power of Fedor Pavlović’s words is immense; even more immense is his punishment. Fedor Pavlović’s death cuts short his life cycle. The context of ‘bezobrazie’ ends. Verbal crime leading to verbal death ends in death.

Fedor Pavlović’s verbal power of ‘bezobrazie’ almost reaches its peak toward the end of the chapter ‘Why Is Such a Man Alive?’ (‘Začem živet takoj čelovek?’): “No vsja eto dosedšaja do bezobrazija scena prekratilas’ samym neožidannym obrazom” (“This scene reached its utmost ugliness when it was suddenly interrupted in a most unexpected way”). Remarkably, Fedor Pavlović is in the midst of another sacrilege – by decontextualizing the text of the Gospels he draws a parallel between Mary Magdalene and Grušen’ka. If it were not for Zosima’s “sinking on his knees” before Dmitrij Karamazov, ‘bezobrazie’ would have continued. Fedor Pavlović slows down for a period of time, and it is not until ‘Skandal’, the highest point in the book’s iconography of ‘bezobrazie’, that he is able to recover his devilish power.

Nowhere is verbal ‘bezobrazie’ as explicit as it is in the Maksimov-Von Sohn metamorphosis which climaxes in ‘Skandal’. Fedor Pavlović first encounters Maksimov at the beginning of the first chapter of ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’. Maksimov volunteers to show the way to Zosima’s house. It is not by chance that Maksimov’s portrait is given before any verbal communication between him and old Karamazov takes place. What is crucial to Maksimov’s characterization is its great resemblance to the portrait of old Karamazov himself given earlier in Book One. The narrator describes Fedor Pavlović as follows:
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Krome длинных и мясистых мешочков под маленькими его глазами, вечно наглыми, подозрительными и насме- шливыми, кроме множества глубоких морщинок на его маленьком, но жирненьком личике, к острую подбо- родку его подвешивался еще большой хадык, мясистый и продолговатый, как кошелек, что придавало ему какой-то отвратительно сладострастный вид [...].

(Besides the long fleshy bags under his little, always insolent, suspicious, and ironical eyes; besides the multitude of deep wrinkles in his little fat face, his Adam’s apple hung below his sharp chin like a great, fleshy goitre. It gave him a peculiar, repulsive, sensual appearance.)

Maksimov is described as

[...] пожилой, лысоватый господин [...] с сладкими глазками [...] человек лет шестидесяти [...] почти бежал сбоку, рассматривая их всех с судорожным почти любопытством. В глазах его было что-то лупоглазое [...].

([...] a bald-headed elderly man with ingratiating little eyes [...] a man of sixty [...] ran rather than walked, turning sideways to stare at them all, with an incredible degree of nervous curiosity. There was something beady about his eyes.)

Maksimov and Fedor Pavlović both share some linguistic traits. They both use French and “high style” Russian inappropriately, in wrong contexts. For instance, Maksimov describes Zosima as “Un chevalier parfait!... Starec, velikolepnyj starec, starec... Čest’ i slava monastyrju...” (“A perfect cavalier!... The elder, the splendid elder... The honor and glory of the monastery...”), while Fedor Pavlović addresses Zosima in the following manner: “Blažennyj čelovek! Božestvennyj i svjatejšij starec!” (“Blessed man! Divine and holy elder!”).

Soon after beholding Maksimov, Fedor Pavlović observes that the former resembles Von Sohn, “Na Fon Zona pochož”. Thereupon the following dialogue ensues between Karamazov-senior and Miusov:

- Вы только это и знаете... С чего он похож на Фон Зона? Вы сами-то видели Фон Зона?
- Его карточку видел. Хоть не чертами лица, так чем-то неизъяснимым. Чистейший второй экземпляр Фон Зона. Я это всегда по одной только физиономии узнаю.
- А пожалуй, вы в этом знаток...
(That's all you can think of... In what way is he like Von Sohn? Have you ever seen Von Sohn? – I've seen his picture. It's not the features, but something indefinable. He's a second Von Sohn. I can always tell from the physiognomy. – "Ah, I dare say you are a connoisseur in such things.")

The Von Sohn affair was among a number of crimes which afflicted Russian society in the 1870s. Von Sohn ('Fon Zon'), an old bureaucrat, was a victim of a notorious murder in St. Petersburg in 1869. He was "enticed into a brothel where he was poisoned, robbed, chopped into pieces and sent to Moscow" in a trunk. By the 1880s – when The Brothers Karamazov first appeared – the Von Sohn scandal was if not exactly old news, then certainly a “slight anachronism”. For the reading public of the time the Von Sohn murder was a sign of 'bezobrazie', and, also, of death as result of this 'bezobrazie'. At the same time, Fedor Pavlović's vivid interest in the Von Sohn affair – contemporaneous with the events of the novel in general and 'Neumestnoe sobranie' in particular – tends to link him with the dead Von Sohn. Both Fedor Pavlović and Von Sohn are debauchers and sensualists; both are about sixty; both, apparently, have money and are willing to spend it on young harlots. While Von Sohn is dead and almost forgotten, Fedor Pavlović emerges as his double, a living corpse, an embodiment of 'bezobrazie'.

