

This clip, from a 1968 Soviet-era adaptation of *Brothers Karamazov* (by Fyodor Dostoevsky), depicts the scene (from the novel) in which Ivan Karamazov (who disputes the existence of God) confronts his devil. Kirill Lavrov plays the role of both Ivan and his devil.

Why did Dostoevsky create Ivan's Devil? What purpose does the Devil serve in the story?

Maybe Ivan's Devil exists to make Ivan face-up to the shame he ought to feel for the role he had in his father's death. If Ivan doesn't publicly own his complicity, in ending the life of Fyodor Pavlovich, what other choice does his Devil give him? Is it to also end his *own* life?

Ivan does feel shame, of this there is little doubt. So why does Dostoevsky need Ivan's Devil to drive the story? Deborah A. Martinsen suggests a reason in her essay, "Shame's Rhetoric, or Ivan's Devil, Karamazov Soul." It starts with how Ivan's Devil first appears:

Ivan's devil appears suddenly, thus reflecting the experience of shame, which comes upon individuals unawares. By exposing Ivan to himself, the devil expresses and embodies Ivan's self-consciousness.

Ivan desires to rid himself of his devil, thereby cutting himself off from the painful aspects of himself. Yet Ivan's devil also tries to plan the seeds of belief in Ivan, thereby reconnecting him with others in such a way as to reorient himself, healing his pain.

The devil as Ivan's self-consciousness thus epitomizes the central paradox of shame: a profoundly isolating experience, shame intimately relates individuals to the universe and their place, or lack of place, in it. Ivan's devil represents Ivan's physical and metaphysical alienation ... [and] thus reflects Ivan's divided self: his sense of alienation as well as his desire for belief and community. (See

*"Shame's Rhetoric, or Ivan's Devil, Karamazov Soul," by Deborah A. Martinsen, included in *A New Word on the Brothers Karamazov*, edited by Robert Louis Jackson, at page 54.)*

Ivan wants to ban his Devil from ever appearing again or ever speaking to him again. But that's not possible, the way Dostoevsky has crafted this story. As we see in the video clip, Ivan's Devil—who is an exhibitionist and a liar—comes and goes as he pleases.

Does Dostoevsky give Ivan a way out? Does he gave him a path to saving himself? Martinsen argues that he does:

*In the novel's progression, shame passes from father to son. But whereas Fyodor Pavlovich [the father] is mired in an inertial cycle of shame and punishment that he perpetuates with his own discourse, Ivan [the son] proves to have a soul that is a true battleground for God and the devil. Though Ivan has a vrun, a spiritual sponger in his soul, he also, as his devil reminds him, authors *The Grand Inquisitor*, and thus has a compassionate, forgiving Christ in his soul.*

Dostoevsky thus shows readers how to heal the paternal legacy of shame and pain. While Fyodor Pavlovich passes his [shame] on, Ivan confronts his.

*The *Brothers Karamazov* closes with Ivan still unconscious. We understand that the battle within him still rages. Yet in generating a progression from father to son, Dostoevsky gives us hope. Ivan's devil may be an exhibitionist liar, but Ivan is not. Like Dostoevsky, Ivan creates fictions that have the power to change, even to save, their readers. In short, Dostoevsky gives Ivan the power to save himself. (See Martinsen, at page 63.)*

Absent from the 1958 American-film version of *Brothers*, the scene depicted in this video clip helps to explain Ivan's later change of mind.

Credits:

Clip from a Russian-language version of *Brothers Karamazov*, starring Kirill Lavrov as Ivan Karamazov.

Subtitles by Lenskii - video clip online, courtesy Lenskii's Channel at YouTube.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Brothers-Karamazov-Ivan-Confronts-His-Devil)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Brothers-Karamazov-Ivan-Confronts-His-Devil)

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