

The Possessed Study Guide

The Possessed by Fyodor Dostoevsky

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Plot Summary

The Possessed is a novel that dramatizes the cultural and political troubles of Russia in the mid-19th century. It tells the story of a small cell of nihilist terrorists that cause chaos and commit several murders in a provincial Russian town.

The novel follows the story of two families, the Stavrogins and the Verkhovensky and the circle of people that revolve around these two families. Stepan Verkhovensky, an intellectual, liberal, and ex-professor tutors Mrs. Stavrogin's son, Nicholas and keeps a small circle of political radicals. Nicholas Stavrogin, a charismatic but morally questionable and rootless young man, returns to his provincial town and brings the various sundry affairs with local women and hangers on of political radicals with him. One of these men is Peter Verkhovensky, the estranged son of Stepan who has become involved in radical politics. Other young men associated with Nicholas who have become involved in radical politics are Shatov and Kirilov. Shatov, once a socialist member of Peter's group and now a reactionary, wishes to leave the group, though Peter will not let him leave. Kirilov is a friend of Shatov's who accompanied Shatov on a trip to America before he also rejected socialism in favor of a strange philosophy that glorifies suicide.

Peter, while ingratiating himself with the local governor's wife, plots political revolution in the town. He supposedly works with the socialist Internationale and has been developing radical terrorist cells of five in many cities in Russia and throughout Europe. Peter has recruited members of his father's discussion circle and other radicals as well as local criminals to participate in his cell. They plan to foment dissent and incite violence from the local factory workers and to undermine the authority of local opinion leaders.

To this end, Peter convinces Mrs. Lembke, the provincial governor's wife, to throw a fete where he and his friends can mock the cultural elite and incite the population. Their plan works well and during the fete some of their members set fire to the poorer side of town, causing a tremendous inferno. Peter also uses one of his agents to murder Nicholas' secret wife and to arrange an illicit liaison between Nicholas and Lisa. Lisa, after the affair, discovers that Stavrogin's wife has been murdered and suspects Nicholas. While attempting to see the dead body of Nicholas's wife, Lisa is murdered by an angry mob of townsfolk.

Meanwhile, Peter has been manipulating his cell to plot the murder of Shatov who insulted Peter in the past. Peter claims that Shatov is an informant and convinces his cell that if they do not kill Shatov he will turn them all into the police. This is a lie, of course, though the group believes that Shatov is an informant and agrees to go forward with the murder. Kirilov believing that suicide is the most supremely perfect act a human can perform is convinced by Peter to kill himself and take the blame for the Shatov murder. Peter's group is successful in murdering Shatov and in convincing Kirilov to commit suicide. After the murder, Peter leaves the town and the rest of the conspirators

are arrested and confess. The novel closes with Stepan converting to Christianity before dying of illness and Nicholas Stavrogin returning home only to hang himself.



Chapter 1, By Way of an Introduction and Chapter 2, Prince Harry, Marriage Proposal

Chapter 1, By Way of an Introduction and Chapter 2, Prince Harry, Marriage Proposal Summary

Chapter one tells the story of Stepan Verkhovensky, a scholar and ex-professor who now lives with a rich, widow named Varvara Stavrogin in a provincial Russian town. Mrs. Stavrogin originally hired Verkhovensky to tutor her son, Nicholas Stavrogin. Mrs. Stavrogin and Mr. Verkhovensky have a complicated but platonic relationship. Despite her help, the Moscow and St. Petersburg intellectuals do not respect Verkhovensky. This, accompanied with his general laziness, leads to intemperate drinking and gambling.

Despite his flaws, Mr. Verkhovensky is still the most educated and literate man in his small Russian village. He is deathly afraid of being thought of as subversive by the government, though he likes to pose in his own circle as a freethinker and progressive.

Our narrator is a member of this circle, though he does not introduce himself here. There is Liputin, a stingy, middle-aged, liberal official in the province. Shatov, the newest member of the circle, was once a student of Verkhovensky's though was expelled from the university for his socialistic views. He has since changed his views and has become a strident conservative. Shatov is, for the most part, not talkative, though he can be quite irritable at times. Virginsky is, like Liputin, a local official. He is said to be the complete opposite of Shatov, though they are both young and somewhat resemble one and other

In chapter two we are introduced to Mrs. Stavrogin's son, Nicholas Stavrogin. Mrs. Stavrogin dotes on her son, though he seems to not like her at all. Verkhovensky once tutored Nicholas before he entered the military. As an officer in the Russian army, he was a bully and fought several duels, one of which led to the death of the other man.

As a result of this duel, Nicholas was demoted to a common private. He eventually worked his way back up into the officer corps. though there are rumors that he also engaged in immoral behavior while in the military. All of the Verkhovensky circle respect and admire Nicholas, who is very charismatic and good looking as well as intelligent.

Mrs. Stavrogin, fearing that she is getting older, decides that it would be good for Verkhovensky to marry her protégé, Dasha, the sister of Shatov. Both Verkhovensky and Dasha are interested in the idea. The chapter ends with Verkhovensky discovering that his son from his first marriage, whom he has only met once, is coming to town to reclaim some property.



Chapter 1, By Way of an Introduction and Chapter 2, Prince Harry, Marriage Proposal Analysis

In chapter one and two, Dostoevsky sets up several of the important characters and introduces many of the key themes. Verkhovensky, Mrs. Stavrogin, and the Verkhovensky circle represent and mirror several portions of Russian society, which Dostoevsky is partially mocking in these chapters. The tone is deliberately ironic and we are meant to see Verkhovensky as a buffoonish, self-important man who has never really lived up to what little potential he may have had. Although he seems to take ideas seriously, his lack of actual scholarship and his preference for drinking and gambling over research and writing illustrate that Verkhovensky is really just posing at being an intellectual and scholar. The members of his circle are no better. Dostoevsky is mocking the liberalism of the time, which he takes to lack seriousness. For Verkhovensky, his ideas are no more than a type of fashion; whereas, for the members of his circle there are a variety of reasons why they are involved. The circle is merely "playing" with ideas and talking.

In chapter two we see a side of Nicholas that may be foreshadowing brutality or inhumanity that is to come later. Although we are told that Nicholas was suffering from a fever when he committed his acts, there is some indication from the comments of Virginsky that the acts may have been completely in character for Nicholas. Towards the end of the chapter, the news of Verkhovensky's son returning strikes an ominous note and the symbolism of the disposed son returning likely indicates future turmoil.



Part I, Chapter 3, Another Man's Sins and Chapter 4, The Cripple

Part I, Chapter 3, Another Man's Sins and Chapter 4, The Cripple Summary

Chapter 3 begins with Stepan Verkhovensky in an agitated state about the prospect of marriage to Dasha Shatov. He is both excited by the prospect and somewhat ashamed. Stepan is somewhat ashamed of the proposal because he believes that Mrs. Stavrogin has only arranged the marriage to cover up something in Dasha's past. This story is substantiated in a meeting between Verkhovensky, Liputin and a man that is friends with Verkhovensky's estranged son Peter, and Mr. Kirilov. Kirilov is a mutual friend of Peter Verkhovensky and Nicholas Stavrogin. Stepan questions Liputin about his recent encounters with Mrs. Stavrogin. Mrs. Stavrogin asked Liputin whether he thought her son mad or not. He replies that he is very intelligent, though he cannot vouch for his character. There is an imputation that Nicholas is an unscrupulous seducer of women and Liputin insinuates that Dasha may have been seduced by him in Geneva. This insinuation upsets Verkhovensky who now believes that Mrs. Stavrogin may have only asked him to marry Dasha so as to cover up her son's indiscretions. Stepan is both upset and excited that he may have to sacrifice himself in some way to cover up Nicholas's action. He is also worried that marriage will somehow corrupt him. This is despite the fact that he has already been married twice before.

In Chapter 4, we are introduced to a new set of characters. First is Lisa Tushin, a young headstrong woman who has apparently had some sort of relationship with Nicholas in Geneva. The next is Captain Lebyatkin and his crippled sister. Lebyatkin also had some relationship with Nicholas in St. Petersburg, though it is not clear exactly what the relationship was. He lives in the same house with Shatov and Kirilov and is said to constantly drink and savagely beat his crippled sister.

Lisa approaches Shatov, who is multilingual, in an attempt to get him to join a business venture she is interested in pursuing. She wants to start a yearly book that will collect all the important articles in Russia from the previous year into one volume. She needs someone to edit and publish this and she wants Shatov to be that man. For some reason though, once Shatov finds out that she wants him to also maintain the printing press, which she will supply, Shatov is offended and leaves in a huff.

