Excerpts from *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoyevsky*
Edited by Joseph Frank & David I. Goldstein

131. **To N. A. Lyubimov**
   
   *Staraya Russa, May 10, 1879*

   Dear Sir, much esteemed Nikolai Alekseyevich,

   I have sent to your name today, at the editorial office of *R[ussian] Messenger*, two and a half printer's sheets of text (minimum) of *The Brothers Karamazov* for the forthcoming May issue of *R.M.*

   This is Book Five, entitled "Pro and Contra," but not all of it, only half. The 2nd half of this 5th book will be mailed to you (in good time) for your June issue, and will consist of *three* printer's sheets. I was forced to split this Book 5 of my novel between 2 numbers of *R.M.* for the following reasons: (1) Even if I had exerted every effort, I would, at best, have completed the whole thing by the end of May (I was too far behind because of the move to Staraya Russa and all the preparations it involved), which would have meant my not getting to see the proofs, and that is something I consider essential. (2) This Book Five is, in my opinion, the culminating point of the novel and it must be completed with special care.

   As you will see from the text I have sent you, it deals with the theme of the ultimate blasphemy and with the central core of the destructive idea of our times, in Russia, among the young generation who have lost contact with reality; and in juxtaposition to blasphemy and anarchism is the refutation of them, which I am preparing now and which will find expression in the last words of the dying Elder Zosima, one of the characters of the novel. Since the difficulty of the task I have set myself is obvious, you will, I am sure, my dear Nikolai Alekseyevich, understand and forgive me for having preferred to extend it over 2 issues, rather than spoil the culminating chapter by excessive haste. On the whole, this chapter will be filled with action. But in the text I have sent you today, I draw only the character of one of the principal persons in the novel, as seen in the formulation of his fundamental be-
lies. That body of beliefs is precisely what I recognize as the Synthesis of today's Russian anarchism. It is the denial, not of God, but of the significance of His creation. Socialism as a whole originated in and began with the denial of the concept of historical reality and has become a program of destruction and anarchy. The original anarchists were, in many instances, people of sincere convictions. My hero chooses an argument that, in my opinion, is irrefutable—the senselessness of children's suffering—and from it reaches the conclusion that all historical reality is an absurdity. I do not know whether I have carried it off well or not, but I do know that the personality of my hero couldn't be more realistic. (Many people reproached me for the implausibility of many of my characters in The Devils, but later, believe it or not, actual developments proved them all to be real, which goes to show that they had been correctly conceived. For instance, K. P. Pobedonossev told me of two or three cases, among the anarchists who had been arrested, who strikingly resembled certain characters in The Devils.) Everything that my hero says in the text that has been sent to you is based on reality. All the stories about the children are actually true, they were reported in newspapers that I could refer you to, and there is nothing that I have invented. The general who set his dogs on a child—it's all fact, an actual event that was reported last winter in Archives, I think, and then reprinted in a number of other newspapers.

The blasphemy of my hero will be solemnly refuted in the next chapter (to appear in your June number), and I am working on it now in fear, awe, and reverence, since I consider my task (the crushing of anarchism) as a civic duty. Wish me luck, much esteemed Nikolai Alekseyevich.

I am awaiting the proofs with the greatest impatience. My address is: Staraya Russa, to F. M. Dostoyevsky.

I do not think that there is a single unseemly word in the text I have sent you. There is only that bit about the torturers who, to train a little girl of five not to soil her bed at night, smeared her with her own excrement. But I beg and beseech you not to delete that. It is taken from a current criminal trial. In all the newspapers (only 2 months ago—Mecklenburg, the mother, the Voice), they used the word “excrement.” It cannot be softened, Nikolai Alekseyevich, it would be just deplorable if that had to be done! We are not writing for 10-year-old children. But I am quite sure that, even without my asking, you would keep my text intact.

One more small thing. The lackey Smerdyakov sings a lackey's song, which contains the following couplet:

The glorious crown,
As long as my beloved is well.

