

The Idiot Study Guide

The Idiot by Fyodor Dostoevsky

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Plot Summary

The *Idiot*, by the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, tells the tragic story of Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin. The Prince is a kind, modest man and an unfortunate sufferer of epilepsy. After spending years in an insane asylum in Switzerland, he travels back to his native Russia to find his ancestors. Experiencing society for the first time, he finds himself an outsider and open to manipulation.

The novel opens with Myshkin traveling by train from Warsaw to St. Petersburg. Myshkin is an affable man and soon begins a conversation with another gentleman in his carriage named Rogozhin. From the outset, it is obvious Myshkin is exceptionally naïve. He talks freely of his time in an insane asylum and does not hold back the purpose of his trip to Russia. Rogozhin and another man, Lebedev, laugh at him, but rather than take offense, Myshkin laughs with them. Soon Rogozhin recognizes Myskin for a good-natured soul and invites him to stay at his house in St Petersburg.

Once in St Petersburg Myshkin immediately makes his way to the home of Madame Yephanchin. General Yephanchin receives him cordially and says he can help him out. As the prince works on an example of his excellent handwriting, the General talks to his assistant Ganja about Nastassya Filippovna. Ganja pulls out a photo of her, getting the attention of the Prince. The Prince thinks she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen.

The general introduces Prince Myshkin to his wife. He tells Madam Yephanchin that the Prince is simple, but once he leaves, Madam Yephanchin takes to the Prince immediately. As in his previous meetings, the Prince talks about his past and even laughs along when he his being laughed at. The Prince tells the woman about Nastassya Filippovna's photograph in her husband's study, and Madam Yephanchin demands to see it, saying her husband is keeping something from her. The Prince brings the photograph and immediately Madam Yephanchin demands to see Ganja. When he arrives, he denies that he is arranging to marry Nastassya Filippovna.

Ganja invites the Prince to stay at his house. On the way, Ganja accuses him of gossiping and tells the Prince he is an idiot. The Prince becomes so angry that Ganja apologizes and they continue onto his house. At the house Ganja and his family argue about his impending marriage to Nastassya Filippovna. Feeling uncomfortable, the Prince leaves the room. As he walks into the hallway Nastassya Filippovna knocks on the door. Her presence causes great unease, particularly when Ganja realizes he now has to explain the situation to his father. Just as he is leading his father to another room, the doorbell again rings. This time it is Rogozin. Rogozhin claims he is in love with Nastassya and attempts to win her with 18,000 roubles. Ganja's sister Varvara calls Anastasia Filippovna shameless. Ganja attacks his sister, but the Prince hold him back. Ganja turns and strikes the Prince across the face. Later with every one gone Ganja apologizes. He confides he is only marrying Nastassya for money.



Prince Myshkin decides to warn Nastassya about Ganja's intentions. When the Prince arrives at her house, she is holding a party. The other guests show their displeasure at him arriving uninvited, Nastassya Filippovna is delighted. She enlivens the atmosphere with a party game involving the men describing the worst thing they have done in their life. After the game, she asks the Prince if she should marry Ganja. The Prince says no.

Rogozhin enters the party with his friends and throws 100,000 roubles on the table. He says the money is Natassya's if she agrees to marry him. The Prince quickly declares his own love for Natassya. She questions whether he can provide for her, and he shows everyone a letter proving he is about to inherit a huge sum of money. Initially Natassya says she will marry him but then changes her mind and decides to leave with Rogozhin. Before she goes she grabs the 100,000 roubles and throws the money on the fire, saying anyone who risks their skin to retrieve it can keep it. She leaves with Rogozhin and the prince sets off in pursuit.

The Prince goes to Moscow to accept his inheritance. He goes back to St Petersburg 6 months later in June. On the railway platform, he feels a pair of eyes staring at him through the crowd, but when he turns to see who it is, they have disappeared. The Prince continues to Lebedev's house. He asks him if he knows the whereabouts of Natassya. Lebedev says she is likely to be staying at a summerhouse in Pavlovsk. The Prince asks Lebedev if he can rent his apartment in Pavlovsk from him and Lebedev accepts the offer.

Myshkin visits Rogozhin. They became close during Myshkin's time in Moscow and refer to each other as brother. The conversation soon turns to Nastassya, and Rogozhin tells the Prince she left him on his wedding day. Myshkin says she cannot live with Rogozhin because of his paranoia, but Rogozhin tells him the reason is that she is love with the prince. They talk about religion and swap crosses, and Rogozhin says he has given up on Nastassya and the Prince can have her.

The Prince feels unwell and knows he is on the verge of a seizure. He wanders back to his hotel. As he walks up the stairs, Rogozhin appears with a knife, intent on killing him. However, the Prince has an epileptic seizure and falls down the steps. Ganja's younger brother Koyla recognizes the Prince and takes him to Lebedev. Lebedev says the Prince needs rest and the three of them travel to Pavlovsk.

Initially Lebedev is protective over the Prince, but eventually allows him visitors. The Yephanchins are the first to come. A number of other people follow, including Keller, Burdovsky and Hippolite. Burdovsky claims the Prince has cheated him out of his inheritance. In their company Koyla reads an article about the Prince, which slanders his good name. The Prince is upset about the article. He tells Burdovsky he is not entitled to the inheritance, but because he has genuinely been tricked, he will give him 10,000 roubles. Burdovsky is angry at the Prince's offer and gives the money back.

As the guests leave, Nastassya's carriage pulls up outside. She tells Aglaya's suitor Radomsky he owes her money. Radomsky denies any knowledge of the IOUs, and no one can work out why she said it, suspecting something underhand is going on. Madam



Yepanchin visits the Prince to ask why he wrote a letter to Aglaya. She wants to know if the Prince is love with Aglaya. The Prince says he looks upon Aglaya as a sister. In reply Madam Yephanchin says he will never marry her daughter.

Madam Yephanchin receives a letter stating Aglaya is in correspondence with Nastassya Filippovna. The information enrages her, and she demands to know exactly what is happening. The Prince arrives at the Yepanchin's house, and Aglaya claims he is the only person in the room worth anything. Later on, she proclaims she will not marry the Prince, and the rest of the room laugh at her remark. Now in a jovial mood, they decide to visit the park. At the park, the Prince sees Nastassya walking towards the group. Again, she approaches Radomsky and speaks to him as if they were acquainted. Later on, Myshkin meets Rogozhin. Rogozhin tells the Prince that Natassya is trying to marry him off to Aglaya.

The Prince meets Aglaya in the park. She accuses him of being in love with her, but the Prince denies it. In return, Aglaya says she is in love with Ganja and that the previous day Ganja had burnt his hand as a mark of his love. The Prince tells her she is lying because he has seen Ganja and his hand is fine. Madam Yephanchin approaches the couple and Aglaya runs away. In a reflective frame of mind, the Prince goes on another walk in the park and meets Nastassya. She asks if he is happy, but before he can answer, she disappears. Rogozhin then approaches and tells the Prince they are heading back to Moscow.

The Prince declares his love for Aglaya, but she tells him he is an idiot. She claims she can never marry someone like that. At the same time everyone knows she is lying, and Madam Yephanchin decides if it is her daughter's fate to marry the Myshkin, then so be it. The Yephanchins invite the Prince over to meet some important people. At the gathering the Prince initially says nothing, but they all arouse his interest when they chat about Catholicism. The Prince goes on a harangue about how Catholicism is bad before having a seizure. The company leave the Yephanchins saying they do not think an ill man such as the Prince is suitable for Aglaya.

Aglaya arranges a meeting with Natassya and invites the Prince along. The two women hate each other and argue bitterly. Nastassya claims she only has to say the word and the Prince will marry her. The two women look at the Prince to see if it is true and his hesitant reply sends Aglaya running from the house. He is about to run after her when Nastassya faints in his arms. After the event, the Prince stays with Natassya, and they arrange to get married.

On the day of the wedding, Nastassya sees Rogozhin among the guests and asks him to save her. Rogozhin immediately takes her to St. Petersburg. Upon hearing the news, the Prince follows them to the city. Myshkin goes to the same hotel where Rogozhin tried to stab him, presuming Rogozhin will come to find him. His presumption proves right and Rogozhin takes the Prince back to his house and up to his bedroom. On the bed behind a curtain, Nastassya Filippovna lies stabbed to death. The Prince and Rogozhin stay with her body until morning. When the police enter the house they find

the Prince and Rogozhin in a state of delirium. The Prince is admitted to an insane asylum and the courts sentence Rogozhin to 15 years in Siberia.



Part 1 Ch. I-V

Part 1 Ch. I-V Summary

In a third class carriage from Warsaw to St. Petersburg, three men partake in a lively discussion. One of the men is Prince Myshkin. He is in his early twenties and so honest and open, he comes across as an innocent. He tells his two companions, Rogozhin and Lebedev, he suffers from epilepsy and has spent the last few years in a hospital in Switzerland. The other two men laugh at his openness, but Myshkin takes no offense and laughs along with them. As the conversation continues, Myshkin mentions that he is a Prince. The statement raises the interest of Lebedev, who has heard of the Myshkin family. Myshkin says he is the one of the last remaining, and he is going to Russia to find Madame Yephanchin, a distant relation.

Rogozhin tells Lebedev he is one of the famous Rogozhin's. Lebedev's incredulous response begins a rivalry between the two men that lasts the remainder of the journey. Rogozhin tells Lebedev and Myshkin that his father has just died, and he coming back to Russia to claim his inheritance. Sometime before he had deeply upset his father by buying Nastassya Flippovna earrings with money his father gave him to pay off an account. Lebedev proves to Rogozhin that he knows Nastassha Flippovna, and Rogozhin turns even more aggressive towards Lebedev.

Rogozhin turns his attention back to Prince Myshkin, inviting him along to meet Nastassya Flippovna. Myshkin accepts the offer, but first he has to travel to Liteyny.

The Prince arrives at General Yephanchin's house in Liteyny. The General is a self-made man, who made his name and fortune through shareholding. Now at 56, he has three daughters and a wife whom he loves.

Initially the footman treats Myshkin suspiciously. In the footman's eyes, he claims to be a Prince, yet dresses poorly and carries few belongings. The footman insists Myshkin stay in the anteroom. Eventually however he decides the Prince is merely simple and despite himself begins to enjoy the Prince's conversation. Myshkin talks eloquently about execution until the footman grants him permission to smoke, a request he had previously denied him. Just as Myshkin is about to light his pipe, another footman walks into the room and invites Myskin through to the General.

The General's assistant, Ganya, takes Myshkin into the General's office. The General greets him cordially; however, when Myskin tells him why he is here, the General admits he cannot help him. Myshkin is about to leave when the General changes his mind. He sees what a genuine person the Prince is and continues their conversation, delving deeper into the Prince's personal life. Myshkin tells the General about his affliction, his time in hospitals and his current situation. The General asks if he has any skills and after a few modest denials, the Prince admits he is an excellent calligrapher. Ganja fetches a pen and some paper and Myshkin goes to work on some examples.



The General meanwhile finds a picture of Nastassya Flippovna, prompting an animated conversation between himself and Ganja. When Myshkin finishes his work, he asks to see the picture and proceeds to tell them of his conversation with Rogozhin on the train. Both Ganya and the General know of Rogozhin, but neither of them like him.