Captain Lebyatkin sends Lisa a letter expressing his desire to marry her, which is odd because it does not seem that they have ever met. Lisa becomes upset and has a desire to see Miss Lebyatkin the cripple. We learn that Miss Lebyatkin was once a nun and there is some insinuation that she may be a witch.



Part I, Chapter 3, Another Man's Sins and Chapter 4, The Cripple Analysis

Chapter 3 and 4 continue many of the themes of the first two chapters but with increasing tension and amplification. It is becoming clear that the older characters, Verkhovensky and Mrs. Stavrogin, who were the central players in the first two chapters, are not in control of the action that is starting to unfurl around them.

In Kirilov we meet a character obsessed with freedom, death, and God. Not uncommon obsessions among Dostoevsky characters. Trained as an engineer, he does nothing but sit in his apartment and brood about death and freedom. He believes that fear of death is slavery to God and eliminates human freedom. He is attempting to eliminate his fear of death and hence his need for God. This is why he studies suicides. His views are odd, but they also bear a striking resemblance to the views of the contemporary German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche believed that a higher man, a superman, who would live in absolute freedom and not be bound by the superstitious morality and religion of the past, must overcome man. Nietzsche famously argued that such a superman would be beyond good and evil in that his freedom would transcend the need for moral rules. In *Crime and Punishment*, one of Dostoevsky's earlier novels, the main character, Raskolnikov decides to kill an old woman merely to transcend morality in this Nietzschean way. Kirilov is an extreme type, but ultimately, Dostoevsky sees all intellectuals who are divorced from the church and God as traveling down the same road to one degree or another. We still have not seen where these ideas are leading our characters, though the tension does seem to be rising.



Part I, Chapter 5, The Wise Serpent

Part I, Chapter 5, The Wise Serpent Summary

Chapter 5 begins with a confrontation between Mrs. Stavrogin, Lisa, Miss Lebyatkin and Verkhovensky, Shatov, and the narrator. Mrs. Stavrogin wants to find out what Shatov knows about Lebyatkin. She also calls Dasha and Mrs. and Mr. Drozdov to come into the conversation. Peter Verkhovensky (Stepan's son) and Captain Lebyatkin also show up. Peter begins to tell of Nicholas Stavrogin's relationship to Miss Lebyatkin when Nicholas suddenly appears. His mother demands to know whether Miss Lebyatkin the cripple is his wife. It is implied that the answer is "no", though Nicholas does not answer directly. Instead he leads Miss Lebyatkin out of the house and takes her home.

After Nicholas has left, Peter takes it upon himself to explain the circumstances of Nicholas's relationship with Miss Lebyatkin. Peter explains that five years ago, Nicholas met Captain Lebyatkin in St. Petersburg. At the time, the captain and his sister were living on the streets begging. Nicholas formed an interest in the captain because he found his buffoonish behavior amusing. At first he took no notice of Miss Lebyatkin, though later he began to notice her innocence. Nicholas decided that Miss Lebyatkin, though crippled and somewhat crazed, was better than all of his other associates and began to treat her very well. He began to give the captain money to provide for his sister. The captain, being a drunk and a tyrant, spent the money on himself and began to see it as his entitlement. The reason for Nicholas's treatment of Miss Lebyatkin is not clear though Peter claims it is a product of the "demon of irony" that possess him.

After Peter is done recounting all of this, Nicholas returns to the group. At that moment, Peter asks his father in front of the group whether his father has asked him there to save him or to congratulate him about his marriage. It is clear that by reading his father's ridiculous letter, Peter is intending to sabotage his marriage arrangement with Dasha. He mentions that Stepan believes that Dasha has fallen into disrepute in Switzerland. Mrs. Stavrogin goes into a rage after hearing this and throws Stepan out, claiming that she never wants to see him again. At this moment, Shatov walks up to Stavrogin and punches him in the face. Shatov walks out of the room after he punches Stavrogin. After he has left a scream is heard from outside the room and that is where the chapter ends.

Part I, Chapter 5, The Wise Serpent Analysis

All of part one so far has been setting up many of the dramatic pieces that will be used in the next two parts. Several elements have been slowly coming together in the story. Peter has been approaching his father, Nicholas has returned home. Stepan and Dasha are engaged in a strange and seemingly ill-fated a manner. In this final chapter of part one, we see all of these pieces come together and climax in Mrs. Stavrogin home. Peter eliminates the possibility of his father's wedding by exposing him as the indulgent, silly,



man that he is. Lebyatkin is exposed as a man who is trying to cheat Nicholas out of his money. Shatov comes out against Stavrogin, presumably because he believes Nicholas to be behind the trick that Peter pulled to end the possibility of Stepan's marriage to Dasha. At the end of the chapter we are left with a feeling of dread, wondering where the scream came from. The themes of betrayal, violence, and ideas that will take up the rest of the book.



Part II, Chapter 1, Night and Chapter 2, Night Continued

Part II, Chapter 1, Night and Chapter 2, Night Continued Summary

In chapter 1 and 2 of part II, we learn the aftermath of the events at Mrs. Stavrogin's and some answers to many of the questions from part I. We learn that for more than a week, no one has seen either Shatov or Stavrogin outside of their homes. We also learn that Peter Verkhovensky has been spreading rumors about what happened in Mrs. Stavrogin's home as well as stories about how Stavrogin is likely to kill Shatov. Peter has ingratiated himself with the governor of the province and has been generally getting to know the important members of the town, including Karmazinov, the important writer who happens to be staying in the town.

Stepan is convinced that his son planned the whole incident with Nicholas beforehand. In a meeting between Peter and Nicholas while Nicholas is recovering from an illness that the blow from Shatov has brought on, we learn that this is partially true. Peter intentionally circulated rumors about Dasha to instigate his father. Although Lisa is to be married to Mr. Drozdov, Stavrogin tells Peter that he is planning on proposing to her in the next five days. It is clear that Peter is planning some sort of uprising and is involved in some type of conspiracy. He tells Nicholas about a nearby factory and the workers there that he intends to organize for some kind of socialist uprising. After Peter leaves, Nicholas falls into a feverish sleep before asking his servant to help him out of the house without his mother noticing.

In the raining cold of the night, he goes to the house of Kirilov and Shatov. He initially sees Kirilov. Stavrogin tells Kirilov about a man named Gaganov who has been insulting Nicholas and whom Stavrogin plans to challenge to a duel. He asks Kirilov to be his second and to set up the duel with Gaganov early the next day. Kirilov and Stavrogin then engage in a discussion about life and death. Kirilov maintains that he loves life and that all things are good. He claims that man would be happy and good if only he realized he were happy and good. Soon, he believes, a man-god will come and preach his new doctrine. Stavrogin is ironic with Kirilov and clearly does not take his views very seriously. He leaves Kirilov and attempts to see Shatov.

Shatov lets Stavrogin in to his apartment, though he is worried that Stavrogin will kill him. He has been so worried over the last several days that he bought a revolver to use against Stavrogin, though he did not buy any ammunition. Once he actually sees Stavrogin, he decides that he could not use the revolver against Stavrogin even if he wanted. Stavrogin wants to know why Shatov struck him. He asks if he struck him because of his affair with Shatov's wife and Shatov responds that it had nothing to do with it. We also learn that Mary Lebyatkin is Stavrogin's lawfully married wife, though he seemed to deny it at the previous meeting. Shatov claims that he struck Stavrogin



because he has "fallen" so far from his previous greatness. It is clear that Shatov has the greatest respect for Stavrogin and Nicholas's disgraceful acts have offended Shatov.

Stavrogin warns Shatov that members of "the society" may try to kill him soon. Shatov was once a member of the society but after he returned from America he tried to leave the society once he changed his political views. The society is a secret revolutionary group of some sort that has ties to the socialist internationale. Peter heads it and many of Verkhovensky's circle are members. Stavrogin is not an official member and he claims that the society may be trying to kill him as well.

Nicholas tells Stavrogin that he plans to make his marriage to Lebyatkin public soon and that Kirilov, Peter, and the Captain all know of the marriage but were sworn to secrecy. Shatov goes on to rant to Stavrogin about his political and religious views. He believes that great people have their own, national god and that the Russian god will be responsible for the regeneration of the earth. Shatov will not admit, however, that he believes in God, though he believes in the Russian Church and Christ. Stavrogin leaves and tells Shatov he will never come back to see him again.