Jackson thus describes the state of Fedor Pavlović in 'Scandal':

The theme of desecration is developed [...] in rising crescendo in 'The Scandal', where in his drunken buffoonery he [Fedor Pavlović; M.D.S.] loses all restraint [...]. Fedor flies out of control here. Objectively, physically, he is dissolving, sagging, losing his features. Subjectively, he is carried away by evil.

By the time of the tragic events, depicted in the novel, Fedor Pavlović has metamorphosed into a living embodiment of 'bezobrazie'. What Fedor Pavlović does to Maksimov might be defined as verbal malmorphozation, that is, verbal ‘obezobraživanie’.

At the very end of 'A Young Seminarian Bent on a Career' ('Seminarist-kar'erist'), the penultimate chapter of 'Neumestnoe Sobranie', the narrator describes the would-be scandal as “unprecedented” and “occurring by inspiration”: "Vse proizoshlo 'po vdochnoveniju'". In terms of Fedor Pavlović's verbal “talent" this “inspiration” may be read as a state of utmost senselessness. At this point the propagator of ‘bestožoč’ (‘senselessness’), old Karamazov, can no longer distinguish between people and signs and automatically superimposes signs of 'bezobrazie' upon people. Thus, to everybody's surprise, old Karamazov metamorphoses innocuous
Maksimov into notorious Von Sohn with such amazing ease: “Tak li, fon Zon? Vot i fon Zon stoit. Zdravstvuj, fon Zon” (“That’s right, isn’t it, Von Sohn? Here’s Von Sohn standing right there. Hello, Von Sohn”). For Fedor Pavlovič, no gap exists between the verbal sign, Von Sohn, and the person, Maksimov. Fedor Pavlovič’s discussion of the Von Sohn affair in front of the whole gathering at Zosima’s cell is critical in terms of the iconography of ‘bezobrazie’ in the novel and deserves a closer inquiry. What seems crucial is that by the end of the scandal Maksimov already responds to Fedor Pavlovič’s malmetamorphic forms of address: “Fon Zon, čego tebe tut ostavat’sja! Prichodi sejčas ko mne v gorod... Ėj, fon Zon, ne upuskaj svoego ščast'ja!” (“Von Sohn, what have you to stay for? Come with me now to town... Hey, Von Sohn, don’t lose your lucky chance”). In the verbal context of Fedor Pavlovič’s actions in Book Two, Maksimov no longer exists. When father and son Karamazov are about to leave, it is Von Sohn who runs up to the carriage to accept Fedor Pavlovič’s invitation: “– I ja, i ja s vami! – vykrikival on, podprygivaja, smejas’ melkim veselym smeškom, s blaženstvom v lice i na vse gotovyj, – voz'mite i menja!” (“‘Me too, I’m going with you!’ he kept shouting, trying to jump in, laughing a thin laugh with a look of glee on his face and ready for anything” [my italics; M.D.S.]). Maksimov has accepted his own metamorphosis. He is Von Sohn. He is sheer ‘bezobrazie’. He is a walking sign of evil. The following words, uttered by Fedor Pavlovič upon beholding the defaced Maksimov, assert the “triumph” of his verbal desecration:

– Nu ne говорил ли я [...] что это фон Зон! Что это настоящий воскресший из мертвых фон Зон! Да как ты вырвался оттуда? Что ты там нафантазировал такого и как ты-то мог от обеда уйти? Ведь надо же медный лоб иметь! У меня лоб, а я, брат, твоему удивляюсь! Прыгай, прыгай скорей! [...] Прыгай на облучок, фон Зон!! [...] (Did not I say he was Von Sohn. It is Von Sohn himself, risen from the dead. Why, how did you tear yourself away? What did you vonsohn there? And how could you get away from the dinner. You must be a brazen-faced fellow! I am that myself, but I am surprised at you! Jump in, jump in! [...] Jump up to the box, Von Sohn!)

The irony of the situation is that by metamorphosing Maksimov into Von Sohn, Fedor Pavlovič inevitably has converted Maksimov into his own double.14 Maksimov is not merely a verbally resurrected Von Sohn, he is a verbal extension of Fedor Pavlovič himself (“s blaženstvom v lice i na vse gotovyj”). Now we can finally answer the set of questions, posed
earlier in the essay and concerned with the nature of Ivan’s displaced violence towards Maksimov. Only at the end of ‘Skandal’ does Ivan find someone who embodies for him the same hated ‘bezobrazie’ of his father. By striking Maksimov, Ivan avoids the social consequences of physically assaulting his own father, Fedor Pavlovič Karamazov. Ivan, the “ideological murderer” of the novel, strikes Maksimov-Von Sohn and thereby brings to conclusion the metamorphoses of ‘bezobrazie’ in Book Two. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, Ivan Karamazov has already “dismembered” his father. What remains is the final act of ‘obezobraživanie’ – one that will round up all the instances of mistranslation/decontextualization in the novel. Smerdjakov commits this final act.