I did not invent that song, but rather I noted it down when I heard it in Moscow 40 years ago. It was composed by a group of merchant's clerks of
the 3rd category and it became popular among lackeys. It has never been recorded by any anthologist and I am the first to use it.

The actual text of the couplet is, however:

The Tsar’s crown,
As long as my beloved is well.

And so, if you find it at all possible, for heaven’s sake restore the word “Tsar’s” instead of “glorious,” which I had substituted for it only to be on the safe side (the word “glorious” would pass on its own).

How is Mikhail Nikiforovich’s health? Please convey my profoundest respect to him.

Kindly remember me to your wife.

And please be assured, much esteemed Nikolai Alekseyevich, of my very best feelings toward you.

Your obedient servant,

F. Dostoyevsky

P.S. Wouldn’t it be possible to announce on the final page that the conclusion of Book Five, “Pro and Contra,” will appear in the next issue, no. 6?

I will mail the text for the June number by June 10 (at the very latest) and possibly before that. This way, I will catch up with the schedule and will be sending you my material before the 10th of every month. I will then publish every month without interruption.

131. The story of the general who had set his dogs on a child appeared in Russian Messenger in 1877. A peasant boy had injured the foot of one of a nobleman’s hounds, and as punishment the boy was ordered to run naked across the fields and the hounds were let loose after him. His mother tried to rescue him but was driven away; she lost her mind and died two days later.

Similarly, the story about the girl whose parents smeared her with her own excrement appeared in the Voice in 1879. Though they lived in Kharkov, the mother came from Mecklenburg, and at the trial (the child had also been beaten, deprived of food, and kept in unsanitary conditions), the prosecutor insisted that such treatment would never have happened among Russians. The Voice’s correspondent disagreed and recalled an incident of the maltreatment of a child that he had witnessed in Kirsanov. In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoyevsky combined the two stories in Ivan’s conversation with Alyosha (chapter 4, book 5, part 2).

Despite what Dostoyevsky says about the “lackey’s song,” a very similar song had been published in an anthology that appeared in Petersburg in 1817, though it made no reference to a crown. When Smerdyakov’s verse appeared in the Russian Messenger (chapter 2, book 5, part 2), it contained Dostoyevsky’s preferred wording, “The Tsar’s crown” (Tsarskaya korona).
To N. A. Lyubimov  
Staraya Russa, June 11, 1879

Dear Sir, much esteemed Nikolai Alekseyevich:

Two days ago I sent off to the Russian Messenger the continuation of The Karamazovs for the June issue (the conclusion of chapter 5, "Pro and Contra"). This completes what "the lips utter in pride and blasphemy." The modern denier, a rabid one, declares openly that he stands for what the devil advises, and claims that this will more certainly bring happiness to mankind than the teachings of Christ. To our Russian socialism, which is so stupid (but also dangerous, because the young generation is involved in it), the lesson must seem very forceful—one's daily bread, the Tower of Babel (i.e., the future reign of socialism), and the complete enslavement of freedom of conscience—that is what this desperate denier and atheist comes to! The difference is that our socialists (and you know very well that they do not consist only of the underground nihilist scum) knowingly act like Jesuits and liars, refusing to admit that their ideal is an ideal of the coercion of the human conscience and the reduction of mankind to the level of cattle, whereas my socialist (Ivan Karamazov) is a sincere man who openly admits that he agrees with the Grand Inquisitor's view of mankind and with the contention that belief in Christ assumes that man is a much nobler creature than he really is. So the question is asked point blank: "You, the would-be future saviors of mankind, do you despise man or do you respect him?"

And all this is supposedly done in the name of love for mankind. They are saying, in effect: "The commandments of Christ are stern and abstract and unbearable for the weak," and so, instead of the law of Freedom and Light, they impose on men, through bread, the law of chains and enslavement.