Stavrogin leaves and heads to the house where the captain and Mary Lebyatkin are now living. Along the way he runs into an escaped convict named Fedka that Peter has told him about. Stavrogin tells him that if he sees him again he will tie him up and tell the police about him. Once at Lebyatkin's, he tells the captain about his plan to make his marriage to Mary known. This bothers the captain, but Stavrogin quiets his fears. He then goes to see Mary, who seems delusional. She tells Stavrogin that he will never live with her and then, frustrated with her madness, Stavrogin leaves. On his way back he sees Fedka and throws him against the railing of the bridge. Instead of tying him up, though, Stavrogin gives him all the money he has and runs home.

Part II, Chapter 1, Night and Chapter 2, Night Continued Analysis

In this chapter we learn about the secret revolutionary society that is operating in the town. Stavrogin claims that Peter is the leader of the group and that he is not a member, though it is not clear how much we can trust Stavrogin. He has clearly been manipulating Kirilov and Shatov for a long time and he may still be manipulating them. Shatov claims that it was Stavrogin who implanted the ideas of a national religion regenerating the world into Shatov's head, while filling Kirilov's head with all of the ideas about atheism and the man-god. Peter, though somewhat defiant, also seems to defer to Stavrogin. In any case, what was idle intellectual chatter in Stepan Verkhovensky's circle has become actual conspiracy in the hands of his son. It is not clear how deep the conspiracy goes though most of the characters seem to be implicated in it one way or the other.

The voice of Shatov in this chapter is also the voice of Dostoevsky and the views he expresses about the Russian Church and the regeneration of man through the Russian religion are views that the author shares. He firmly believes that socialism is merely a



modern variant of the atheistic urge that Dostoevsky believes is the main error of humankind. At one point in the chapter he argues, through Shatov, that each great people has given the world their god. The Jews gave us an actual god, the Greeks gave us art and religion, and the Romans gave us the state. The French adopted the Roman Catholic religion, which to Dostoevsky is worse than atheism, and soon rejected it in favor of mad atheism and the guillotine. He believes that it is the job of the Unified Russian church to bring humanity out of the darkness of atheism, socialism, and Catholicism and thereby to regenerate the world.

We see these themes again in Dostoevsky's later novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, especially in the "Grand Inquisitor" scene. There, in more dramatic form, he accuses the Roman Catholic church of succumbing to the final temptation that Christ was presented in the desert by the devil, the temptation to rule over the world. This temporal desire has infected their church and has turned their religion into anti-Christianity. In "the Grand Inquisitor" the head catholic inquisitor comes to actually kill Christ, who has come back to earth claiming that the church has a different, more important mission. Dostoevsky, like Shatov, sees this perversion of religion as also being present in the socialist desire to remake the world and bring about paradise on earth. In this novel, many of the characters are possessed by abstract ideas of socialism or atheism. These ideas will lead them to act in ways contrary to their humanity.



Part II, Chapter 3, The Duel and Chapter 4, All Agog

Part II, Chapter 3, The Duel and Chapter 4, All Agog Summary

Chapter 3 begins in the afternoon of the next day, the day of the duel between Stavrogin and Gaganov. As Nicholas requested, Kirilov went to Gaganov early in the morning to apologize again for the insult that Stavrogin gave to Gaganov's father years ago. Gaganov would not accept the apology and was eager to duel with Stavrogin. It was decided that the weapons would be pistols and that if either duelist missed on either the first or second shot they would have another shot, for a total of three possible shots. It is evident that Gaganov's hatred of Stavrogin runs deep. He intends to kill Nicholas rather than to just regain his father's honor. Mr. Drozdov, an old school friend of Gaganov's and the fiancée of Lisa, acts as Gaganov's second. They meet at the appointed time and place for the duel.

Before the duel begins, Nicholas offers one more apology in hopes of stopping the duel. Gaganov again refuses and the duel proceeds. Each man takes his place and walks twelve paces from the other. Gaganov fires first and wounds Nicholas in the finger, though the injury is not serious. On Stavrogin's turn to shoot, he intentionally shoots into the air so as to miss Gaganov. This enrages Gaganov who takes another shot. He yells at Nicholas to aim the gun at him and claims that by shooting into the air, Nicholas is insulting Gaganov again. Nicholas argues that it is his right to shoot as he pleases and shoots again into the air. Gaganov exercises his right to take a third shot, but misses again. Nicholas takes his last shot, still shooting into the air, but this time closer to Gaganov.

After the duel, Nicholas returns to his mother's house where Dasha comes to see him. We find out that the rumors of their affair are true and Dasha declares her love for Stavrogin. Nicholas tells her that he will probably announce his marriage to Mary Lebyatkin in a day or two, but claims, cryptically, that by that time they may all be dead.

In chapter 4 we learn that news of Stavrogin's duel has spread and opinion of him throughout the province has gone up substantially. The rest of the chapter deals with the relationship between the provincial governor, Mr. Lembke and Peter Verkhovensky. Lembke is an ethnically German Russian and because of this, a member of the Russian ruling elite. Although in school he lacked ambition and talent, his familial connections have allowed him to achieve distinction in the civil service. At one time, he desired to be a writer and even wrote a novel that was rejected by a literary magazine. Mrs. Lembke is from a good, though not great, family and desires to be included in Mrs. Stavrogin's society. She fancies herself a kind of liberal and tries to keep up with the current political fashions of the Russian youth. For these reasons she befriends Peter Verkhovensky. Peter is a political radical and has nothing but contempt for Mr. Lembke, which he

openly shows. Mr. Lembke gives Peter his novel to read and Peter claims that he has lost it.

Later, Peter meets again with his father and proceeds to abuse him. He accuses Stepan of being a worthless hanger-on and claims that Mrs. Stavrogin let Peter read all of Stepan's letters to her. Apparently Peter plans to drive his father into a frenzy of despair and do something involving Mr. Lembke; this is exactly what Peter is planning though it is still not clear. At the end of the chapter we learn that whatever plans Peter has are being facilitated by Julia Lembke's ambition and lack of sense.

Part II, Chapter 3, The Duel and Chapter 4, All Agog Analysis

Aside from a rather uneventful duel, there is not much action in chapter 3 and 4. It is clear that Dostoyevsky in the last 4 chapters has been setting up and slowly turning the screw to increase the tension before his impending climax. Every chapter has revealed some new fact about Nicholas Stavrogin that started in part one as a rumor, was seemingly dispelled, and is now revealed to be true. Here we also find out that the rumors of Nicholas's affair with Mrs. Shatov are also true. Peter's relationship with Nicholas is more complicated than it originally seemed and it is not clear who is manipulating whom. Peter is more devious and clever than it might have seemed at the outset and it is clear that he is using his relationship with Mrs. Lembke to plot something.



Part II, Chapter 5, Before the Fête and Chapter 6, Peter Verkhovensky is Busy

Part II, Chapter 5, Before the Fête and Chapter 6, Peter Verkhovensky is Busy Summary

Julia Lembke is planning a Fête for the town. All of the townspeople will be allowed to attend if they first buy a ticket that acts as a subscription to a new literary magazine that Julia Lembke wants to start. The great writer, Karmazinov will be attending and Stepan Verkhovensky will also be giving a lecture. Julia and Mrs. Stavrogin are social rivals and Mrs. Stavrogin would very much like to host the fête. Meanwhile, Peter is busy spreading rumors at the Lembke house that Stavrogin is a government spy. Julia is hosting many of the local youth in her salon and we discover that as the behavior of the youth is degenerating, her favors continue to pile up upon them.

Mrs. Stavrogin, finally fed up with Stepan Verkhovensky's antics after his letter about Dasha to Peter, decides to separate from him. She tells him that he must leave her house for good, but that she will still pay him an allowance and provide for some of his expenses even after her death. Mrs. Stavrogin is becoming increasingly modern, with utilitarian views. She accuses Mr. Verkhovensky of being a fraud and a dilettante and then abuses him when she finds out that he is planning on talking about the Sistine Madonna at Julia Lembke's fête. She believes this to be too old-fashioned a topic.

In Chapter 6, we see Peter rushing around town manipulating various characters to act out whatever evil designs he may have waiting. We find out that Mr. Lembke has become ineffectual and is under the sway of his wife. Many of the youths that are running wild in town would, in normal circumstances be sent to Siberia, but are being protected by Julia. As a result of this, Mr. Lembke is becoming more and more distant and disconnected from the work of government. Julia in her hopeful naivety believes she can help and rehabilitate the wild youths, but in reality they are manipulating her. A local lieutenant, accused of freethinking and nihilism, attacks his general, biting his ear. Once his room is searched, the authorities find a stack of radical literature. Similarly, a cholera outbreak at the town factory leads to an investigation where the same radical literature is found in the factory. It is clear that someone is instigating radical activity in the town.