Myshkin's writing examples impress the General. He tells Myshkin he can find him both a job and a place to stay in St. Petersburg with Ganja. Myshkin again looks at the picture of Nastassya Filippovna and says she has a beautiful, yet tragic face. Ganja asks him if he thinks Rogozhin will marry her, and Myshkin says yes, but he will murder her the next day. Myshkin's answer turns Ganja pale.

The General prepares to see his wife and three daughters. All his daughters are beautiful and particularly the youngest, Aglaya. She is so lovely the family have plans for her to marry the richest, most perfect man they can find. The General's friend, Totsky, asks him if he can marry one of his daughters. The General knows Totsky to be wealthy and of good character. He offers him his eldest daughter, Alexandra. At 25, she is sensible, loyal and handsome.

Unfortunately, Totsky has one major problem. Eighteen years ago, he took in Nastassya when she was a child, after both her parents died. Initially Nastassya was a normal young girl, shy and emotional, but as she grew older, her behavior became erratic. Totsky feared she would ruin his high social standing and he has unsuccessfully tried to entice her into a marriage. He must find a suitor if he is going to marry Alexandra.

The General suggests Ganya will make an excellent husband, and it is common knowledge he had been in love with her for a number of years. The General and Totsky visit Nastassya with the proposal. To their surprise, Nastassya greets them pleasantly. She accepts Totsky's offer of money and then says she will seriously think about marrying Ganja. It soon becomes clear Ganja's family is not so keen on Nastassya. To complicate matters further, the General has also become an admirer of Nastassya and has even bought her a gift of pearl earrings. His wife has found out about it, but the General thinks he can calm his wife down. Usually the General would run away from such a potential conflict, but with Prince Myshkin in tow, he feels quite safe.

The General leaves Myshkin outside and approaches his wife. He makes the Prince sound so strange his wife prepares herself for the worst. The General calls Myshkin in and leaves for an important date.

Madam Yephanchin sees her husband was exaggerating, and she takes to Myshkin immediately, talking to him about their family's prestigious pasts. Her three daughters, Adelaida, Aglaya and Alexandra, also take to the Prince, and it is not long before his attentions turn to the three young women. They ask him about his illness and his travels and Myshkin responds eloquently. He tells a few interesting and vivid stories about people waiting to die before Adelaide asks him to tell a story about when he fell in love. The Prince says he has never fallen in love, but he has experienced the feeling of extreme happiness.



Part 1 Ch. I-V Analysis

In this opening section, Dostoevsky introduces the three major characters of the book, Prince Myshkin, Rogozhin and Nastassya Flippovna, foreshadowing the intense love triangle they will develop through the novel. He paints the Prince as an innocent, and, combined with his light complexion and blue eyes, there is already a suggestion of a Christ-like figure that becomes more obvious in later chapters. In contrast, Rogozhin is the devil, and, in fact, Rog in Russian means horn. He has a dark complexion and black eyes and his aggressive behavior on the train is in comparison to the Prince's gentle nature. Despite these differences, they share similarities that mark them both as potential suitors for Nastassya. Both of them are exceptionally honest and open people. Rogozhin and Lebedev laugh at the Prince for telling people that the doctors have just released him from a mental institute, but Rogozhin unashamedly tells everyone he is on the way to claim his inheritance from his recently deceased father, who he had previously fallen out with. The natural ease in which they both impart the information shows the individuality that will attract a similar interest in Nastassya.

Lebedev represents the other side of society, to which the aforementioned characters can never quite give themselves. He also has a sense of himself, but he is restrained by a need to fit in. The character of Ganja personifies this need. Ganja tries desperately to be original, but it only leads him to becoming someone he is not. Like so many of the other characters, for example Aglaya and Madam Yephanchin, he shows respect for the uniqueness of Rogozhin, the Prince and Nastassya, but can only express it through anger. In this section, for example, he accuses the Prince of being an unashamed gossip.

The reader does not meet Nastassya Filppovna in this chapter, but the other characters bring up her name on numerous occasions. First, Rogozhin declares his love for her on the train carriage, and second General Yephanchin and Ganja discuss her while they look at her picture. The Prince sees the picture and says she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. His declaration that she has a tragic face foreshadows not only her death, but also the role she plays as both the Prince and Rogozhin's lover. As a Christ-like figure, the Prince has a need to cleanse Nastassya's soul and help her find her happiness. Rogozhin understands he can never help her in that way but knows marriage to her will fulfill his darker desires. Near the end of the section, the Prince tells Ganja that Rogozhin will probably murder Nastassya, foreshadowing not only the murder at the end of the book, but Rogozhin's foreboding and murderous presence that casts a dark shadow across the whole narrative.



Part 1 Ch. VI - X

Part 1 Ch. VI - X Summary

Still chatting away to Myshkin, the four women ask what he can see in their faces. He is very complimentary of Alexandra, Madam Yephachin and Adelaide, but he avoids commenting on Aglaya. When they mention he has left out the most beautiful girl in the room, the Prince says he knows, but she is so beautiful he can scarcely look at her. They press the Prince further, and he says she is as lovely as Nastassya Filippovna. All four women show surprise the Prince knows who Nastassya is and ask where he met her. The Prince says the General showed him her picture. At once Madam Yephachin tells him to fetch the picture and to bring it back to her. The Prince goes back to the General's study. Ganja is upset the Prince has told the women and questions the Prince's motives. The Prince apologizes and says he meant no harm. The Prince's calm response pacifies Ganja and he becomes friendlier, asking the Prince if he can deliver an important and secret letter to Aglaya. The Prince agrees and leaves the study with both the letter and Nastassya's picture.

The moment he sees Aglaya he hands her the letter and rejoins the others. Upon seeing the picture Madam Yephanchin insists on talking to Ganja, knowing instinctively her husband is arranging marriages behind her back. Ganja denies any knowledge of marriage, and Madam Yephanchin tells him she will remember he said that when the marriage goes through.

Ganja and Myshkin find themselves alone. Ganja accuses Myshkin of telling Madam Yephanchin about the marriage, but Aglaya's entrance stops him from going any further. Aglaya asks the Prince to write something down in her album, which he gladly does. She then guides the Prince away from Ganja and asks him to read the letter Ganja wrote. The letter asks Aglaya to save him from marrying Nastassya. Aglaya tells the Prince she will not be a compromise.

As Myshkin walks back to Ganja's house, Ganja once more turns on the Prince. He says the Prince is an idiot, and for the first time Myshkin reacts angrily. He says he was an idiot when he was ill, but he is now much better. He tells Ganja he would prefer to pay for his lodgings than to stay with someone who thinks so low of him. Ganja immediately apologizes and persuades the Prince to change his mind.

Ganja and his family own a boarding house, run by Ganja's mother and sister. Myshkin chats to the family and Ganja leaves with a friend. On Ganja's return, an argument begins between Ganja, his mother and sister about his impending marriage to Nastassya Filippovna. Eventually Myshkin gets up to leave, prompting Ganja to imply he has been eavesdropping on the conversation. Myshkin decides not to reply to the comment and walks into the hall where he hears the doorbell. With no one else around to answer Myshkin opens the door to Nastassya. Her presence surprises the Prince so



much he can hardly utter a word, and Nastassya takes him for a footman. She demands Myshkin to announce her to the family.

Nastassya walks through to meet Ganja's family for the first time. The scene is not unpleasant, but the atmosphere is highly formal, and Nastassya gives the impression of someone waiting for something happen. Ganja's father's unease increases at Nastassya's presence. Ganja has yet to tell his father of his marriage plans, and Nastassya seems aware of this, cajoling the General to tell her a story. The general tells a tale of how he fell out with the Yephanchin family. He recalls a time he was smoking a cigar out of a train window. An English lady took offense at his smoking, grabbed his cigar and threw it out of the window. In reply, the General grabbed her dog and threw in the same direction as the cigar. The distraught lady happened to be friends with Madam Yephanchin, and since this episode his relationship with the family has dissolved. Nastassya thanks him for the wonderful story, but tells the room she read the same story in a newspaper two weeks ago. An embarrassed Ganja is requesting his father's presence in another room when the doorbell rings again.

Koyla answers the door to a drunk Rogozhin, who charges through to the drawing room and confronts Ganja, asking if it true that he is going to marry Nastassya. His anger turns to surprise when he spies Nastassya. She seems just as uneasy at his presence, but her unease soon turns to delight when she reaps all the attention. Rogozhin claiming he is rich pulls out 18,000 roubles and hands it to her. She laughs and calls him a peasant. Ganja's sister is not impressed and calls Nastassya shameless. Her comment angers Ganja and he strikes her repeatedly across the face. Myshkin steps in to stop him and Ganja strikes him as well. The two men stare at each other before Myshkin breaks down into tears, slumping down into a corner of the room. He says Ganja will feel ashamed of what he has done. The Prince's passive response encourages sympathy from everyone. Rogozhin suggests the Prince should come and stay with him. Eventually Nastassya gets up to leave, kissing Ganja's mother's hand before she goes. In a state of great agitation, Ganja follows Nastassya to the door and she confuses him by saying, "Don't come with me... You must come, do you hear."

Ganja apologizes to the Prince, kissing his hand. His apology comes across as so sincere the Prince forgives him immediately. Ganja relaxes and confides his problems to the Prince. He admits he is marrying Nastassya for money, telling Myshkin he (Ganja) is a complete scoundrel. Myskin tells Ganya he does not think he is a scoundrel deep down, but Ganja becomes scornful at such a suggestion. He says scoundrels always need honest men, and that is why he wants to be the Prince's friend.

The Prince decides he must go and see Nastassya. He approaches General Ivolgin and asks him to take him to her house. The General claims he had exactly the same idea, and then proceeds to tell Myshkin his life story over three bottles of wine. By the time they leave for Nastasya's the General can hardly walk. The General insists they visit his friend's house, but they find they are not home. Upon leaving, the General admits that it was the wrong house anyway. He then takes Myshkin to his mistress's house, where Koyla is also present. Koyla tells the Prince that Nastassya lives nowhere near where the General said and walks the Prince to her house.



Part 1 Ch. VI - X Analysis

Dostevsky introduces all the themes and character very quickly, providing a breathless pace and a narrative reminiscent of a melodrama. In the previous chapter, he foreshadows the love triangle between the Prince, Rogozhin and Nastassya, and here he adds both Ganja and Aglaya to the mix. Ganja is due to marry Nastassya, but obviously has feelings for Aglaya. He hands the Prince a letter to give to Aglaya, but Aglaya is not impressed and she shows more interest in the Prince. On the Prince's part, he compares Aglaya's beauty to Nastassya, foreshadowing the choice he will later have to make between the two women.