When leaving behind the monastery and Maksimov (now verbally depersonalized by Fedor Pavlovič and symbolically “murdered” by Ivan), Ivan pronounces to his father what appears to be the heart of Ivan’s verdict, “Polno vam vzdoř toloč’, otdochnite chot’ teper’ nemnogo” (“You have talked enough nonsense. You rest a bit at least now”). “To-loč’ vzdoř” (‘to talk nonsense’, literally ‘to pound senseless’) recalls the earlier “vseobščaja bestolcoč” (“universal senselessness”) and “bestolkovščina” (roughly ‘utter stupidity’). “Otdochnite chot’ teper’ nemnogo” may be read in two mutually complementary ways: as ‘rest a bit at least now’ and ‘rest though you haven’t got much time left’.

Throughout ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’, much like elsewhere in the novel, both Ivan Karamazov and his father Fedor Karamazov shift their guilt and project it onto the others. Ivan responds to his father’s acts of malmetamorphozation – omnipresent and affecting everyone – by his own ‘bezobrazie’ of a silent observer. Ultimately, the Karamazov ‘bezobrazie’ metamorphoses into death. The desecrative (con)text of the Karamazov tragedy comes to an end and brings us back to the mysterious epigraph of the novel.

On the eve of Dmitrij Karamazov’s trial, at the very end of Ivan’s third interview with his half-brother Smerdjakov, the latter says the following to Ivan, “Vy, kak Fedor Pavlovič, naibolee-s, izo vseh detej naibolee na nego pochoži vyšli, s odnoju s nimi dušoj-s” (“You are like Fedor Pavlovič, you are more like him than any of his other children. You have the same soul as he had”).
NOTES

1 All citations from the Russian text are from F.M. Dostoevskij, Sobranie sočinenij v desjati tomach, tt. 9-10. Moskva 1957-1958. All citations from the English translation are from Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov (tr. Constance Garnett, ed. Manuel Komroff). New York 1957. For stylistic reasons I have amended the translation in places.


4 See Russkij vestnik, No. 139, January 1879, 138-207; ‘Istorija odnoj sem’ejki’; the four chapters of Book One, Part One introduce the reader into the family history of the Karamazovs and into the events of the novel; the actual narrative proper starts in ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’.

5 Jackson, 304; it is also illuminating to consult the Russian text of Jackson’s article, and, especially, the seminal discussion of ‘obraz’/‘bezobrazie’ in Dostoevskij’s art, see R.L. Džekson, ‘Vynesenie prigovora Fedoru Pavloviču Karamazovu’. Dostoevskij. Materialy i issledovanija. Leningrad 1978, t. 3, 175.

6 Remarkably, in his aforequoted tirade, Fedor Pavlovič manages to ‘naturalize’ Father Zosima by calling him “suśčestvo”, “being”.


8 In light of our discussion, the Russian idiom ‘na koj šut?’ meaning ‘what the devil?’ is significant.

9 I am grateful to R.L. Jackson for sharing his observation that “prekratilas’ samym neožidannym obrazom” (my italics; M.D.S.) points to the core of the central opposition of ‘Neumestnoe sobranie’ and of the entire novel, ‘obraz’ vs. ‘bezobrazie’. Zosima, the quintessential ‘obraz’, image of beauty, serves to oppose Fedor Pavlovič’s desecration, and terminates it, albeit temporarily.

10 For a useful analysis of Fedor Pavlovič’s use of high style see R.L. Busch, Humor in the Major Novels of F.M. Dostoevsky. Columbus 1987, 122-123. Busch’s observations are also relevant to our previous discussion of Fedor Pavlovič’s methods of verbal desecration; Belknap (42) elucidates the parallels between the anecdote-telling techniques of Fedor Pavlovič and Maksimov: “the self-dramatization, the aggressive shame, the almost deliberate faux pas... and above all, a joyful disregard for impossibility”; see also Belknap 41, 23-24, and 96.

11 See Richard Chapple, A Dostoevsky Dictionary. Ann Arbor 1983, 460. In his commentary to Dostoevskij’s notebooks, Wasiolék writes the follow-
ing on the Von Sohn affair: "Von Sohn was lured into a dive on the pretext of being provided with a fifteen-year-old girl. He was robbed and murder-
ed by a gang headed by Maxim Ivanov on 18 November 1869. His body was stuffed into a trunk and sent to Moscow. The baggage ticket was burned. Further murders were planned, but one of the gang confessed and the first murder was discovered" (Edward Wasiolek [tr. and ed.], The Notebooks for The Brothers Karamazov. Chicago 1971, 35, ftm. 49. Also see Terras, 143 and L.P. Grossman, Seminarij po Dostoevskomu. Moskva-Petrograd 1922, 66-67.

12 See Terras, 143.
13 Jackson, 306.
14 See Terras, 143; also not accidental is the fact that at the very end of 'Začem živet takoj čelovek' Miusov looks at Ivan Karamazov and thinks to himself, "Mednyj lob i karamazovskaja sovest'", -- cf. Fedor Pavlović's address to Maksimov, quoted above.
15 See Jackson, 310.
16 'Toloe' ('to pound') of course recalls 'bestoloć' only phonetically; ety-

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