Mrs. Lembke sends Peter to see her husband to find out some information about the fête. Mr. Lembke begins questioning Peter about the literature and Peter advises that he has all of the factory workers flogged to discourage any radical thinking. He then shows Lembke a radical poem, *A Noble Character*, which he claims is written by Shatov. Peter also claims that Shatov is responsible for the revolutionary literature around town. Peter argues that Shatov, Kirilov, and the Lieutenant who bit his general are all part of a radical conspiracy. Lembke then shows Peter a letter he has received and Peter takes the letter telling Lembke to remain silent about its contents.



After Peter leaves Lembke, Lembke begins to distrust Peter and starts to wonder if Peter is telling the truth. Lembke's assistant, Blum, also believes that Peter is lying and trying to manipulate Lembke. Blum suggests that they search Peter's house for revolutionary material and Lembke seems to give Blum permission to do so.

After meeting with Lembke, Peter calls on Karmazinov, the great Russian writer who has been staying in town. Karmazinov has lent the manuscript of his new novel *Merci* to Peter, though Peter claims to have not read it and misplaced the novel at home. When Karmazinov requests that he send his people over to Peter's to immediately find the novel, however, Peter produces the copy from his pocket. Peter trades some back-handed insults with Karmazinov and then Karmazinov goes on a tirade about the drawbacks of Russia and the Russian people. He claims that he is more of a German now than a Russian and equates Russia to a sinking ship. Peter alludes that the revolution is coming and Karmazinov tells Peter he is emigrating soon.

Next Peter goes to Kirilov's apartment. Although it is still not clear what Peter's plan is, it seems that Kirilov has decided to commit suicide to cover up some crime that Peter intends to commit. After talking to Kirilov, Peter goes to see Shatov. We find out that it was Peter, not Shatov, who wrote a Noble Character and that Peter threatens to hang Shatov with the success of the revolution.

Simultaneously Mr. Drozdov, Lisa's fiancée, approaches Stavrogin and asks him to marry Lisa. He knows that Lisa loves Stavrogin and would leave Drozdov at any time to be with Stavrogin. Nicholas tells Drozdov that he is already married. Drozdov leaves and Peter enters Stavrogin's room. They talk to each other cryptically and then leave together.

Part II, Chapter 5, Before the Fête and Chapter 6, Peter Verkhovensky is Busy Analysis

Like the last chapters, chapter 5 and 6 are building up for the inevitable climax. We learn that Mrs. Lembke is being duped and manipulated by the local ill-behaved and politically radical youths, led by Peter. We also learn that Peter is manipulating several important people in town. He tries to frame Shatov to Lembke as a radical author and provocateur, though we know that Peter himself is the culprit. We also find out that Kirilov has agreed to commit suicide to cover up a murder that Peter is planning. The assumption is that the murders will be politically motivated, though part of the approach Dostoevsky has been using in this novel is to show how political, spiritual, and mundane motives and reasons can often overlap and be used as substitutes for one another. It is not clear in the rash behavior of the youths at the monastery, what behavior was the result of genuine anti-religious sentiment and what was just boorishness and immature pranks. It is similar with Stavrogin and his relationships and Kirilov. Kirilov is a member of the "society" but he has clearly agreed to commit suicide for purely personal, philosophical reasons. Peter seems to be driven by political motives, but he is also a clever and manipulative fellow who is working everyone around him to his designs. How much of his ultimate reasons are political rather than merely personal is not clear.

Part of Dostoevsky's point here in using Mrs. Stavrogin and Mrs. Lembke is to show how radical youths need and take full advantage of silly rich people who want to ingratiate themselves with the younger generation. As the narrator makes clear, none of the impending problems would have occurred but for Mrs. Lembke's behavior. That is, everyone believes the radicals are harmless and charming until it is too late.



Part II, Chapter 7, At Virginsky's and Chapter 8, Ivan the Crown-Prince

Part II, Chapter 7, At Virginsky's and Chapter 8, Ivan the Crown-Prince Summary

Fifteen people have gathered at Mr. Virginsky's house, ostensibly to celebrate his birthday. The real purpose is to engage in a radical political meeting. Some of those in attendance are members of Peter Verkhovensky's secret revolutionary cell or "group of five." Liputin, Virginsky, Shigalyov, Lyamshin, and Tolkachenko. None of those in attendance, save Peter, know the purpose of the meeting, though everyone is anxious and excited. A young man and woman student begin discussing some of the latest nihilist ideas in an attempt to impress Stavrogin and Peter, though they only annoy everyone at the party.

After they get the young students to stop their silly quibbling, Shigalyov starts the meeting by giving an overview of his new plan of social organization. His plan is to remove the necessity of thinking from 90% of humanity and to basically make them all slaves. Contented slaves, but slaves nonetheless. The other 10% will stay educated and maintain the society.

The next chapter, "Ivan the Crown-Prince", begins with Peter racing out of Virginsky's to stop Stavrogin from leaving. Peter realizes that he does not need to return to Virginsky's and decides to head off Kirilov and Stavrogin by taking a shortcut to Phillipov's where Stavrogin and Kirilov are heading. Peter is concerned about an anonymous letter that someone sent to Lembke that will expose their group. Peter suggests to Stavrogin that Lebyatkin was the one who sent the letter and that he is using it to blackmail Stavrogin. Stavrogin does not take this threat seriously and tells Peter that he will not let him kill Shatov. Nicholas says that Peter is intent on killing Shatov to cement his new political group; furthermore, he wants Fedka, the escaped convict to kill Mary and the Captain. Peter argues that he has similar cells all over Russia and that once the violence begins, they will tear the foundations of the Russian State apart. Peter goes on a long speech about how much in agreement he is with Shigalyov doctrine of equality. He believes in the equality of the slave and the necessity of violence to bring about his desired social transformation. He plans to use drunkenness and vice to reduce the common man's desire for learning and then to level everyone but the elite to the level of contented workers. Peter claims he is a rogue rather than a socialist and goes on to extol many despicable things. Peter needs Nicholas to be his charismatic leader, his prince Ivan, and a mystical figure that has been in hiding and will return to lead the revolution. Stavrogin refuses to play this part in Peter's plan and Peter, in a rage says he will give Nicholas three days to change his mind.



Part II, Chapter 7, At Virginsky's and Chapter 8, Ivan the Crown-Prince Analysis

We are now beginning to see where the plot is taking the novel. We see the designs that Peter has on Shatov and maybe on the Lebyatkins. The plan that Dostoevsky attributes to Shigalyov is an amalgamation of various nihilist, socialist, and anarchist plans that were floating around during the time, though it is not atypical. Indeed the plan is not too far from the communist system that was actually implemented in Russia several decades after the events in this novel take place. Peter has been manipulating everyone around him to create revolutionary societies to topple the Russia society. Nicholas correctly suspects, though, that Peter is more of a rogue of ambitious politician than he is a committed socialist. We are left wondering whether it is a political ideal that Peter is after or just plain power, and whether there is really ever much of a difference.

Before Shigalyov gives the overview of his plan the two students are debating at Virginsky's home. This scene has elements of satire with both students trying to outdo one another in radical ideas. One claims that he knew that morality was meaningless before the other suggesting that radical ideas are like fashions.



Part II, Chapter 9, Stepan Verkhovensky is Raided and Chapter 10, Filibusters, A Fateful Morning

Part II, Chapter 9, Stepan Verkhovensky is Raided and Chapter 10, Filibusters, A Fateful Morning Summary

Chapter 9 begins, as the title suggests, with Stepan Verkhovensky being raided by the provincial police. Stepan has many papers and books taken from his house by the police. Mr. Verkhovensky is very upset, but also somewhat triumphant and excited by the raid. We find out that it was Mr. Lembke's assistant, Mr. Blum who carried out the raid. Stepan, far from resisting the search is more than cooperative, opening his drawers and desks for the police, helping them find anything that might be of interest. The narrator, who is talking to Stepan after the arrest is baffled by the fact that Stepan facilitated the entire search. Indeed, he declines his rights to have a more limited search and asks the police to perform a more detailed search. Stepan, though he has in some ways brought the search on himself, is deathly afraid of being sent to Siberia. He believes the coach for Siberia will pick him up at any minute. Eventually he gathers his courage and decides to visit Lembke and demand to know why he is being searched and what he is accused of. The narrator, noting that he has been selected by Mrs. Lembke to be a steward for her upcoming Fête, decides to join Stepan on his trip to Lembke's. The narrator is hoping to make sense of the odd raid and to keep Stepan from doing something silly at Lembke's.