Dostoevsky's melodramatic style continues when Ganja and the Prince walk home. Ganja calls the Prince an idiot, and the Prince reacts badly saying he would rather not stay with someone who has such a low opinion of him. They make up, but when they get to Ganja's house, the pace further increases when an argument breaks out between Ganja and his family. Still this is not the end, and the cause of the argument, Natassya Fillipovna, knocks on the door, followed by Rogozhin. If the reader remembers to take a breath, he will realize that all the action so far has taken place over a few hours. In fact, the whole first section covers only one day. Interestingly the pace of the novel slows down in following parts, but here it serves to build the dark atmosphere that maintains the philosophical and reflective nature of the middle part of the book. With the novel starting so explosively, the reader understands, despite the later meandering pace, that it is just setting itself for a grand finale, which, given this early section, can be nothing but tragic.

Dostoevsky introduces Nastassya Flippovna for the first time in this section. He presents her as the most complex character in the book and misunderstood by everyone. Ganja's sister, in particular, thinks she is manipulative and wants nothing more than to destroy her family. Initially Natassya reinforces this opinion with her sharp and smug remarks, yet each time someone reproaches her, she shows her nasty side to be a facade. Dostoevsky shows this best when some of Varya's comments force her to blush. She soon continues as before, but her lapse shows there is a dark and desperate force inside her that she cannot control.



Part 1 Chapters XI-XVI

Part 1 Chapters XI-XVI Summary

The servant announces the Prince. As the guests await his arrival, they gossip about his character. Ganja states, though he initially thought the Prince an idiot, he is nothing of the kind, and once you get to know him, he is a thoughtful individual. Some of the guests are put out that the Prince has invited himself to the party. Ferdyschenko thinks they should make fun of the Prince for being so impudent, suggesting they force him to sing a jovial song. Upon the Prince's entrance Nastassya states her delight in seeing him and shows him to the chair positioned next to her.

The party livens up in the Prince's presence, and Nastassya, always looking to twist things, suggests a game where all the men have to describe their worse ever action. The men all put their names on a piece of paper and give the Prince the honor of drawing them from a hat. Ferdyschenko is first and he recalls a time he was at a friend's house and he stole some money they had left money on the side for housekeeping. A servant was blamed for the theft, and Ferdyschenko recounts how he persuaded her to confess to the crime. He then spent the money on getting drunk. His friend fired the servant the next day.

His story upsets everyone in the room, leading him to ask what did they expect from such a game. Yephanchin paints himself in a far better light. He once blamed the death of his landlady on himself. The day she died he had unscrupulously threw insults at her regarding payment of the rent. He felt so guilty, years later he helped a couple of old ladies in a nursing home. Totsky tells a tale about how he stole a woman's affections from someone who truly loved her, for no other reason than to share a short intimacy. The man ended up enlisting to fight in the Crimean War, dying soon after in battle. Upon hearing the stories, Nastassya asks the Prince if she should marry Ganja. The Prince says no. Totsky, Ganja and Yepinchin are indignant, but Natassya says she trusts the Prince and the case is closed. A ring at the door prevents further conversation and Nastassya exclaims "A-ah! Here's my way out."

Rogozhin and his friends enter the party. His presence disgusts and intrigues everybody, which, in turn, greatly pleases Nastassya. Rogozhin tells the company he has come into money and throws 100,000 roubles down onto the table, saying the money is Natassya's if she consents to marry him. After casually insulting all her would-be suitors, Nastassya wonders whether to accept the payment and leave with Rogozhin. Suddenly the Prince stands up and declares his love for her. He asks her to marry him and says he does not care if she has no money or if she has a disreputable reputation because he loves her. Everyone is angry with the Prince, saying he has nothing to offer. However, he shows them a letter declaring he is to inherit 100,000,000 roubles. Nastassya decides she cannot refuse such a large sum of money and the people in the room gather around the Prince to congratulate him. However, falling in line with her unpredictable character, Nastassya immediately changes her mind and decides



again to leave with Rogozhin. She says the Prince is an idiot, and he needs looking after himself. She grabs Rogozhin's 100,000 roubles and with his consent throws it into the fire, saying the person who risks their skin to fish it out can keep it. She expects Ganja to rush forward immediately, but he stands hypnotized by the burning notes; his vanity prevents him from stepping forward. Eventually it becomes too much for Ganja and he faints. Nastassya orders her servant to bring her tongs and she retrieves the money, lays it next to Ganja and leaves with Rogozhin. Myshkin runs after them.

Part 1 Chapters XI-XVI Analysis

In this section, Dostoevsky highlights the difference between the three main characters and the others. As mentioned previously, other characters such as Ganja see themselves as different, but a feeling of responsibility always holds them back. Dostoevsky does not present this as an admirable quality, and the Prince, Rogozhin and Nastassya come across as more human as they are never anything less than themselves.

The real difference is the instinctiveness of their actions. Firstly, the Prince arrives uninvited to Nastassya's party and for a reason he does not seem to understand. Most of the characters criticize his decision, but Nastassya admires his spontaneity and welcomes him warmly. His presence immediately changes the atmosphere, and Nastassya suggests a game where all the men have to say the worst thing they have ever done. Ferdyschenko tells a shocking story about how he contributed to the sacking of a servant. His story is brutally honest, yet most of the characters criticize his actions. Only Myshkin and Nastassya withhold judgment and most likely because they see his admission as honest and true to himself. After this story, the General and Totsky paint themselves in the best possible light, showing their fear of losing their high position in society and their inability to admit their own faults.

Rogozhin then gate crashes the party and asks Nastassya to marry him. At this point, the Prince stands up and declares his love for Nastassya. However those in the room only believe his sincerity when he tells them he is about to inherit a large sum of money. Their congratulations show the Prince is finally speaking their language and going about things in a way they can understand. However, Nastassya cannot stand the conformity of their opinions, and while she initially accepts the Prince's proposal of marriage, she just as quickly laughs off the idea and decides to leave with Rogozhin. Before she leaves, she throws Rogozhin's money on the fire, expecting Ganja to leap in and grab it. Dostoevsky says Ganja's natural response would be to do exactly as she expects, but that he stays where he is proves how much the other characters repress their true desires. Nastassya scorns him for his vanity, and the reader may see this as a blunt remark. However, most likely Nastassya would have respected him more if he had followed his instincts. When Rogozhin leaves with Nastassya, the Prince instinctively follows them out the door. The other characters claim Nastassya is mad, but, unlike Nastassya's remark about Ganja, this comes across to the reader as a lack of understanding.



Part II Ch. I-V

Part II Ch. I-V Summary

The next day Myshkin leaves for Moscow to claim his inheritance, staying for six months. Meanwhile, in St. Petersburg, rumors abound of his whereabouts. Madam Yephanchin is upset with him because he left so suddenly and does not like to hear anyone mentioning his name. She claims she was mistaken about the Prince's character as she has so often mistaken about people's goodness. General Ivolgin, Ganja's father, is put into debtor's prison for money he owed his mistress. Ptitsyn and Varya marry and Varya becomes acquainted with the Yepachin sisters, much to Madam Yephanchin's disgust. Ganja changes for the better and has become more friendly towards his family, in particular his younger brother, Koyla. Koyla accepts his brother's change of heart, and Ganja impresses him by returning the 100,000 roubles to Nastassya. Koyla also becomes good friends with the Yephanchin sisters. One day he gives Aglaya a letter from Myshkin that says how much he needs her as a friend.

Myshkin returns to St. Petersburg in June. As he walks through the crowded platform, he feels someone's eyes on him. He turns expecting to see a familiar face but sees no one but strangers. He continues to Lebedev's house. Lebedev has lost his wife six weeks before and is mourning her death. Lebedev is drunk and talking to his children and nephew. The Prince and Lebedev talk about Nastassya, who Lebedev claims left Rogozhin on their wedding day. He says Nastassya is staying with his sister-in-law, but she could also be in Pavlovsk. The Prince wants to push him further on the subject, but decides Lebedev is too drunk. Instead, he asks if he can rent out Lebedev's house in Palovsk. Lebedev accepts his offer.

Myshkin visits Rogozhin's house, which he describes as large and gloomy. The two men are surprisingly friendly towards each other, and the Prince calls Rogozhin brother. As their conversation continues, it turns out they became very close in Moscow. The two men talk about Nastassya. In Rogozhin's opinion, she has dealt him a bad hand, running away when they planned to get married and embarking on affairs. He recounts a story where he "beat her black and blue" and then spent the next 36 hours begging her forgiveness. During this time, he did not eat, drink or sleep until she agreed to marry him. The day before the wedding she ran away. Myshkin says Nastassya cannot cope with Rogozhin's paranoia. Rogozhin says Myshkin is wrong, and the root of the problem is that she is in love with the Prince.

A number of times during the meeting, Myshkin claims he feels on the verge of an epileptic seizure. At one point, he absent-mindedly picks up a knife and Rogozhin snatches it away. Yet, moments later he picks it up again and again Rogozhin has to take it away. Myshkin decides to leave, but he goes the wrong way and Rogozhin has to lead him out.



As he takes Myshkin through his house, Rogozhin turns the conversation to religion. Rogozhin asks Myshkin if he believes in God. His question leads the Prince into two stories. The first one is about a peasant who murdered someone for their chain and watch, praying to God as he slit their throat. The second story is about a man who sold him his silver cross for 20 kopecks so he could get drunk. Rogozhin asks the Prince if he can have the cross. The Prince is reluctant, but Rogozhin says he can have his gold cross in exchange and as a token of their friendship. They swap crosses, and Rogozhin takes the Prince to see his mother, who, upon her son's request, blesses the Prince. Before leaving Rogozhin says, "Don't be afraid! Though I've taken your cross I won't murder you for your watch." He continues to say the Prince can have Nastassya.

The Prince walks to General Yephanchin's house but finds no one in. Leaving his card, he goes to see Koyla at the Scales hotel. Koyla has gone out and the Prince waits for him for a few hours, before heading out to catch a train to Pavlovsk. Just as he is boarding, the Prince decides not to go after all. He throws away his ticket and heads back into the streets.

At this point, the Prince is not feeling well and his thoughts become increasingly disconnected. While he stands at a shop window, he feels the same eyes on him he felt at the train station. He spins around expecting to see Rogozhin, but like at the station, all he sees are crowds. The Prince talks about seeing everything very clearly before a seizure. He runs over his previous problems with Nastassya and Rogozhin with great clarity and knows instinctively Rogozhin is following him. He wants to find Rogozhin and tell him everything is okay, but these are just thoughts, and his body takes him back to the hotel. While climbing the hotel stairs, Rogozhin jumps out intent on killing him, but the Prince has a seizure.

Rogozhin flees from the scene, leaving the hotel staff to discover the Prince's convulsing body. Luckily, Koyla arrives back at the hotel and identifies his friend. Once the Prince is conscious, Koyla takes him to Lebedev's, and from there the three men travel to Pavlovsk.

Part II Ch. I-V Analysis

The most important part of this section is the meeting between Rogozhin and the Prince. The earlier part of the section shows Dostoevsky's rambling style and highlights the contrast between the three main character's individuality and the conformity of the others. In the presence of the Yephanchins and Lebedev, the narrative is ponderous and full of highbrow ideas that come across as mere pretense. In this respect, they look towards the Prince to make something happen and take them away from their conventional lives. Even when Lebedev takes the Prince back to his house in Pavlovsk to recover from his seizure, it comes across as a selfish act rather than a moment of kindness.