In the next book, there will be the death of Elder Zosima and his last conversations with his friends. This is not a sermon, but rather a sort of story, an account of an incident in his own life. If I can bring it off, I will have accomplished something useful: I will force them to admit that a pure and
ideal Christian is not an abstraction but a tangible, real possibility that can be contemplated with our own eyes and that it is in Christianity alone that the salvation of the Russian land from all her afflictions lies. I pray God that I may succeed; it will be a stirring piece if only I am granted sufficient inspiration. But above all, the theme is one that would never even occur to any other contemporary writer or poet, and so, it is completely original. It is for this theme that the entire novel is being written, and I only hope that I will carry it off—that's what concerns me most now! I will send you some material for the July issue without fail, and by July 10 at the latest. I will do my utmost to keep this promise.

I received your letter, much esteemed Nikolai Alekseyevich, concerning the money you will be sending me, and I am waiting impatiently for the promised thousand rubles. I have almost no money left and I am rather reluctant to borrow any. And so, I beg you most urgently to send me the thousand rubles as soon as possible and, if you can, without delay, because I need it very badly.

Where is Mikhail Nikiforovich now, in Moscow or at his country estate? And how is his health? Please give him my warmest wishes and regards.
Dear Sir, much esteemed Nikolai Alekseyevich:

I hasten to send you herewith Book Six of The Karamazovs, the whole of it, to be published in the no. 8 (August) issue of Russian Messenger. I have called this 6th book “A Russian Monk,” a bold and provocative title, for it will incite all the critics who dislike us to cry out: “Is this what a Russian monk is like? How dare one to put him on such a pedestal?” But so much the better if they cry out, don’t you agree? (And I am certain that they won’t be able to restrain themselves.) I am convinced that I have not sinned against reality: I have done justice not only to an ideal but also to reality.

I am not certain, though, that I have done it successfully. I myself feel that I have not been able to express ¼ of what I would have liked to. Nevertheless, I view this Book Six as the culminating point of the novel.

It goes without saying that many of the teachings of my Elder Zosima (or should I rather say, his way of expressing them) are inherent in his personality, i.e., in the manner in which his character is portrayed. And although I fully share the thoughts that he expresses, if I were to express them myself, in my own name, I would do so in another language and in another form. But he could not express himself in any other language or in any other spirit than the ones I have ascribed to him. Otherwise, I would have failed to create a live literary character. This is true, for example, of Zosima’s discourses on what is a monk, or on servants and masters, or on whether one can sit in judgment over another man, etc. I modeled this character and figure on the ancient Russian monks and holy men: along with their profound humility they had limitless and naive hopes for Russia’s future, for her moral
and even political destiny. Didn't the metropolitans Sts. Sergius, Pyotr, and Aleksei always think of Russia in those terms?

I would be extremely grateful to you (I implore you), much esteemed Nikolai Alekseyevich, to entrust the proofs of this book to a reliable editor, since my absence prevents me from attending to them myself. I beg you to pay special attention to the proofreading of half-sheets 10 to 17 inclusive (the section headed “On the Holy Scriptures in the Life of Father Zosima”). This is an exalted and poetic chapter; the prototype is taken from certain teachings of Tikhon Zadonsky, and the ingenuity of the narrative from the book of the wanderings of the monk Parfeny. Please take a look at it yourself, Nikolai Alekseyevich—be like a father to me! And after the proofs of the entire book have been gone over, please submit them to Mikhail Nikiforovich. I would very much like him to read them and say what he thinks, because I value his opinion very highly.

I hope you won't find anything that you will have to delete in this book or that you will have to correct editorially—not a single word, I assure you of that.

I would also be very much obliged if you would keep all the divisions into chapters and subchapters just as I have them. I have introduced into the novel something that is purported to be someone else's manuscript (the Note of Aleksei Karamazov) and it goes without saying that this manuscript has been divided up by Aleksei Karamazov in his own way. Here I will inject a NBene of protest: in the June issue, in the chapter “The Grand Inquisitor,” you not only failed to respect my divisions, you even had 10 consecutive pages without a single paragraph break. This upset me a great deal and I am lodging a cordial complaint with you.