The next chapter begins just as Stepan and the narrator are leaving for Lembke's. They notice that workers from the Spigulin factory are gathering in the street to ask the governor to intercede on their behalf to deal with their manager who had fired them and not paid the whole amount he owed them. Some claim that the workers in the street are just trying to get the money owed to them by the factory owner, others believe that they are political agitators stirred up by the revolutionary literature that Peter has been planting at the factory. Liputin and Fedka have been stirring up agitation at the factory and Fedka and two workers are implicated in arson at the factory. The police commissioner, convinced the workers are part of a general socialist uprising, gathers his police on the street to confront the workers. In the crowd of workers, Peter and some of his gang are stirring up trouble trying to incite the crowd. Mrs. Lembke, whose generosity and naivety are partially responsible for these troubles, still believes that she can reform the youths.

Meanwhile, Stepan and the narrator arrive at Lembke's and Stepan demands to know why he was searched. Lembke, somewhat confused, asks Blum if he knows anything about the search. Blum claims that it was all a misunderstanding. Apparently, Blum meant to search Peter's house and searched Stepan's by mistake. Julia Lembke, still



upset at her husband, sees Stepan and rushes him into her salon to meet with Karmazinov. They talk about his new book *Merci* and Lembke discusses what he will read for the Fête the next day. Lisa, who is also in the salon challenges Nicholas by asking him to have Lebyatkin, who claims to be his relation by marriage to stop writing her letters. Nicholas, in front of everyone, admits that Lebyatkin is his brother-in-law and that he is married to Mary. The chapter ends with Mrs. Stavrogin shocked and mortified that her son has married Mary and all of the characters in the salon in an uproar about the news before the fête.

Part II, Chapter 9, Stepan Verkhovensky is Raided and Chapter 10, Filibusters, A Fateful Morning Analysis

These chapters are similar to the last several chapters in that they are setting up the plot pieces for the coming climax rather than advancing the plot themselves. Nicholas, by admitting that he is indeed married to Mary, has passed the point of no return and his mother can no longer cover up his indiscretion. The possibility of him living an honorable life is effectively over once he announces this fact. He has separated himself from his society. We also see how far Peter's plotting goes in the factory uprising. Peter has been manipulating everyone in town to force some kind of confrontation that can spark a revolution and we may just have that kind of event in the factory uprising. We see Dostoyevsky's lampoon of the literary intelligentsia in his portrayal of Karmazinov and Verkhovensky here. Both are out of touch with the times and desperately trying to ingratiate themselves with a younger generation that is hell bent on destroying them. Only Lembke, who is hamstrung by his appeasing wife and his own personality, recognizes the brewing threat, though it may be too late to do anything about it.



Part III, Chapter 1, The Fête, Part One and Chapter 2, The End of The Fête

Part III, Chapter 1, The Fête, Part One and Chapter 2, The End of The Fête Summary

This chapter begins the day after the factory riot, the day of the fête. Mrs. Lembke, the planner of the fête, is still unaware that public opinion has shifted against her. Peter is controlling her, though she is not aware of the fact herself. On the day of the fête, everyone who could afford the high price of a ticket to the event and some that could not would be attending. Some of the poorer folk in town had even pawned household items to afford dresses for their daughters and wives. The fête was composed of two main parts, a morning literary event and an evening ball. Mrs. Lembke, at the advice of some of young men on the planning committee, made a grave error in deciding to charge a high price to attend, but also not to provide food.

As the Fête begins, it is clear that Liputin and other compatriots of Peter are letting many of the disheveled lower class townspeople in to the house. They begin to loudly complain about the lack of food and demand that they should have food for the price they paid. The chief of police realizes that this is a plot to incite a riot and starts arresting the complainers. Next, the townspeople start entering the fête and taking their seats for the expected reading by Karmazinov. On the stage where Karmazinov is set to speak, however, Lebyatkin is on the stage drunk. Liputin takes the stage and shuffles Lebyatkin off before returning and asking the audience if they would allow him to read a poem. The crowd, agitated and bored, ask him to read the poem, which is an obscene farce lampooning the gentry and generally in bad taste. Liputin leaves the stage and Karmazinov comes on to read his final work *Merci*. Karmazinov begins reading 30 pages of pretentious memories that, half way in, bore the audience. Some of the younger, unruly types in the back begin to heckle Karmazinov. He finishes and exits the stage, leaving it for a reinvigorated Stepan Verkhovensky. Stepan, in opposition to the prevailing trend, gives a passionate defense of high culture against materialism. The crowd reacts violently against his message and the narrator pulls him off the stage and sends him home. Next a mad, revolutionary professor takes the stage and stirs up the crowd, but before we can hear too much of his message, the narrator escapes from the fête and runs away.

In the chapter, "The End of the Fête", we find the narrator with Mrs. Lembke back at her home. She has finally realized that Peter has been manipulating her and she is sobbing and arguing with Peter. Peter, alternately insulting her and trying to comfort her is trying to convince her to go back for the second part of the fête, the ball. Peter, in the midst of all this, lets slip (intentionally) that Lisa has gone back to Stavrogin's in his carriage. The narrator accuses Peter of instigating Lisa's liaison. The narrator then leaves. Returning to the ball, the only people left after the spectacle earlier in the day are drunken rabble,



lower class functionaries, and troublemakers. Some of the revolutionary cell engages in a satirical play until a fire is seen coming from across the river, the poor side of town. It is assumed that workers from the Spigulin factory set the town on fire and everyone from the ball rushes across the river to help put the blaze out. In an attempt to help put the fire out, Lembke is hit by a burning board and is incapacitated. Later it is discovered that in a house that was meant to be burned are the bodies of Mary Lebyatkin and the Captain along with their maid, throats slit and robbed. Some of the townsfolk start discussing how Stavrogin must have had them killed so that he could engage in his affair with Lisa.

Part III, Chapter 1, The Fête, Part One and Chapter 2, The End of The Fête Analysis

These two chapters are part of the rising climax of action that will play out through Part III. In this chapter Dostoevsky shows one of the central themes of the novel in the events of the fête, namely, the distinction between the "superfluous men" of the 40's and the "raw youth" of the 60's. Karmazinov, who is modeled on Turgenev, is the archetypal aristocratic superfluous man. He is an educated writer who is concerned with the affairs of Europe and would desperately like to see his homeland, Russia, reformed, but he is also aloof and alienated from his homeland. He goes so far in his meeting earlier in the novel with Peter to say that he is no longer going to live in Russia and that he does not consider himself a Russian. Dostoevsky shows Karmazinov in this chapter to be well meaning, but also out of step and disconnected from the population, in this case the audience. Stepan is a similar type though more comical in some ways. He is, like Karmazinov, a man of the 40's but is more similar to Alexander Herzen, a writer who he admires. Herzen, like Stepan in this chapter, argued that Shakespeare was more valuable than boots. That is, high culture was valuable regardless of the material effects that it contributed to the lower classes. Part of the dispute between the older and younger generation here is a frustration with the older generations defeatism. The younger generation regards the literary methods of the older generation as ineffectual and decadent. Hence the dispute between Shakespeare and boots. What good is Shakespeare, the youth argue, when we have no boots? This separation is seen clearly between Peter, the young, culture-less terrorist and Stepan the older, cultured, but alienated and ineffectual intellectual. Much of the action in this chapter is a sustained satire of both generations, though Dostoevsky does seem to be, however reluctantly, closer to the older generation than the younger generation.



Part III, Chapter 3, The End of a Love Affair and Chapter 4, The Last Decision

Part III, Chapter 3, The End of a Love Affair and Chapter 4, The Last Decision Summary

Chapter 3 begins in Stavrogin's home the morning after the eventful fête. We find Lisa, in her dress from the evening before, sitting in Stavrogin's parlor after clearly having spent the night with him. They begin to quarrel and Stavrogin begs Lisa not to leave him after their night together. Lisa, is upset with herself and claims that she must leave. Stavrogin protests and says that he has paid for their night together with a life—not his, but someone else's. Lisa, not having heard of the murder of the Lebyatkins and the fire of the night before, is confused and does not understand what he is talking about. We find out that Peter had a hand in manipulating Lisa to come to Stavrogin. Lisa also insults Stavrogin and claims that he really wants Dasha, who will follow him anywhere.

As they are arguing, Peter enters and takes Stavrogin aside. He tells him about the murder of the Lebyatkins and claims that it was all Fedka's fault. Peter tells Stavrogin about the fire and claims responsibility for it. He also tells Stavrogin that some of the townspeople believe Stavrogin to have been behind the double murder. Stavrogin, feeling guilt for the murder of his wife, also accuses Peter of having a hand in the murder.