In comparison, the meeting between Rogozhin and the Prince is dark, foreboding and complex. Even when the Prince approaches the house, Dostoevsky makes the reader



aware of a potential tragedy with a description of the building that fits Rogozhin's dark character. Inside the house, Dostoevsky confirms the complexity of their relationship by the way they address each other as brother and even swap crosses. The religious discussions that follow show, despite their differences, they are both naturally inclined towards religion. Rogozhin confirms his sincerity by asking his mother to bless the Prince. However, when he attempts to kill the Prince in the hotel stairway, it comes as no surprise. In fact, it seems like the natural thing for him to do. They both know it is all going to end badly, the Prince earlier predicting Rogozhin would murder Natassya, and Rogozhin is trying to put an end to their misery.



Part II Ch. VI-XII

Part II Ch. VI-XII Summary

The Prince rests at Lebedev's villa in Pavlovsk and receives a number of visitors. The first to arrive is General Ivolgin, then Ganja, and before long Madam Yephanchin and her three daughters. Madam Yephanchin does not particularly like the company the Prince keeps and tells him so to his face. The Prince, however, takes her comment lightly, which only serves to increase her anger.

On the verandah, the Prince, Madam Yephachin, her three daughters, Koyla and Lebedev partake in a lively conversation. Koyla mentions the phrase "poor knight," which he heard Aglaya say aloud when she read Don Quixote. The Poor Knight is also a Russian poem, and Aglaya says she changes the letters A.M.D, inscribed on a rosary around the Knights neck, to A.N.B, though she refuses to explain why. Madam Yephanchin wants to hear Aglaya recite the poem. As she begins, General Yephanchin and a young man walk onto the Verandah.

The young man is the retired army officer Radomsky. Agalya continues to recite her poem and everyone listens intently. After she finishes, General Yephanchin introduces the Prince to Radomsky. He greets him cordially, but there is something else on the Prince's mind. He realizes Aglaya swapped the letters A.N.B for N.F.B and knows in some way this is significant. Madam Yephanchin meanwhile tells her daughter she knows she was making fun of the Prince, but she understands why.

Suddenly Vera asks Lebedev why he does not tell the Prince about the people waiting for the Prince at the front door. Lebedev says they are not worth seeing; it is only the son of Pavlishtchev. The Prince seems to know about them and says he had already asked Ganja to take care of them. Despite protests, the Prince opens the door for the four men. Their names are Burdovsky, Doktorenko, Keller and Hippolite.

The four men are overexcited and display anger towards the Prince. Myshkin says he would prefer to talk to them elsewhere. At this point Madame Yephanchin finds a newspaper article about Myshkin and hands it to him. The Prince says he will read it after he has spoken to the gentlemen, but Madam Yephanchin snatches it from his hands and gives it to Koyla to read.

The article is scandalous containing so many falsities that everyone in the room is embarrassed. It turns out Keller, one of the four men at the door, wrote it and the conversation once again turns to the four men. Keller wrote the article for Burdovsky, who feels he is due some of Myshkin's inheritance money because the Prince's benefactor, Pavlishtchev, is Burdovsky's father. The Prince offers Burdovsky 10,000 roubles, but he refuses. Finally, the Prince announces Ganja has done some research of his own and learned that Pavlishtchev is not Burdovsky's father. The Prince does not



blame Burdovsky, saying his friends have lied to him, but the fact is he is not entitled to any money. Everyone looks at Ganja, who stands up to recite his findings.

Ganja tells Burdovsky his real father was a drunkard, dying 8 years into the marriage after spending his wife's entire dowry. He left Burdovsky's mother in poverty and Pavlishtchev took pity on her. Ganja has visited Burdovsky's mother and says she told Burdovsky that Pavlishtchev was fond of him but only because he felt sorry for such a shy, awkward child. Ganja finishes by saying the whole thing is a result of lawyers' lies.

Burdovsky and his friends are unhappy with Ganja's statement and begin causing a scene. It all gets too much for Madam Yephanchin and she flies into a rage, criticizing everybody in the room. She is so angry that the rest of the room is dumbstruck. Eventually, the ill Hippolite lets out a long laugh and Madam Yephanchin turns on him. In reply, he says he does not mean any offense, that he is laughing because the rumors he heard of Madam Yephanchin being a wonderful woman are true. This calms Madam Yephanchin down and she listens to Hippolite's story.

Hippolite is dying from consumption and seems content on causing trouble. First, he tells the room Lebedev proofread the scandalous article and second that the Prince sent Burdovsky's mother money. Lebedev cannot deny his involvement in the article, but says the Prince will forgive him anyway, so what does it matter. This comment makes Madam Yephanchin angry and she insists the Prince reacts. The Prince just shrugs his shoulders.

The Yephanchin's leave the house. Outside a woman approaches Radomsky and tells him not to worry about the I.O.U's because Rogozhin has paid them off. Inside the house, the woman's voice sends a shiver through the Prince's spine.

Adelaide and her fiancé, Prince S., come to see the Prince and tell him about the affair with Radomsky. They think it is impossible for him to know Nastassya. The Prince's next visitor is Ganja. Ganja says Radomsky has had no dealings with Nastassya, but she has been in town for four days and is definitely up to something. Keller comes in next and asks the Prince to give him 25 roubles. Lebedev comes in and the Prince asks him if he was involved with Natassya's appearance yesterday. Lebedev admits he was and that he sent his son to tell her that Radomsky was at the Prince's house. Koyla arrives and sees that the Prince is jealous of Ganja's love for Aglaya. The Prince talks to General Yephanchin, who confirms Radomsky could not possibly have any dealings with Nastassya, but he says he can feel something bad in the air.

After three days of avoiding the Prince, Madame Yephachin comes to see him. She asks why the Prince sent Aglaya a letter and if he is love with her. The Prince explains he only sent the letter as a friend. Madam Yephanchin accepts this but at the same time warns him that he can never marry her daughter. She then shouts at the Prince for not visiting her for three days. The Prince tells Madam Yephanchin that Aglaya sent him a letter forbidding him to come. He shows her the letter and minutes later Madam Yephanchin is marching him to her house.



Part II Ch. VI-XII Analysis

In this section, the scene changes to Pavlovsk, and the novel replaces its dark atmosphere with sunny weather. After his seizure, this is exactly what the Prince needs and it is notable that he becomes far calmer. In contrast, the characters are constantly looking for something to do and hang around the Prince expecting things to happen. In this respect, Lebedev's claim that he edited the scandalous letter shows not necessarily evil doing on his part, but the desire to make a dull life more exciting. Madam Yephanchin is also guilty of this. Throughout the section, she jumps on every little comment, constantly causing a scene, much to the embarrassment of her daughters. She revels in the role of the eccentric, middle-aged woman, particularly shown when Hippolite calms her down by saying how much Hippolite admires her eccentricity.

In the background, Nastassya Flippovna is pulling the strings. First, Dostoevsky shows the effect Nastassya had on Aglaya when Aglaya changes the initials in the Poor Knight poem to Natassya's initials. Later it comes to light that Nastassya sent Aglaya letters trying to persuade her to marry the Prince, and here her words seem to be on the young girl's mind. The poem shows she has thought about the Prince and even tried to understand things from his perspective. However, she comes across as naïve and confused. In this regard, she is not a good match for the Prince, whose spiritual and forgiving nature needs someone like Nastassya, who he can steer away from wrongdoing. The prince's earlier letter calling Aglaya his sister and asking her for her friendship is most likely his true feelings towards Aglaya. His feelings become confused because of his desire to please and also because he knows he is heading for great danger.



Part III Ch. I-V

Part III Ch. I-V Summary

As Madam Yephanchin marches the Prince to her house, thoughts rush through her mind. She wonders in particular about Aglaya, and if Aglaya is serious about either the Prince or Ganja. She mentions a letter that someone sent, saying Aglaya has been in contact with Natassya Flippovna.

The Prince sits at the Yephanchin's table looking very pale. Aglaya sits in the corner, and the Prince can feel her black eyes on him. Radomsky argues against Russian liberalism and claims the liberals are against Russia. He asks the Prince's opinion on the matter and he agrees with Radomsky. However, his serious words lead to the others making fun of him. Radomsky claims he did not expect a serious answer. Alexandrai asks Myshkin why, if he sees things so clearly, did he let Burdovsky take advantage of him. Madam Yephanchin steps into the conversation and tells the room that Burdovsky did not take advantage and the Prince has a letter to prove it.

At this point Koyla enters and tells the Prince that Hippolite has arrived at his house. The Prince stands up to leave, but the Yephanchins invite him for a walk in the park.

Just before they leave, the Prince approaches Radomsky and tells him he likes him in spite of everything. Radomsky does not know what he is talking about and laughs. In reply, the Prince says he is not feeling well, yet he continues anyway in the same vein, prompting Madam Yephanchin to ask if this is how his fits begin. The Prince reassures her he is not going to have a fit, but says he does not deserve such good friends. Aglaya stands up and screams at the Prince, asking why he bothers to speak to them and that he is worth more than everyone put together. She finishes her rage by saying she will never marry him. The Prince tells her the thought never crossed his mind and much to everyone's relief Aglaya laughs.

Finally, they head towards the park and Aglaya insists the Prince walks with her. They pass a green bench and Aglaya says this is where she comes some mornings at 7 o'clock. The statement makes the Prince feel uncomfortable. They reach an entertainment complex and sit to watch a band. In the near distance, three women approach them. One of the women is Nastassya Filippovna. She walks up to Radomsky and tells him his Uncle has shot himself. Radomsky's officer friend says Nastassya deserves to be whipped. Nayasya takes a stranger's cane and hits the officer around the face. The office goes to hit her back, but Myshkin steps in and grabs him from behind. At this point Rogozhin appears and takes Nastassya away. The police arrive soon after and everyone goes home.

The Prince walks back to the Yephanchin's house and waits on the veranda while they argue inside. After a while, Aglaya comes out feigning surprise at Myshkin's presence. She talks enthusiastically about duels and tells the Prince exactly how to load a gun.



The General comes out onto the veranda and requests the Prince's company in another room. When they are alone, the General asks him about Nastassya Filippovna, and the Prince says she is insane. After their conversation, the Prince opens a letter given to him by Aglaya. It asks him to meet her at the bench the following morning.

The Prince goes for a walk in the park and meets Keller. Keller tells him the officer wants to face the Prince in a duel; however, the Prince laughs at such a suggestion. He goes to the green bench and sits down. Moments later, Rogozhin approaches and says Nastassya wants to see him. The Prince and Rogozhin have a lively conversation about Nastassya and the night Rogozhin tried to kill the Prince. Finally, the Prince invites Rogozhin back to his house for a party. Rogozhin says the Prince is not acting himself.

The Prince approaches his house with Rogozhin. When they get there, the house is already full. They have heard it is the Prince's birthday and they have all come to celebrate. Radomsky immediately asks for a word with the Prince. When they are alone, he tells him the duel with the officer is off, though the Prince never really knew that is was on. Radomsky then asks for the Prince's friendship, which the Prince immediately grants.

The Prince and Radomsky walk back to the party in time for a speech by Lebedev. He goes on a drunken discourse about humanity, which then leads into a debate. Lebedev demands everyone's attention again and says he has a story to tell. The tale is about monks turning to cannibalism during famines.