The next book, Book Seven, entitled “Grushenka,” which will conclude Part Two of The Karamazovs this year, will be sent to you without fail from Staraya Russa around September 10. This Book Seven is meant for publication in the September and October numbers of Russian Messenger. This Book Seven will be only about 4 printer's sheets long, so that there will be only 2 printer's sheets for September at most. That cannot be helped, however, since Book Seven consists of two separate episodes, which are, as it were, two independent stories. But then, with the ending of Part Two, the spirit and the meaning of the novel is completely fulfilled. If it is not, it is I, the artist, who am to blame. As for Part Three of the novel (at most the same number of printer's sheets as Part One), I am postponing it, as I have already written you, until the coming year. It's my health, my health, that has interfered! Thus, Part Two will be, as it may seem, disproportionately long. But it just happened that way and cannot be helped.

I would like to tell you how very grateful I am to you for the favor you did me in sending the money to my wife in Staraya Russa as I asked you to. She has already written me to tell me that she has received it.
And now I will ask another favor of you, a bit in advance: Please do not forget, much esteemed Nikolai Alekseyevich, to see to it that the August number of R[ussian] Messenger is sent promptly to Staraya Russa! I expect to get home just around the time that it will be coming out.

Please accept the assurance of my-profound and sincere respect,

Your faithful servant,

Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Book Six, “The Russian Monk,” which is being sent now, consists of a total of 53 half-sheets of letter-size paper.

138. St. Sergius (1314?–1392?) was the founder of the Troitse-Sergiyevskaya monastery at Zagorsk. Metropolitan Pyotr (d. 1326) supported the princes of Moscow in their struggle for the throne against the princes of Tver, and he became the first metropolitan to be installed in Moscow. Metropolitan Aleksei (d. 1378) played a similar role for Dmitry Donskoi in establishing Moscow as the center of resistance to the Tatars.

The monk Parfeny (d. 1688), of the Guslitsky Preobrazhensky monastery, was the author of A Tale of Wandering through Russia, Moldavia, Turkey, and the Holy Land (Skazaniye o stranstvii po Rossi, Moldavii, Turtsoi, i Sv. Zemle, 1856).

142. To K. P. Pobedonostsev

Ems, August 25/September 6, 1879

Much esteemed and most worthy Konstantin Petrovich,

I have received your two letters and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for both of them, particularly for the first, in which you speak of my emotional state. You are perfectly, profoundly right and your thoughts have plainly buoyed me up. But I am sick in spirit and full of apprehension. Sitting here in sad and total isolation, I was bound to become depressed. Nevertheless, I ask you: Is it really possible to remain calm in our times? Why, you yourself, in your 2nd letter (and what is a letter?), point out all the intolerable things that are taking place. It so happens that, just now, I am still busy working on my novel (and I will finish it only next year!), but I am tormented by a desire to resume my Diary because there really are things that I have to say, just the things you would wish me to say, not sterile, commonplace polemics, but firm, fearless words. The main trouble is that now even those who have something to say are afraid. And what is it they are afraid of? Of a ghost, unquestionably. The “all-European” ideas in science and enlightenment stand despottically over everybody and no one dares to speak his mind. I understand only too well why Gradovsky’s last few articles, in which he hailed the students as members of the intelligentsia, met with such huge success among our Europeans: it is precisely because he sees the cure for all
the present horrors of the mess we are in in that same old Europe, and in Europe alone.