Lisa finally barges into where they are talking and, overhearing some of their conversation, asks Stavrogin if he really did murder his wife. Nicholas says that he knew they were going to be killed and did not stop it, but that he did not have a hand in their death. Lisa rushes out upon hearing this and Stavrogin argues with Peter before Peter chases after her. Lisa escapes Peter and finds her fiancé Drozdov on the path. He helps her into a carriage and they rush off to see the murdered trio. Along the way, they find Stepan Verkhovensky walking on the road in the rain. He decided to set off on foot to find the real Russia. Once Lisa arrives at the house of the murdered, the townspeople are in an agitated state. One of them, seeing that Lisa is Stavrogin's mistress strikes her on the head and kills her.

In the next chapter, Peter finds out that Stavrogin has left for Petersburg and assembles his group of five. Peter and the group quarrel about the necessity of the murders and the fire. Peter claims, erroneously, that Lebyatkin is an informant and so the murder was necessary. He also explains to his group how there are many groups such as theirs spread throughout Russia. Peter tells them all of a plot to inform on the group and undermine their plan and claims that Shatov is the informant. Peter proposes that they lure Shatov to a secluded area and murder him. He also proposes that they get Kirilov to commit suicide to cover up their crime. Peter claims that he has seen Shatov's letter to the governor and that they must kill him right away, though we learn from the narrator that Peter is really intent on killing Shatov because of an insult from years ago. The



group is not really in favor of killing Shatov, but they feel compelled to go along with the plan. Peter quarrels with Liputin and they meet with Fedka. Fedka is mad with them and strikes Peter, later we find out that Fedka has also been found murdered.

Part III, Chapter 3, The End of a Love Affair and Chapter 4, The Last Decision Analysis

In these chapters we learn more about the characters of Stavrogin and Peter. We find out, in his exchange with Lisa, that Stavrogin, though he is a seducer, is genuinely looking for some kind of companionship and redemption from a woman that is consistently eluding him. We also find the novel rushing further and further into melodrama. After the murder of Fedka, the body count stands at five. Lisa's death is gratuitous and seems to follow directly from her sin with Stavrogin.

We discover that Peter, though he may in some sense hold the revolutionary ideals that he claims to hold, is driven by petty and personal interests to commit the crimes that he does. He is consistently lying to his cell about who is and who is not an informant and his murders seem to lack any real political motive. Dostoevsky may be trying to show here that it is not so much the political ideas themselves that are corrupting, but rather the desire to disregard the propriety of the means to achieve a given end. Peter finds, in the radical political ideals of the time, a force that he, cynical and manipulative as he is, can use to motivate others to do his bidding. All of his followers are flawed in some serious sense, but they do seem to believe in the political ideals in a way that is less serious in Peter. Peter is clearly exploiting their devotion to an ideal to commit crimes for him. This is the danger of any ideals that subvert the moral order, they allow less than scrupulous people to manipulate the faithful in ways that they would not endorse.



Part III, Chapter 5, The Globe Trotter and Chapter 6, A Very Busy Night

Part III, Chapter 5, The Globe Trotter and Chapter 6, A Very Busy Night Summary

In this chapter, Shatov's wife Mary returns to home after having been gone for more than 3 years and having an affair with Stavrogin. Shatov is overjoyed to see his wife, despite their long absence and her infidelity. After Shatov settles his wife in his room, Erkel, the second lieutenant that attacked his superior officer and a member of Peter's group show up to talk to Shatov. Erkel tells Shatov that if he shows the group where his printing press is buried, they will let him leave the group peacefully. He is only to meet them later in the park near Stavrogin's house and show them where it is buried. Shatov agrees and hurries back to his wife. She faints and Shatov discovers that she is pregnant. He rushes to Kirilov and borrows money from him to hire a mid-wife. He rushes to the best mid-wife in town, Virginsky's wife. Shatov then rushes off to Lyamshin house to sell him his pistol for money. Mrs. Virginsky delivers the baby safely and Shatov revels in the miracle of new life. Shatov has a renewed faith in God and in the goodness of man.

The next day, Virginsky spends the morning running to each member of the group to tell them that Shatov will certainly not inform now that his wife is back with a child. The group meets in the appointed place and Virginsky raises his concerns. Shigalyov put the point more strongly claiming that all the murders are counterproductive to their mission and he will not take part in them, he says he will not stop them but that he also wants nothing to do with the murders and leaves. Shatov finally arrives and Liputin and Peter attack him and Peter shoots him in the head. Virginsky becomes very excited and attacks Peter after the murder. Liputin and Erkel fight him off and calm him down. The rest of the group ties rocks to Shatov's body and throws him in the pond before going their separate ways.

Peter goes to Kirilov to have him commit suicide and write a note that he killed Shatov. Kirilov is upset that Peter has killed Shatov and argues with him for a while. Kirilov discusses the necessity of suicide and the implication of atheism. He is disgusted with Peter and it seems as though he will not commit suicide. He runs into the next room with his gun and Peter goes into the room to kill Kirilov, believing that he will not commit suicide. Peter attacks Kirilov who then shoots himself in his head. Peter then rushes to the train station with Erkel, who sees him off.



Part III, Chapter 5, The Globe Trotter and Chapter 6, A Very Busy Night Analysis

Aside from the murders, this chapter is interesting because of the involved philosophical discussion contained here. Everyone is discussing philosophy in these two chapters; even Shatov and his wife discuss the ridiculous nature of the Russia radicals and liberals. It is as if Dostoevsky, not content with all of the murder, feels the need to say everything he thinks in these two chapters about the Russia situation that he is portraying in the story.

Although there are many interesting discussions in this chapter, by far the most interesting is the discussion between Peter and Kirilov. Kirilov is a deeply philosophical character. We have already seen that he is prepared to commit suicide on principle and here we learn more about his strange philosophy of life. The thrust of Kirilov's philosophy is that, since as he believes (though reluctantly) that there is no God, there can be no other God than the individual man, in this case Kirilov. It is a man's will, his free will, that makes him a god and this will can only be expressed in a free and thoughtful suicide. Kirilov maintains that mankind invented God to give them a reason not to kill themselves and that he, Kirilov, is the first man to express his self-will by killing himself because there is no God. He will be an example to those after him that can, after his suicide, have the courage to express their will. Kirilov says that he does not understand how an atheist can believe that there is no God and not kill himself at once. Fear is the curse of humans who refuse to express their self-will. By killing himself, Kirilov hopes to liberate mankind from the curse of fear by showing the reality of the will.

Although his philosophy sounds insane, it is not totally without precedent. In the early 19th century, Schopenhauer expressed a similar philosophy, claiming that the ultimate end of human life was suicide and he even supposedly slept with a revolver under his pillow. Schopenhauer's philosophy did not have the religious element that Kirilov's does, however. Dostoevsky is using Kirilov, as he will use Ivan Karamazov in his next novel, to show the logical implications of serious atheism. Dostoevsky takes this kind of atheism seriously, though he rejects it in favor of a redeeming Russian Christianity similar to the view that Shatov holds.



Part III, Chapter 7, Stepan Verkhovensky's Last Pilgrimage and Chapter 8, Conclusion

Part III, Chapter 7, Stepan Verkhovensky's Last Pilgrimage and Chapter 8, Conclusion Summary

After the momentous events of the last two chapters we are left to follow the wanderings of Stepan Verkhovensky. Having made up his mind to leave Mrs. Stavrogin's care and discover the "real Russia." Instead of taking a carriage to begin this great journey, however, he sets off on foot. He has no clear destination in mind and after walking for a while, he sits under a tree to rest and dozes off. A carriage of peasants drives up and a woman inside asks him who he is. Stepan replies in a way that confuses the peasants and then asks if he can join them in their carriage. They are traveling to a nearby town and Stepan offers to pay them if they will take him along. They continue to question him along the way and eventually they arrive an inn. Stepan, sitting at a table in the inn buys some Vodka and is approached by a woman selling Bibles. He buys one of the Bibles and asks the woman to sit next to him. Also at the inn is a servant of one of his friends named Anisim. Anisim talks to Stepan and then leaves. The peasants are confused and suspicious of Stepan and the Bible saleswoman, Sophia, decides they should leave. In the carriage, Stepan talks to Sophia about the Bible and then dozes off with a fever. They arrive at another inn and go inside. Stepan pays the innkeeper to find a chicken for dinner. While she is gone, Stepan sits with Sophia and tells her the story of his life. He is very feverish now and his story is confused and impressionistic.

During this tale, Stepan falls violently ill and is confined to a bed in the inn while Sophia nurses him somewhat reluctantly. In his illness, he asks her to read the Bible to him. He is interested in hearing the story from Luke about the devils that possess the swine before drowning in the sea, the same passage that the narrator uses to open the novel. In the story, Jesus casts several devils that are possessing men into nearby pigs that then rush into the ocean and drown. Stepan believes that this story expresses the current plight of Russia.