Hippolite wakes up suddenly and asks how long he has been asleep. Someone tells him seven minutes. Hippolite shows shock at this as he feels like he has been asleep for hours. He tells everybody he dislikes the Prince, though not as much as he did five months ago. At this point, Hippolite has everyone's attention and he tells them he has a letter to read. The Prince tells him to read it tomorrow and Hippolite tosses a coin. It comes up heads, which means he has to read it now.

Hippolite's letter starts with a retelling of a dream. He dreamt he saw a Scorpion in his room. He screamed for help and his sister came in, took the Scorpion between her teeth and bit down. When he woke up the Prince stood over his bed.

No one is impressed with his dream and the Prince tells Hippolite to stop reading. He ignores his pleas and continues. He reads out what it feels like waiting to die. He says nothing holds any importance.

Part III Ch. I-V Analysis

While the Prince is at Pavlovsk, Dostoevsky develops his role as a Christ-like figure. Continuously the other characters come to him with their problems, seeking advice. In this section, both Radomsky and the General talk to the Prince about Nastassya Filippovna. Though unusual for the Prince, he exclaims Nastassya is insane. However, this seems to be the only way the Prince can justify her behavior, which the others see



as plain vindictiveness. By calling her insane, the Prince is asking his friends to forgive Nastassya as he forgives her.

The Prince's forgiving attitude is one of his main characteristics and both his strength and his downfall. Already he has forgiven Lebedev for helping write the scandalous letter, Burdovsky for trying to extort his inheritance and Ganja for treating him so shabbily at the beginning. This means everyone thinks they can do or say anything in his presence.

Initially in Pavlovsk, people such as Lebeyev and Keller come to him asking him for forgiveness almost as if his words will cleanse their soul. People such as Madam Yephanchin become annoyed at his attitude and start acting badly towards him, knowing he will forgive. For example, Madam Yephanchin is constantly blaming the Prince for Aglaya's problems, when it is obviously her daughter's naivety is to blame. However, in some ways she is not completely wrong in blaming him. The Prince's forgiving nature is getting as destructive as Rogozhin's dark temper and Nastassya's mood swings, allowing problems to develop that only the Prince can stop. Ironically for such a perceptive person, this is almost unforgivable for the Prince to allow such behavior from others. At the end of this section he meets Rogozhin and still, despite the attempted murder, refers to him as brother and invites him to his party. All the time he knows if does not give up his friendship with both Rogozhin and Nastassya, something very bad will happen.



Part III Ch. VI

Part III Ch. VI Summary

Hippolite continues reading and talks of meeting Rogozhin. Rogozhin left a great impression on Hippolite and he recalls the religious painting in Rogozhin's hallway. One day, Rogozhin walked into Hippolite's bedroom, sat down and stared at him. His presence was not expected and frightens Hippolite so much he cannot speak. In the morning, Hippolite finds out it would have been impossible for Rogozhin to enter because the servants had locked all the doors.

Hippolite says he has a small pistol in his pocket and his aim is to shoot himself in the head at sunrise in Pavlovsk Park. He says the letter he has just read is his last Will and Testament. Suddenly Hippolite jumps up and declares it is now sunrise. No one knows what he is talking about until Vera runs up to Hippolite and says he is going to blow his head off. Everyone laughs and says he is lying.

Just as everyone is leaving, Hippolite turns to the Prince and says he wants a drink. Hippolite pours himself champagne, but with his other hand he reaches into his coat pocket. Keller runs to him, but he is too late. Hippolite pulls out a gun, aims it at his head and presses the trigger. To everyone's surprise, not the least Hippolite, the gun does not go off. On further inspection, Keller notes Hippolite forgot to put in the caps. The Prince calls a doctor for Hippolite before going to the park bench to meet Aglaya. The Prince has been awake all night and he falls asleep. He dreams a woman approaches him, beckoning him to follow her. The Prince stays where he is because he has a horrible feeling she has committed a crime. A laugh behind the Prince wakes him. It is Aglaya.

Agalya tells the Prince he is the most honest and upright person she has ever met and she wants to run away with him. Her idea is for the Prince and Aglaya to become teachers somewhere in the countryside. When the Prince questions her motives for running away, she says she is tired of her family laughing at her. She asks the Prince about the love letter he sent her via Koyla. The Prince denies it was a love letter and repeats his earlier claim that he sent it in search of friendship. At this, Aglaya says she does not love the Prince, but loves Ganja. She says the day before she sat on the same bench with Ganja, and he proved his love for her by burning his hand with a candle. She says he kept his hand over the flame for five minutes. The Prince tells her he saw Ganja only a few hours ago and his hand is fine.

The conversation turns to Nastassya, and Aglaya gets the Prince to admit he came to Pavlovsk to win Nastasya back. Aglaya shows the Prince three love letters written by Nastassya persuading Aglaya to marry the Prince. Aglaya says if Nastassya does not stop sending the letters, she will get her father to admit Nastassya into a lunatic asylum. Madam Yephanchin surprises them by approaching the bench from behind. Aglaya tells her mother she is going to marry Ganja and then runs away. The Prince is about to leave when Madam Yepanchin stops him.



When the Prince gets back to the Yephanchin house, Madam Yephanchin does not know what to say. Like the Prince, she has not slept all night and feels exhausted. After a short while, the Prince goes back home to sleep on the veranda. Unfortunately, a succession of visitors interrupts him. First, Koyla comes and gossips to him about the party and where everyone slept and then Lebedev approaches him with what he says is a serious matter.

He tells the Prince he has lost 400 roubles. The Prince suggests that he had too much to drink and perhaps mislaid it. Lebedev claims he has looked everywhere and thinks someone must have stolen it. The idea horrifies the Prince, and he asks Lebedev who he thinks would commit such a crime. Lebedev thinks it is Ferdyschenko and states he is going to follow him to St. Petersburg.

The Prince reads the three letters Aglaya gave him. Each one is from Nastassya trying to persuade Aglaya to marry the Prince. The Prince walks home from the Yephanchin house and sees the woman from his earlier dream. It is Nastassya and this time it is no dream. She approaches the Prince, squeezes his hand and gets down on her knees. The Prince tells her to get up, and in reply, Nastassya asks him if he is happy. Rogozhin appears and escorts Nastassya away. He comes back to the Prince and asks him to answer Nastassya's question. The Prince says he is not happy, and Rogozhin goes away laughing, saying that is exactly what he thought the Prince would say.

Part III Ch. VI Analysis

Many readers will see this novel as overwrought, continuing with themes when they have appeared to have stopped communicating any real meaning. Madam Yephanchin still obsesses about the developing relationship between Aglaya and the Prince. The reader, as well as many of the characters, have known about Nastassya's letters to Aglaya since the middle of the second section, but still Aglaya informs the Prince of them as if it was a big secret. When the Prince reads the letters, they contain no more than what the reader would expect.

As mentioned before, the opening section has such a dramatic pace that the middle sections' rambling style comes as a shock, and perhaps a disappointment. However, it is interesting how this structure fits in with the Prince's seizures. In the first section, the novel becomes increasingly frantic right up to the Prince's fit. Since his fit, everything has calmed down, and the Prince relaxes in the open spaces of Pavlovsk. There are problems such as Burdovsky, but these are mere distractions. At the beginning of this section, Hippolite's foreshadows that things are going to pick up again when he tells people of his dream, showing the Prince as a protector and Rogojin as an evil force. Aglaya further intensifies the narrative by showing that her feelings towards the Prince are very real. This all seems to come to a head when he has a seizure in front of the Yephanchin home in the next part. However, the fact this is only a mild seizure symbolizes the lack of intense feeling he has for Aglaya. When he reunites with Nastassya and Rogojin's crazy world in the final section, he falls into insanity.



Part IV Ch. I - V

Part IV Ch. I - V Summary

Varya comes back from the Yepanchin's house depressed. She has been going to the Yepanchins everyday on behalf of her brother in order to help him win Aglaya's hand. When she arrives at her house, she hears her husband and Ganja arguing. She enters to find her husband gone, but Ganja still in the room. Ganja says he wants to throw his father out, as he is making a fool of them. That day their father had already made their mother cry. Varya changes the subject to Aglaya. She says Aglaya is now formally engaged to the Prince, and she doubts her brother has any chance of marrying her. To her surprise, Ganja takes the news well. However, when Varya mention their father was at the Yephanchin's house the previous day, his anger rises again. Varya tells him their father told the Yephachins that Ganja's family was no good. This sends Ganja into a rage. Just as he is cursing his father, he walks in with Koyla and Hippolite.

The General is furious. His passion impresses Ganja, but still Ganja wants the General out of the house, and it is only for Ganja's mother's sake he keeps quiet. When the General finishes, he runs upstairs. His disappearance starts an argument between Ganja and Hippolite. Both men hate each other; Ganja states that a man should not act like Hippolite in someone else's house. In reply, Hippolite states he is Varya's guest and not Ganja's.

Varya finds a note on Ganja's desk from Aglaya. It asks Ganja to meet her at the green bench with his sister. She is just wondering the significance of the note, when the General leaves the house with luggage. Varya runs after him while Ganja stays behind and kisses Aglaya's letter.

The General starts to spend time with Lebedev. Mostly they are drinking, arguing and laughing. Koyla expresses his disgust at their behavior, but the Prince says they have always behaved in this manner. However, one night the Prince hears them arguing loudly, and worried something is wrong, he goes to see the General.

The General begins their conversation by asking the Prince for advice, but as he talks, tears fill his eyes and his speech becomes increasingly disconnected. He ends the conversation by saying he cannot talk to the Prince at this moment. Now even more worried, the Prince calls for Lebedev. Lebedev skirts the issue and the Prince changes the conversation to the earlier theft of Lebedev's money. Lebedev tells him he found the money a long time ago under the chair in his room. The Prince says that this is impossible and questions Lebedev further. It turns out that the General stole the money, but feeling guilty, he cut a hole in Lebedev's jacket and put the money inside. The money fell out of the jacket and onto the chair. The chapter finishes by stating the Prince waits anxiously for his meeting with the General the next day.



At 12 o'clock, the next day, the Prince enters his house to find the General is already waiting for him. The General states he is leaving Lebedev's house because of their constant arguing. He calls Lebedev a liar, but the Prince points out Lebedev's good points, which the General reluctantly accepts as true. The General then tells a highly improbable story about how he befriended Napoleon as a young boy. Myshkin humors him, but at the same time he knows the General will be angry at the Prince later for showing so much pity.

Outside the Prince's house, Koyla approaches his father, who is sitting on the steps. He tells his father he should come home. His father looks as though he is weeping, but when Koyla looks closely, he sees his father is having a stroke.

Madam Yephanchin thinks about her daughter marrying the Prince. She hears from her other two daughters that the Prince came to the house while she was out. The Prince and Aglaya played chess together, and Aglaya beat him every time. The victory put Aglaya into a good mood and she immediately challenged the Prince to a game of cards. The Prince beat her every time and upon the fifth defeat, she became angry and said she hated him.