As for my literary status (I have never spoken to you about this), I consider it almost phenomenal that a man consistently writing against European principles, who compromised himself once and for all with The Devils, i.e., as an exponent of reaction and obscurantism, and a man who, notwithstanding the Europeanizers, their journals, newspapers, and literary critics, is, nevertheless, recognized by our youth, the very same youth who have been corrupted by the nihilist scum, etc. I have been informed of that from many quarters, both by individuals who have approached me and in collective declarations. They have told me that they look to me alone for a heartfelt and vibrant word and that they consider me alone their guiding writer. These statements by the young are well known to all our literati, to the pirates of the pen, and to the crooks of the publishing business, and they are flabbergasted by them—if it were not so, they wouldn’t leave me alone to write so freely. They would tear me to pieces like a pack of dogs, but they are afraid, and in their bewilderment, they wait and see which way the wind will blow.

I’ve been reading that miserable Voice here—my God, how stupid, how sickeningly apathetic and quiescently petrified it is. Believe it or not, at times my rage turns to hilarity, for instance upon reading that 11-year-old thinker Yev[geny] Markov on women’s rights. This is the acme of stupidity. You write that you did not like the issue of Putyskovich’s publication. You are certainly right, but after all it is quite impossible even to say anything to the man, let alone give him advice, because he is very touchy and so sure of himself. Actually, all he cares about is circulation, but as for how he goes about all the rest, he is not to any great extent weighed down by scruples.

Your opinion of what you have read of The Karamazov (about the force and vigor of the writing) flatters me greatly, but then, you also raise the absolutely essential question: That thus far I don’t seem to have the answer to all these atheistic arguments, and an answer is indispensable. Yes, you have something there, and this is now my major worry and concern. For I attempt, as a matter of fact, to give the answer to this whole negative side in Book Six, “A Russian Monk,” which will be coming out on August 31. And that’s why I am trembling over it, wondering whether it will be an adequate answer. What makes it even more difficult is that the answer itself is not a direct one, not really a point-by-point refutation of the ideas formulated earlier (by the Grand Inquisitor and earlier), but only an indirect one. What is offered here is a worldview that stands in direct opposition to the one that was previously presented, but again the opposition is not made point by point but, so to speak, in the form of an artistic picture. And that is just what worries me—i.e., will I be understood and will I even come close to my
goal. And here, on top of everything else, there were certain artistic imperatives: I needed to draw a character who was both humble and sublime, whereas real life is full of the ridiculous and is only sublime in its inner meaning; and so, to satisfy the demands of art, I was also forced to touch upon some of the coarser aspects of existence when telling the life story of my monk. Then, there are also some of the monk’s teachings, which people will inveigh against as being absurd because they are too exalted. I know very well that they are absurd in the everyday sense, but, in another, deeper sense, they seem quite appropriate. In any case, I am very uneasy and I would like very much to have your opinion, because I esteem and value your opinion very highly. I did write it with great love.

I see, however, that I have let myself go in telling you about my work. I shall be in Petersburg on September 1st or 2nd (hurrying to Staraya Russa to rejoin my family), and I will come by to see you (I cannot tell you in advance at what time it will be), and if I’m lucky enough to find you in we can have a moment together. Good-bye, then, my most kind and sincerely esteemed Konstantin Petrovich, may God send you many years of health—and no better wish is needed in our time, because people like you must go on living. From time to time, a silly and sinful thought crosses my mind: what would happen to Russia if we, the last of the Mohicans, should die? True, a second later I smile scornfully at the thought. Nevertheless, we must go on living and keep doing our duty. And are you not a man of duty? By the way: When I told Putsykovitch about your letter in which you described the sending of the political prisoners to Sakhalin, he started badgering me to let him publish that passage in the Citizen. It goes without saying that I refused.

All yours,

F. Dostoyevsky.

142. In an article in the Voice in August 1879, Gradovsky had objected to the “going-to-the-people” movement and had advised students instead: “You can be useful to the people only by remaining yourselves, i.e., members of the Russian intelligentsia, only by gradually coming to swell the ranks of educated, reasonable, and moral Russian citizens.”

Yevgeny Lvovich Markov (1835–1903) was a liberal writer and critic who contributed to many magazines and published popular travel sketches and novels.