The next day, Mrs. Stavrogin arrives angry with Stepan for leaving and concerned for his health. She chastises him and sends for a doctor. The doctor proclaims his condition terminal and Stepan, the radical intellectual, finally takes the sacrament and converts to Christianity before he eventually dies. Mrs. Stavrogin takes Dasha and Sophia back to her home with her.

In the conclusion we find that despite Peter's planning, it does not take very long for the authorities to discover what he and his group have done. Mrs. Shatov, wondering where her husband is, goes to ask Kirilov and finds him dead. She panics and rushes out of the house into the cold to find out what happened. In her panic, she ends up catching a



cold and dying and neglecting her child in the process, who also dies. The police find the body and get a confession from Lyamshin. Virginsky and his family are also arrested, as are the other members of the group. Only Erkel refuses to talk. Stavrogin has been in Petersburg, but has sent a note to Dasha asking her to come to his new home in a valley to live with him. Dasha shows Mrs. Stavrogin the note and they all decide to go live with Nicholas far from their town. After making this decision, however, one of the servants informs them that Nicholas has just arrived at the house. Rushing into his room to find him, they do not see him at all until someone notices an open doorway into the attic. As they rush into the attic they find Stavrogin hanging from a silk rope from the rafters. Another suicide, clearly intentional and clearly done of a sound mind.

Part III, Chapter 7, Stepan Verkhovensky's Last Pilgrimage and Chapter 8, Conclusion Analysis

In these final two chapters we see the opposite trajectories of two of the novel's main characters, Stepan and Nicholas. Stepan wanders into the "real Russia" where he does not belong until he eventually finds God through the redeeming help of a decent woman. This is a theme in many of Dostoevsky's novels. Nicholas, on the other hand and despite some attempts, is not able to find a woman that will redeem him for his sins and, lacking faith in God's saving redemption, he commits suicide. We will find out more about Stavrogin in the Appendix.

Stepan, in his desire to hear the story of the devils from Luke, sheds some light on what Dostoevsky is trying to say with this novel. The novel is extremely melodramatic, almost over the top, in the number of murders and suicides and it is clear that Dostoevsky has a message over and above the dramatic action. The clue from this biblical story and from the title is that, as Stepan claims, Russia is a nation possessed with demons. She is a nation both attracted to and repulsed by the modernization and liberalism of the west. She is also a terribly backward and traditional nation that still has a tyrannical monarchy and an Orthodox church. The convulsions of the early to mid 19th century let loose these demons into the heart of the Russian soul that are not easily expelled. In the story, Jesus casts the devils into swine, which then drown. Dostoevsky seems to be suggesting here that only the Church can truly save Russia and that the demons need to be cast into swine, in this case Peter's revolutionaries, who can then be dealt with.

Dostoevsky was right to think that his nation was possessed. If only the swine who became possessed with devils were as, ultimately, ineffectual as Peter and his group. In reality the devils that took up residence in Russia were much more formidable and after Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin were done with her, Russia was left with many scars and many graveyards. Dostoevsky then, despite the melodrama, was more right in this novel than he would ever know.



Characters

Nicholas Stavrogin

Stepan Verkhovensky tutored the son of Mrs. Stavrogin, Nicholas before leaving home. He traveled all over Europe and even visited Egypt and Greece. He is an aristocrat by birth and, despite, his behavior and associations, retains a noble attitude. Well liked and admired by many in the town, Nicholas is aloof with most people. He has a frosty relationship with his mother and does not seem to have any real friends. He is a serial seducer who has had relationships with Lisa, Dasha, Mrs. Shatov, and is married (secretly) to Mary Lebyatkin. We find out in his confession that while in Petersburg, he raped a 12-year-old girl who later committed suicide.

Nicholas fights a duel with Gaganov wherein he refuses to shoot directly at his opponent. He also is responsible for several senseless acts of violence in the town before the events of the novel.

Nicholas was a member of Stepan's original circle, though he is not directly involved in Peter's plots. Peter desperately wants Nicholas to be the leader of his new revolutionary group, though Nicholas clearly despises Peter and refuses to be a part of any of their doings. If Nicholas has a relationship with anyone it is probably Shatov, though even that relationship is tentative at best. Nicholas feels some guilt for the death of his wife and the chaos that engulfs the town and returns home at the end of the novel to hang himself. Before his suicide, he expresses several times a desire to leave with one of the women and start a life somewhere new, away from civilization.

Peter Verkhovensky

Son of Stepan Verkhovensky, although until the events of the novel he had only met his father once before. Raised by his aunts and supported by the funding of Mrs. Stavrogin, Peter was educated in Petersburg. Peter's mother had some property when she died and Stepan has been holding it in trust for Peter until he arrives in town, ostensibly to sell the property.

He is rumored to be the leader of a revolutionary movement in Switzerland and St. Petersburg. He is a witness to Stavrogin's marriage to Mary and greatly admires Nicholas. Peter is the consummate manipulator and con man. He worms himself into the Governor's household and controls the imagination of Mrs. Lembke. Eventually she will do whatever he wants, regardless of the consequences to her own standing or the health of the town.

Peter gathers some of the members of his father's discussion circle to form his own revolutionary cell. He claims to have many other cells throughout Russia that are intent on causing chaos and revolution, though some of the members doubt this. Shatov was an early member of Peter's secret society, though he now wants to leave. Peter, who



was insulted by Shatov years ago, desires to kill Shatov and manipulates his group to carry out the murder. He is also directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of at least 9 other characters in the story.

Peter has no real friends, though he admires Nicholas. Erkel follows him devotedly, though Peter does not respect Erkel. Peter seems to feel an intense ambition to rule and reorganize society, though it is unclear how dedicated he is to the political ideals of the group over and above their ability to motivate people to do his bidding. He is also the author of a revolutionary poem, *A Noble Character*.

Shatov

Shatov was a member of Stepan's circle, though he joined later than the others. Shatov was born as a serf of Mrs. Stavrogin's before the emancipation and was educated by Stepan before leaving briefly for the university. He was expelled from the university for some undisclosed disturbance. Shatov fell in love with the maid of a family he was tutoring and married her in Geneva. He and his wife lived together for 3 weeks before parting. His wife later had a child by Nicholas Stavrogin; both she and the child die after the murder of Shatov. After his marriage he traveled Europe where he apparently joined Peter's revolutionary society and traveled to America with Kirilov to learn how American workers lived. Eventually Shatov has to ask Stavrogin for money to come back to Russia where he eventually returns to his native home.

After he returns, Peter asks him to print his poem, *A Noble Character*. After his return, however, Shatov renounces his early socialist views and converts to a kind of Russian Christian nationalism. Shatov is generally disliked by most in the town due to his morbid and austere personality, though Stavrogin does seem to get along with him and he has something like a friendship with Kirilov. He often borrowed newspapers and books from Mrs. Stavrogin and despite his poverty and general ugliness, he tried to dress well and look neat. Shatov believes in a Russian nationalist version of Christianity being the salvation of mankind. In many ways Shatov probably represents the views of the author.

Kirilov

Kirilov is one of the more interesting and unique characters in any of Dostoevsky's work. He is obsessed with a philosophical idea that leads him to believe that he must commit suicide to be truly free. He believes that all of mankind is happy, but that most people do not know they are happy because they are psychologically paralyzed by the fear of death. Kirilov thinks that many people think that they do believe in god, yet do not and vice versa. He believes suicide should be the logical consequence of atheism. His views are somewhat similar to those of Schopenhauer, though with a more Christian flavor than Schopenhauer's more eastern-influenced theories.

Kirilov, like Shatov, greatly admires Stavrogin. Kirilov is a member of the "society" of revolutionaries, though like Shatov, his philosophical views have changed and led him away from directly political activity. He dislikes Peter intensely. He spent some time with



Shatov in America investigating the plight of the American workers where they both lived in extreme poverty. This trip seems to have been essential in leading to a change in both people, with neither keeping the political views they held before the trip after their return.

Knowing that Kirilov is intent on committing suicide, Peter enlists him to take the blame for the death of Shatov in his suicide note. Kirilov, being indifferent to what people think about him after he is dead, agrees to help Peter and his one-time comrades. Peter does not tell him until it is too late, however, that it is Shatov's murder he will be taking the blame for. This upsets him, though he eventually commits suicide nevertheless.