A while later, Aglaya meets Koyla, who has just found a hedgehog. Aglaya buys the hedgehog from him and tells Koyla to give it to the Prince as a present from her. Upon receiving the gift, the Prince is delighted and even more so when Koyla tells him he thinks Aglaya loves him.

The next day the Prince arrives at the Yephanchin house at his usual time. Aglaya is not there but arrives later in the evening. She demands to know if the Prince will marry her and the Prince says yes. He tells Aglaya he loves her, and she starts asking about how much money he has and if he thinks it is enough to support her. She goes on so much, her sisters begin to laugh, thinking it is all a joke. Their jovial mood annoys Madam Yephanchin, and she escorts her three daughters out of the room. Soon Aglaya is in tears screaming she cannot bear the Prince, but it is now obvious to everyone she is in love with him. Madam Yephanchin decides if it is her fate to marry the Prince, then who is she to prevent it. Eventually the Prince leaves the Yephanchin house in a great mood.

Part IV Ch. I - V Analysis

In this section and for the remainder of the final part, Dostevsky raises the tension. Whereas before people were coming to the Prince asking for his advice, he is now arranging meetings himself and trying to solve problems that are not his own. In particular, he becomes embroiled with General Ivolgin and Lebedev's argument. It is hard to pinpoint his motives, but his mood has certainly changed with his involvement with the beautiful Aglaya. Before he saw no way out from his destructive relationship with Natassya and Rogzhin, but now that there is potential for genuine happiness he is back to his old instinctive self.



In this section, the confused Aglaya cannot cope with her love for the Prince. One minute she is smiling and joking with him and the next, she is telling him how much she hates him. However, the Prince takes Aglaya's strange behavior into stride and his clear thinking reminds the reader of how Dostoevsky described the beginning of an epileptic fit in the second section. He said that before a seizure, an epileptic acts disconnected and distant. In the previous section, both Rogozhin and Radomsky comment on the Prince's strange behavior.



Part IV Ch. VI-XII

Part IV Ch. VI-XII Summary

The Yephanchins invite the Prince to a party to meet Princess Bielokonski. Aglaya comes to see the Prince about the party, talking so quickly, the Prince presumes she is nervous about him making fool of himself. She says she not only wants him to make a fool of himself, but he should break his mother's priceless vase to show he is clumsy. The Prince says he will do no such thing, and he does not appreciate her putting such thoughts into his head. In fact, he will sit as far away from the vase as possible. Before Aglaya leaves, she tells the Prince he should sit and say nothing.

A drunk Lebedev visits the Prince, claiming he has just had a moral slap in the face. The Prince questions him and it turns out he has just taken Madam Yephanchin a letter, but she threw it back at him and told him to leave. Lebedev is not making too much sense and talks about other letters, including one he sent to Madam Yephanchin about Nastassya. He is also currently in the possession of Aglaya's letter to Ganja, which he hands to the Prince. He tells the Prince to open the letter, but the Prince says he will give it straight back to Ganja.

The Prince heads off to the Yephanchin party. It is not a big party and the Prince loses his nervousness when he sees society people are not so bad. Initially he only answers questions put to him, but by the end of the chapter, he is becoming increasingly comfortable and on the verge of diving into one of his speeches.

General Yephanchin introduces the Prince to Ivan Petrovitch. He is a relation of the Prince's benefactor, Pavicheff, and the two of them begin a conversation. Petrovitch says Pavicheff converted to Catholicism before his death. The remark upsets the Prince, saying that is impossible. Pavicheff was a religious man and in the Prince's opinion, the Catholic Church is not Christian. The Prince continues into a discourse about religion. Earlier, the Prince had changed seats to sit nearer Petrovitch and unfortunately for the Prince, nearer the vase. As his speech becomes more rapid, the Prince sprays out his arms and knocks over the vase. Seeing it broken on the floor, he goes into shock.

Seeing him upset at such a trivial matter everybody laughs. Madam Yephanchin approaches the Prince and tells him it is no matter; it is only a vase. This cheers up the Prince and he starts talking about his nerves and how everybody is much nicer than he imagined. Again, his speech becomes agitated, but this time he stands up and starts walking to the middle of the room. Aglaya runs to him, catching the Prince as he falls into a seizure. At the end of the chapter, Madam Yephanchin decides the Prince is a bad match for her daughter.

The Prince's seizure is not one of his bad fits and the next day he is feeling much better. People come to visit, but their mood is strange and the Prince thinks something is



wrong. The Yephanchin's arrive to tell the Prince they are still his friend. Aglaya does not say anything, but she smiles brightly at the Prince upon arriving and leaving. Just before Aglaya leaves, she manages to get a message across to the Prince via Vera. She wants the Prince to stay at his house until 7 pm.

Hippolite comes to see the Prince. As usual, he is trying to stir up trouble. He tells the Prince he saw Ganja and Aglaya in the park. The Prince says he does not want to know and kindly asks Hippolite to keep quiet on the subject. Hippolite says he has own business to discuss with the Prince. He tells Myshkin he has been busy arranging a meeting between Agalaya, Rogozhin and Nastassya that very evening.

When Agalaya comes to pick up the Prince, he already knows exactly where they are going. They walk to Daria Alexyevna's house. In the house, Aglaya shouts at Nastassya, exposing her many faults. Nastassya has very little to say in return, and at Aglaya's request, she banishes Rogozhin from the room. Aglaya then asks the Prince which of the women he loves. The Prince criticizes Aglaya for being so cruel towards Nastassya and Aglaya runs from the room. Myskin steps forward to stop Aglaya, but Natassya faints in his arms.

Rogozhin revives Nastassya with water. At first, she is confused, but when she realizes what has happened, she is happy. She asks Rogozhin to leave the house and for the Prince to stay.

The Prince arranges to marry Nastassya. All his friends denounce him and accuse him of causing Aglaya's current ill health. Radomsky comes to visit the Prince and points where the Prince has gone wrong. The Prince explains he tried to run after Aglaya, but Natassya prevented him from doing so. He tells Radomsky he is in love with Aglaya and asks Radomsky to give her a letter. Radomsky refuses and leaves.

General Ivolgin dies after a second stroke. His death reconciles the Prince with his friends. At the funeral, the Prince sees Rogozhin.

Keller meets with the Prince and tells him Lebedyev is conspiring to put Myshkin into a mental hospital. When the Prince sees Lebedev, he openly admits that was the case, but his attempt failed. Earlier in the week he had told the Prince he was ill and sent for a doctor. Lebedev wanted the Doctor to declare the Prince insane, but the doctor said he had never met anyone saner in his life.

Hippolite's mother summons the Prince. She tells him Hippolite wants to see him. Hippolite warns the Prince about Rogozhin. Rogozhin knows the Prince is still in love with Aglaya, and Hippolyte says Rogozhin is capable of killing Aglaya just to get at the Prince. Meanwhile Nastassya is becoming increasingly unstable. She thinks Rogozhin is watching her from the garden.

However, on the day of the wedding, Nastassya is happy enough, laughing with her maids of honor. When she approaches the church in her wedding dress, everyone proclaims how beautiful she looks. She is just about to enter the church when Rogozhin



runs to the front of the crowd. Nastassya runs to him and begs Rogozhin to take her away. Immediately Rogozhin calls for a carriage and they head off to St Petersburg.

The Prince takes the news philosophically, surprising the guests with his good humor. After the wedding, he goes home and asks Vera to wake him up in the morning, so he can take the first train into St. Petersburg. In the morning he heads off, promising Vera he will come back that evening.

The Prince goes to Rogozhin's house, but the servant says she has not seen him. However, the Prince catches up with Rogozhin's porter who confirms Rogozhin was at the house all night. He tells the Prince that Nastassya was not with him. From here, the Prince goes to Nastassya's flat, but she is not there. He goes back to Rogozhin's home and he again has no luck. After going back and forth for a while he decides if Rogozhin wants him, he will come and find him.

Rogozhin finds the Prince at the hotel and takes him back to his house. When they enter, Rogozhin tells him to be quiet and leads the Prince up to his room. The prince asks where Nastassya is, and Rogozhin tells him she is on the bed behind the curtain. Rogozhin pulls back the curtain to reveal Nastassya's dead body. The Prince asks if Rogozhin murdered her and he says yes, claiming if he cannot have her, no one can. The Prince accepts Rogozhin's invitation to stay the night beside Nastassya's body. During the night, Rogozhin shouts, cries and paces up and down the room, while the Prince calms him down by stroking his cheek and speaking soothingly. In the morning, Rogozhin's brother breaks into the room to find Rogozhin unconscious with fever and the unresponsive Prince sitting motionless beside him.

Rogozhin suffers from brain fever for two months afterwards before a judge sends him to Siberia for 15 years. The Prince goes back to the hospital in Switzerland. He recognizes nobody and spends his time staring into space. Aglaya runs off with a Polish Count.

Part IV Ch. VI-XII Analysis

Fate is the drive for all three main characters, and they believe too much in being themselves to change it. From very early in the book, the Prince says Rogozhin will murder Nastassya, and even Nastassya know this is the case. Before her wedding day, she fears Rogozhin is in the garden ready to pounce. Rogozhin himself is so aware of his urge to murder that his dark thoughts communicate themselves to other characters. In this section, Hippolite warns the Prince that Rogozhin could murder Aglaya to get back at the Prince. It is interesting that Hippolite says this as he is another character driven by fate. He knows he is going to die and consequently has stopped trying to fit in. The other characters, and particularly the Yephanchins, distant themselves from the unfolding tragedy, showing their fear of life and anything that contradicts their secure life style. The Prince, Rogozhin and Nastassya are not made for such pretense and their self destruction comes willingly, realizing life for them cannot be any different.



Characters

Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myskin

Myshkin is the main character and the "Idiot" of the title. The main reason they call the Prince an idiot is that he suffers from epilepsy, and the time he spent in a mental hospital has given him little knowledge of the outside world. From the beginning, he displays such openness with people, it prompts laughter in disbelief. In the opening chapter when he makes his way to St. Petersburg, he tells his new acquaintance, Rogozhin, his business in Russia and the problems he has had recovering from his illness without once wondering if Rogozhin is trustworthy.

The Prince's trust of people and his ability to forgive, even when they break his trust, paints him as a Christ-like figure. Dostoevsky further emphasizes this characteristic when the Prince moves to Pavlovsk. While he is recovering from a seizure, a variety of people visit him asking for money and advice. The Prince is always willing to help, yet in the end, it proves his downfall.

Few of his friends value his friendship and merely look to take advantage of his good nature. He moves into Lebedev's home, and Lebedev helps his friends write a scandalous article about the Prince in order to extort money. His only real friend is his relative, Madam Yephanchin. Unlike the other characters, she acknowledges the Prince is not an idiot, and they develop a close friendship. The Prince often leaves Madam Yephanchin exasperated by the way he allows the other characters to take advantage of him. It becomes such a problem for Madam Yephanchin that she refuses to allow Aglaya to marry him.

Aglaya is one point of a love triangle that also involves the Prince and Anatasia Filippovna (Nastassya). The Prince is sincerely in love with Aglaya but has very compassionate feelings for the femme fatale Anatasia Filippovna. His need to look after people and set them on the right path means he ends up arranging to marry Anatasia. However, there is another love triangle involving Rogozhin, the Prince and Anatasia Filippovna, which proves destructive. Anatasia, who cannot cope with her love for Myshkin, runs off with Rogozhin on the day of the wedding. The Prince runs after them and meets Rogozhin in St Petersburg. Rogozhin takes him to his house and shows him Anatasia lying dead in his bed, stabbed to death. The Prince shows his dominating characteristic of forgiveness by staying with the murderer Rogozhin and stroking his hair until the police find them in the morning.

The Prince's subsequent mental deterioration ends the book, showing such an inherently good person is not fit for an unkind and selfish society. The fact the other characters call him an Idiot more than proves the lack of trust they have in themselves and others, feeling that the genuine love they have for the Prince can only mean he is stupid. Dostoevsky's title is actually ironic, and he presents the Prince as a highly perceptive and sensitive person. The Prince understands how people think and feel,



and even when their intentions are not honorable, he always responds with compassion.

Anatasia Filippovna (Nastassya)

Anatasia Filippovna (whose nickname is Nastassya) is a femme fatale, yet Dostoevsky also presents her as one of the book's tragic figures, alongside the Prince and Rogozhin. Totsky took her in after a fire killed both of her parents. He paid for her schooling and raised her in his household. As she grew up, her beauty attracted her to Totsky as a woman and she became his mistress. However, her unpredictable character frightened Totsky and, worried she would ruin his reputation, arranges for her to marry Ganja. During the novel, Anatasia proves too clever for her guardian, and beyond living her life for just money and position in society, she runs off with Rogozhin.

The other characters show distaste for Anatasia throughout. The men are attracted to her beauty, but fear her personality, and the women think she is shameless. Varya throws this exact insult at her when Rogozhin offers her money to marry him. However, she is not at all as she seems, and beneath her bad behavior, Dostoevsky paints a sensitive and troubled individual. When she argues with people, she usually wins by using her deep knowledge of people's weaknesses or scaring them with her instability. Yet, Dostoevsky adds complexity to her character by occasionally showing her true emotions in the midst of a disagreement. For example near the end of the book, Aglaya confronts her with such passion that Anatasia loses her usual coolness and comes across to the reader as frightened. Such a display of her true feelings is too much and she faints.

Anatasia Filippovna is an outsider, misunderstood by everyone apart from the Prince and Rogozhin. In this respect, some of her behavior is a reaction against this isolation from society. Like the Prince and even Rogozhin, society forces her to be fearful of a character, the reader could construe as mentally unstable. The only way she can cope with who she is is through marrying a similarly unstable personality

Parfyon Semyonovich Rogozhin

In many ways, Rogozhin is the antithesis of the Prince. Unlike the Prince, he has black eyes and black hair, and his spontaneity and inner demons are in contrast to the Prince's passive nature. At the same time, no two characters have a closer bond. Their love for Anatasia Filippovna is one reason, but their own love and hate relationship is close to brotherhood. In the meeting, before Rogozhin attempts to kill the Prince, they actually refer to each other as "brother," swapping crosses and talking about their closeness during their time in Moscow. In fact, when Rogozhin attempts to murder the Prince, the reader has the feeling he is attempting to kill the part himself that he can only articulate through aggression.

Dostoevsky emphasizes this point with Rogozhin's religious paintings, hanging in the hall of his otherwise dark and dismal house. This suggests that like the Prince,



Rogozhin is a religious man, but his feelings for God conflicts with his dark and cruel nature. In the same chapter, he introduces the Prince to his ill mother, who blesses the Prince. Turn back to the first chapter where Rogozhin talks about the awkward relations he has with his family, then together these two scene express a religious guilt from which he cannot escape. At the end, when he kills Anatasia Filippovna, he seeks out the Prince knowing he will forgive him of his sin.

Aglaya Ivanovna Yephanchin

Aglaya is the youngest and most beautiful of the Yephanchin daughters. Her father and mother have great plans for her, intending Aglaya to marry the perfect man. However, Aglaya shares her mother's eccentricity and stubbornness and wants to do as she pleases. Unfortunately, these characteristics mix with great immaturity. For example, she is deeply in love with Prince Myshkin, yet often treats him badly, calling him an idiot and saying she will never marry him. The characters all blame the Prince for losing Aglaya, but it is because of her inability to grasp the complexity of situation that the Prince goes off with Anatasia Filippovna.

Gavril Ardalyonovich Ivolgin (Ganja)

Dostoevsky initially presents Ganja as a scoundrel. He wants to marry Anatasia Filippovna purely for financial reasons and hits his own sister when she questions his decision. In fact, he runs his household, which includes his own father, with an iron fist. However, as the novel moves on, Dostoevsky shows these characteristics as mere pretense and when Ganja does have the opportunity to prove he is a real scoundrel, he cannot go through with it. Dostoevsky shows this when Anatasia Filippovna throws 100,000 roubles into the fire. Instead of taking it out, Ganja stares at the money, eventually fainting. Even when Anatasia leaves the money by his unconscious body, he later gives it back. His relationship with Prince Myshkin is also like this. Initially he calls the Prince an Idiot and a gossip and at one point slaps him in the face. However, when the Prince is having problems with Burdovsky, Ganja steps in and resolves the situation.

Ivan Fyodorovitch Yephanchin

Dostoevsky describes General Yephanchin as a self-made man, who has now built enough of a fortune to be considered part of high society. He loves his wife, Madam Yephanchin, but he is also afraid of her and often avoids her for long periods when he has done something wrong. He is also the first character the Prince meets in St. Petersburg. It is because of the General's kindness towards Myshkin that the Prince gets the chance to meet everyone else.



Lizaveta Prokofyena Yephanchin

Madam Yephanchin is a distant relation to Prince Myshkin. She immediately takes to Myshkin like a son and hates to see the other characters use him. However, she is very eccentric and stubborn and is quick to get angry. Sometimes her disagreements make no sense. For example, she is angry with the Prince for not marrying Aglaya, though she tells him he cannot marry her anyway.

Alexandra Ivanovna Yephanchin

Alexandra is the eldest daughter of the Yephanchins. She has a talent for music.

Adelaide Ivanovna Yepanchin

Adelaide is the middle child of the Yephanchins with a talent for painting. She is engaged to Prince S.

Hippolite Terentyev

The young Hippolite visits the Prince with Keller and Burdovsky in order to extort money. The Prince takes pity on him because he is dying from consumption. Hippolite rejects the Prince's pity, yet still comes back to visit. Hippolite dislikes that people are happy when he is miserable and dying.

Afanassy Ivanovich Totsky

Totsky is Anatasia Filippovna's rich guardian. He once made Anatasia Filippovna his mistress, but now he is scared of her and the rumors she could spread about him in society. He tries to get rid of Anatasia by arranging a marriage between her and Ganja.

Lebedev

He is part of Rogozhin's gang and later becomes good friends with the Prince, renting out a room to him in his apartment in Pavlovsk. Lebedev is not trustworthy. He helps write a scandalous about the Prince and later tries have the Prince committed to a mental institute.

Ivan Petrovitch Ptitsyn

Ptitsyn is a friend of the Ivolgins, who eventually marries Varvya.



Ardalyon Ivolgin

With his lies and cheating, General Ivolgin is a disgrace to his family. The one close relationship he has is with his youngest son, Nikolai. At the end of the book the General dies from a stroke.

Nina Alexandrovna Ivolgin

She is the put upon wife of General Ivolgin. Her good heart leads her to help Hippolite.

Varvya Ardalyonovna Ivolgin

Varvya is a strong-minded woman. She is very much against her brother marrying Anatasia Filippovna, but encourages him to marry Aglaya. She marries Ptitsyn.

Nikolai Ardalyonovitch Ivolgin

Nikolai is a 15-year-old boy, who becomes great friends with the Prince.

Keller

Keller is an ex-boxer, who writes the scandalous article about the Prince. The Prince later makes Keller his best man.



Objects/Places

St. Petersburg

The city in which most of the characters live.

Pavlovsk

Most of the character have a summer house in Pavlovsk. The Prince comes here to recover from his seizure.

The hotel stairwell

This is where Rogozhin attempts to murder the Prince.

The Silver Cross

Rogozhin swaps his gold cross for the Prince's silver cross

Rogozhin's knife

Rogozhin uses his knife to attempt to kill Myskin and then to kill Natassya.

The Scandalous article

Keller writes a scandalous article about the Prince in order to extort money from him.

Rogozhin's house

The Prince and Rogozhin talk about religion, and at the end of the book Rogozhin murders Nastassya in his bedroom.

The Train Carriage

In the opening chapter the Prince meets Rogozhin in a train carriage.

The Veranda

The Prince relaxes and hold parties on his veranda in Pavlovsk.

Hippolite's Pistol

Hippolite tries to shoot himself in the head with a pistol, but he forgets to put in the caps.



Themes

Religion

Religion plays a big part in this book. Most of the characters see themselves as religious and mistrust anyone who claims to be atheist. Dostoevsky shows this when nihilists visit the Prince, and the characters all turn on them, claiming they are nothing but scoundrels. Interestingly, these nihilists are part of the younger generation, which the older characters reject because they think their liberal ideas are destroying traditional Russian values.

However, it is the Prince and Rogozhin who embody religious spirit. Prince Myshkin is a Christ-like figure, evident through the way he both looks and acts. From the beginning, Dostoevsky describes him as having a light complexion with a kind and dreamy look in his eye. As a person, he forgives everybody and has exceptional levels of understanding. Most notably, he forgives Rogozhin for trying to murder him. When the book moves into the middle section, the characters all come to the Prince for either friendship or forgiveness, as if his word will cleanse their souls.

Because of their spiritual beliefs, Rogozhin and the Prince both seem to understand each other and twice the Prince refers to him as a brother. When they stand next to a religious painting in Rogozhin's house, they swap crosses, and Rogozhin then takes the Prince down to his mother, who blesses him. They do all this with an intense religious belief that none of the other characters share.

Love and Marriage

In the novel, there are three love triangles. First, Ganja fights Rogozhin for the hand of Nastassya. Second, Nastassya falls in love with both the Prince and Rogozhin. Third, the Prince finds it difficult to choose between Aglaya and Nastassya. In the end, all three love triangles prove destructive. Ganja loses a lot of his pride and confidence; the Prince goes insane; the police imprison Rogozhin for murdering Nastassya and Aglaya runs off with a Polish count.

It seems as though Dostoevsky is promoting the security of marriage over the instincts of love. He shows that the characters that are married, such as the Yephanchins, are happy in their lives and in themselves. Although Dostoevsky claims they are in love, it comes more from mutual respect than either passion or lust. As a result, they want their three daughters to marry wealthy, handsome and kind men, who can provide a secure family life. For example, they do not want Aglaya to marry the Prince because of his epilepsy. In comparison, Nastassya will not marry the Prince because she thinks he is too good for her, and that she will ultimately destroy him. She knows she is the one who wants to be destroyed, and in that way, Rogozhin is the perfect match.



Acceptance of the Other

The three main characters are all outsiders who struggle to fit into Russian society throughout the novel. The Prince finds friends, but only because he is such a forgiving and kind person, and others know they can easily take advantage of him. For example, Lebedev helps to write scandalous letters about him and even tries to get him put back into a mental hospital. In fact, most of the other characters view the Prince as an eccentric, rather than one of them. The Yephanchin's, for example, adore his company, but refuse him permission to marry Aglaya.

Rogozhin is a man who will stop at nothing to get what he wants. He does have friends, but they do not necessarily stay with him out of pure friendship, and no doubt if his passion got out of hand, they would runaway. Nastassya is the femme fatale of the book and at the beginning almost every male character falls in love with her. However, Nastassya's self-destructive streak loses her most of her friends.

In general, the other characters are fearful of the three main protagonists because they never quite know of what they are capable. The Prince, for example, has a habit of breaking into long, rapid speeches. They tolerate this behavior, and even encourage it, because it entertains their dull and repressed lives, but they are just as quick to disregard his as crazy. With no chance to find acceptance, the three main characters increasingly follow their own instincts, even though they know they are heading towards disaster.



Style

Point of View

Dostoevsky tells the story of the Idiot in the third person. The point view is at times omniscient, but Dostoevsky mostly tells the story through the Prince's eyes. This is important to the novel because it allows the reader see that although he is not the "Idiot" of the title, he is actually a deep-thinking and sensitive individual.

Occasionally he shows the story through another character's eyes, in particular Madam Yepanchin. This works to show the superficiality of a world, of which most of the other characters are part. In general, Madam Yepanchin's interest is in her daughters and finding them good and conventional husbands. In contrast, the Prince represents the world of the outsider, of which Nastassya, Rogozhin and to a lesser degree, Hippolyte and Aglaya are part. Madam Yephanchin represents Russian upper-class society.

Setting

The first setting is the train carriage where the Prince meets Rogozhin and Lebedev for the first time. The carriage is full of passengers, and the Prince shows his innocence by talking openly in front of everyone. The train is traveling from Venice to St Petersburg.

The City of St. Petersburg is the main setting in the first part of the novel and the place where Rogozhin murders Nastassya. Within St Petersburg, the other settings are the hotel, Nastassya's house, Rogozhin's house and the Ivolgin's house.

The Prince stays at a hotel during his second visit to St. Petersburg and again in the final part. In the first section, Rogozhin attempts to murder the Prince in a hotel stairway, but the Prince has an epileptic seizure and falls down the steps. The second time he goes to the hotel on the chance he will meet Rogozhin.

Rogozhin's house is a dark building with few windows, and upon seeing it, the Prince is in no doubt that it is the one belonging to his equally dark friend. The house has two entrances. One entrance leads to Rogozhin's mother's house and another leads to Rogozhin's apartment. Rogozhin takes the Prince to his mother so she can bless him. One of the most significant parts of the house is the religious painting in the hallway. The Prince and Rogozhin discuss the picture at great length. It means different things to each of them, reflecting their opposing personalities. To Rogozhin, the picture signifies guilt; to the Prince, goodness.

In the first part, Nastassya holds a party in her house. Dostoevsky describes her house as small, but expensive and with everything she needs inside. At the party, everyone gathers around a table in the drawing room, and Nastassya directs the party with dangerous party games. At one point Nastassya throws 100,000 roubles in the fireplace, hoping Ganja will dive in and fish it out.



The Ivolgin's house is a boarding house, where the Prince stays for one night on his first visit. Ganja's mother and sister run the boarding house because the family has fallen into hard times. During the Prince's stay, the family has an argument in the kitchen, which Nastassya and Rogozhin also join. The minor characters Ferdyschenko and Ptitsyn also lodge here.

The first place the Prince visits in St. Petersburg is the Yepanchin's house in the Liteyny district. He waits in the anteroom with a servant before introducing himself to Ganja and General Yephanchin in the General's study. In the study, the Prince sees a picture of Nastassya. The General then takes the Prince to meet his wife and three daughters, who are sitting in the drawing room. Dostoevsky paints St. Petersburg as a dark and repressive place and the city where all the Prince's problems occur. When the characters are in St. Petersburg, the narrative is melodramatic and in the end tragic.

In contrast, Pavlovsk is a beautiful town with open spaces, a perfect place for the characters to spend their summer. The fact that both Lebedev and the Yephachins own a house in the town gives the reader the impression that it is an expensive place where the rich go to unwind. After his seizure, the Prince stays at Lebedev's house, spending most of his time sitting on the veranda. Here he has parties and gatherings. Most memorable is his meeting with Burdovsky, who tries to extort money from the Prince. In general, the house is the perfect place for the Prince to recover from his illness. The prince spends a lot of time at the Yephanchin's house in St. Petersburg, where the mother and three daughters spend most of their time in the drawing room. Occasionally the characters take a walk in the nearby park. Here, there is a bench where the Prince has a secret meeting with Aglaya and talks with Rogozhin. At one point, the characters go to a concert hall in the park called the Vauxhall.

Language and Meaning

The Idiot is a translation from Russian to English, and it is difficult to know how much of the novel's meaning is lost. For example, the Ivolgin family, General Yephanchin and Keller are from poorer backgrounds than the other characters, but this is only told to the reader within the story and the translator does not reflect this difference in the dialogue. In general, though, the characters are from high society and the formal language reflects their position. In particular, the characters talk about philosophical ideas that show them to be highly educated. At times, though, their formal and highbrow language does not feel natural to the characters and instead show them to be repressing their true selves.

The formal language feels very much of its time. The characters send letters and go on long, meandering speeches about Russian politics and tell stories with hidden metaphors. Within this 19th century, Russian society, Dostoevsky's shows a huge difference between the role of men and women, mostly through the dialogue. The women are often very emotional and even hysterical. For example, after Burdovsky claims the Prince should give him half his inheritance, Madam Yephanchin shouts at him and then everyone else in the room. She leaves the house claiming the Prince is a



disgrace, despite the fact that she knows none of it is his fault. A few days later, she is back to being friendly again. In comparison, the men's conversation is always about business matters, and even if it is not business, they often refer to it as such, showing their need to be upstanding members of Russian society.

Structure

The *Idiot* is 573 pages long, and Dostoevsky divides it into four parts, each part about 150 pages in length. Each part contains between 10 and 16 chapters. The four parts are different in structure, which gives the book an uneven pace, but suits the changeable and, at times, unstable moods of the three main characters.

The first part of the novel is very melodramatic and the narrative moves from one event to another quickly. As the section continues, the narrative becomes frantic, and the characters increasingly passionate. Adding to this atmosphere is Dostoevsky's love for introducing a character that could increase intensity to an already intense scene. He ends a chapter three times with someone knocking on the door. The first time is in the Ivolgin's house. While they argue passionately about Ganja's impending marriage to Nastassya, Nastassya knocks unexpectedly on the door. Dostoevsky further increases the tension when Rogozhin enters. Rogozhin is Ganja's love rival, and his presence sends everything into disarray, ending with Ganja hitting the Prince across the face. Later on, a chapter ends with Rogozhin knocking at the door of Nastassya's house while she is having a party. The Prince's early arrival had already charged the atmosphere, and Rogozhin's arrival again throws it into disarray. Rogozhin throws money on the table demanding Nastassya marry him, only for the Prince to declare his own love for her. Nastassya decides to marry the Prince but then minutes later, changes her mind and joins Rogozhin's side. Before she leaves with him, she throws the bundle of notes into a fire. When they leave the house, the Prince runs after them. Everything happens so quickly in the first part, it is difficult to believe it occurs over one day.

In the second and third parts, the narrative slows to a meandering pace, the novel switching between black and at times farcical humor, to themes of a philosophical and religious nature. Dostoevsky still fits in many events, but it is over a far longer time frame and within a smaller setting, nullifying the danger so apparent early on. Even when the characters lie and argue, the environment is too secure to cause any major repercussions.

The final section is akin to a tragedy. The narrative is faster than the second and third parts, but it still does not reach the melodrama of the opening section. Instead, Dostoevsky creates a dark and foreboding atmosphere. He starts the section with Ganja on the verge of throwing out his father. His father then has a stroke and eventually dies. At the end of the novel, Rogozhin kills Nastassya and invites the Prince to sleep at the side of her dead body. The final chapter explains that Prince Myshkin has gone mad, and a judge sends Rogozhin to Siberia for fifteen years.



Quotes

"Tears, positively shone in his eyes towards the end, yet it was nothing but sentences without beginning or end, unexpected words and unexpected ideas, bursting out rapidly and unexpectedly and stumbling over one another."

P.454

"'An unchristian religion in the first place!' Myskin began in extreme agitation and with excessive abruptness. 'And in the second place Roman Catholicism is even worse than atheism itself in my opinion... Atheism only preaches a negation but Catholicism goes further; it preaches a distorted Christ.'"

P.508

"Myshkin was so absent-minded that at first he heard nothing at all, and when the General stopped before him with some excited question, to his shame he was forced to confess that he had understood a word."

P.332

"Natasya Filipovna instantly turned to him. Her eye flashed. She rushed up to a young man, a complete stranger, who was standing a couple of paces from her, snatched a thin plaited riding whip out of his hand, and struck the offender with all her might across the face."

P.337

"We are constantly hearing complaints that there are no practical people in Russia; that there are plenty of politicians, plenty of generals, that any number of business men of all sorts can be found at a moments notice, but there are no practical men."

P. 302

"'A-ah! Here's the way out! At last! It's half past eleven!' cried Natasya Filipovna. 'I beg you to be seated, friends. Here is the way out!' Saying this, she sat down. A strange laugh quivered on her lips. She sat in silent and feverish expectation, looking towards the door."

P. 144

"One of them was a short man about 27, with almost black curly hair and small, grey, fiery eyes. He had a broad and flat nose and high cheek bones. His thin lips were continually curved in an insolent, mocking and even malicious smile."

P.1

"The owner of the cloak was a young man, also 26 or 27, above the average in height, with very thick hair, with sunken cheeks and a thin, pointed almost white beard. His eyes were large, blue and dreamy; there was something gentle, though heavy looking in their expression."

P.2



"Myskin was sitting beside him motionless on the floor, and every time the delirious man broke into screaming or babble, he hastened to pass his trembling hand softly over his hair and cheeks as though soothing him. But by now he could understand no questions he was asked and did not recognize the people surrounding him."

P. 574

"Don't be afraid! Though I've taken your cross, I won't murder you for your watch!" he muttered and indistinctly, with a sudden strange laugh."

P.207

"The Poor Knight is the same Don Quixote, only serious and not comic. I didn't understand him at first, and laughed, but how I love the 'the Poor Knight' and what's more, respect his exploits."

P.232

"I saw your portrait this morning and I felt as though I recognized a face that I knew. I felt you had called to me already... I shall respect you all my life. Natasya Filippovna."

P.157



Topics for Discussion

In what ways can the Prince be seen as a Christlike figure?

In what ways does Rogozhin represent the devil?

Why is marrying Natassya so important to the Prince?

Why do you think Dostoevsky changes the pace of the narrative so much in the middle section?

What are the differences between Pavlovsk and St. Petersburg? How does each setting affect the Prince's mindset and mood?

What role does the city of Moscow play in the book? Why is it such an important city in the book, though none of the story takes place there?

Why do you think the other characters are constantly seeking the Prince's attention?