Stepan Verkhovensky

Stepan is one of the stranger characters in the novel. He is both a comical and sympathetic character. Both characteristics are central to the plot and yet he is also always hovering on the periphery of the actual action of the novel. His central purpose is to contrast with his son, Peter, and to show two different approaches to dealing with the troubling times in Russia of the 19th century.

Stepan was once a university lecturer and for unclear reasons eventually "exiled" himself in the town of the novel. There are allusions to a play that he wrote when he was a lecturer that may have had subversive undertones, though by all evidence, the play itself was difficult to understand and not widely read. He was married twice, with both wives dying shortly after the marriage. Peter is the fruit of his first wife, though before the action of the novel, Stepan had only met him once before. Mrs. Stavrogin, taking a liking to Stepan and wanting an educated professor for her household, employed Stepan as a tutor to Nicholas and generally provided him with an income and a home.

Stepan has an odd relationship with Mrs. Stavrogin, writing her multiple letters a day and alternately resenting and loving her. He is emotionally incontinent and extremely pretentious, sprinkling his conversation with superfluous French phrases. Stepan fancies himself a liberal and progressive, though his views are confused and not coherent. Ultimately, he is a caricature of many aristocratic, learned "men of the 40s" who desire change in Russia, though are alienated from the actual people of their homeland. Despite his liberal convictions, as we see in the fête scene, he will not trade culture for material progress putting him in the same camp as his great hero, Alexander Herzen. He has a circle of political radicals that discuss ideas at his home that will eventually constitute the core of Peter's revolutionary group.

Stepan is engaged to Dasha at one point in the novel but Peter breaks up the engagement by revealing some of Stepan's secret letters. After the fête he is intent on leaving Mrs. Stavrogin (she throws him out in any case) and discovering the "real Russia." After walking for a while, he catches some kind of cold and eventually dies of a gastric catarrh.



Varvara Petrovna Stavrogin

Mrs. Stavrogin is a local aristocratic, landowning widow in the town of the novel. She is the mother of Nicholas and the benefactor of Dasha Shatov and Stepan Verkhovensky. Dasha and her brother Shatov were once serfs of Mrs. Stavrogin before the emancipation. Mrs. Stavrogin educates both of them after the emancipation and takes a special liking for Dasha, treating her like a daughter.

Mrs. Stavrogin was married to a lieutenant general before his untimely death and now she lives at her magnificent estate, Skvoreshniki. Her son rarely wrote to her before his return and though she dotes on him and clearly adores him, he is indifferent at best to her. She is a strong, dominant woman who has a soft spot in her heart for the likes of Stepan. She hates the social climber Julia Lembke and dislikes many of the members of Stepan's political circle.

Lisa Tushin

Lisa's mother was once a childhood friend of Mrs. Stavrogin and their families are still very close. Lisa is a strong-willed woman who had an affair with Nicholas in Geneva, though they apparently quarreled there and she left him. Once she returns to the town she is engaged to Mr. Drozdov. Peter manipulates Lisa into meeting with Nicholas after the fête and she sleeps with him. Once she discovers that Nicholas's wife has been murdered she rushes off to see the bodies and is murdered by a mob of angry townsfolk.

Dasha

Dasha is the sister of Shatov and the protégé of Mrs. Stavrogin. She, like her brother, was once a serf on the Stavrogin estate. She has an illicit affair with Nicholas and Mrs. Stavrogin attempts to marry her off to Stepan to conceal this indiscretion and to allow her to enter proper society. Before his return, Nicholas asks Dasha to come live with him, though immediately after she finds him having hung himself. She is a kind and patient woman.

Liputin

A middle aged, provincial official and member of Stepan's and Peter's political circles. He was known in town as a liberal and an atheist. He is a tyrant to his family whom he oppresses and he is also very stingy. Somewhat mean, he is also very intelligent. Liputin, along with Lebyatkin, composes and reads an obscene poem at the fête. Liputin is instrumental in the murderous activities of Peter's group.



Captain Lebyatkin

Despite his clothes and his claims, Lebyatkin is not, in fact, a captain at all. Captain Lebyatkin is a drunk who mercilessly beats his sister Mary with a whip. He met Nicholas in Petersburg and Nicholas married his sister. He becomes involved in some of the activities of Peter's group though only really as a pawn. Fedka eventually murders him along with his sister and their servant.

Mary Lebyatkin

The crippled sister of Captain Lebyatkin and the secret wife of Nicholas Stavrogin. We do not learn very much about Mary in the course of the book, she is quite and good-natured putting up with huge amounts of abuse from her brother. Shatov befriends her, as does Kirilov. Fedka eventually murders her.

Lyamshin

A Jewish post-office clerk and sometimes member of Stepan circle and later conspirator with Peter. Shatov buys a revolver from him and then, after his wife returns, attempts to sell the revolver back to him. Lyamshin has second thoughts about the murder though he goes through with it anyways. The police eventually catch him.

Virginsky

Another local official and member of Stepan's and then Peter's circle. He is a local official who is poor, but well educated and supports a family. Although he gets taken up with Peter's ideals, he is a man of conviction and pure heart. Once he learns that Shatov's wife has returned he tries to stop the murder, though he goes through with it anyway. The police eventually arrest him and his entire family.

Mrs. Virginsky

A professional mid-wife in the town. She is a complete atheist and often makes strange atheistic comments while delivering babies, but regardless of this she is extremely popular as a mid-wife in the town. She once had an affair with Lebyatkin until her husband beat Lebyatkin. She delivers Shatov's baby and after the murder is arrested along with her husband.

Erkel

A second lieutenant and stranger in the town who has fallen under the sway of Peter. He is Peter's most devoted follower and is the only one after the murder to not confess to the police.



Shigalyov

Mr. Virginsky's bother-in-law and member of Peter's cell. He is a gloomy, radical theorist who has developed a complete theory about the organization of society. Peter completely agrees with Shigalyov's system. Right before the murder, he decides that the murder is counter-productive and he is not involved.

Karmazinov

A distant relative of Mrs. Lembke and resident of the town during much of the novel. Loosely based on Turgenev, he is older and pretentious. He reads his final work *Merci* at the fête, though is heckled by the crowd.



Objects/Places

Petersburg

St. Petersburg, at this time the capital of Russia. The largest and most westernized of the major Russian cities.

Samovar

A heated, metal Russian tea container and tea maker.

Fourier

A 19th century French utopian socialist. His ideas were very influential at the time; he believed that society should be arranged in worker phalanxes along scientific lines.

Serf

A Russian class until their 19th century emancipation. Not exactly slaves, they were bound to a certain space of land, usually owned by a Russian aristocrat. They were not allowed to move and the landowner owned the product of their labor, at least in part.

Alexander Herzen

19th century Russian liberal and writer. He edited and printed the influential and technically illegal journal, *The Bell*. The greatest Russian liberal of his time, he was not a doctrinaire political thinker and often angered dogmatists on many different sides of the political spectrum. He famously argued that he preferred Shakespeare to boots, that is, high culture to material prosperity.

Fête

A French word for a party of some kind, usually in honor of something particular.

Socialism

At the time of the novel, the doctrine that economic classes should be leveled and workers should have political rights. Basically, the doctrine that wealth should be redistributed from the wealthy to the poor in society.



Slavophil

The doctrine that all Slavic peoples are part of the same nation and should be arranged politically under one state. A further view related to this is that Slavic peoples are superior to non-Slavic peoples.

Superfluous Men

A type of person popularized in 19th century Russia literature. Many of the "men of the 40's" were of this type. Typically aristocratic, highly educated, though also alienated from the common man, they do not fit into any particular profession. They are full of liberal ideals, though they do not know how to make actual political change. Many became disillusioned and withdrew into literary pursuits.

Nihilist

Although a more general term, in the 19th century Russian context, an unorganized movement of anarchists fed up with the posturing of the "men of the 40's" and intent on pursuing direct action and propaganda of the deed including political assassinations and terrorism. Peter's circle is meant to be a typical nihilist cell.

Atheist

One who does not believe in the existence of a god. In the context of 19th century Russia, atheism (often called just "free-thinking") was bound up with the politics of liberalism, socialism, and nihilism. This is partially because of the close connections between the Russian state and Russian Orthodox Church; to oppose the state, one also, of necessity, opposed the church. This was also due to the materialistic nature of many of the radical doctrines.



Themes

Men of the '40's vs. Men of the '60's

Much of the novel is a playing out of one of the central cultural and political themes of the 19th century, the dispute between the older men of the '40s and the younger men of the '60s. Both of these groups are stereotypes, though salient types of the time. Men of the '40s were superfluous men, aristocratic, highly educated Russians who desired change in their homeland, though were unable to influence change directly. They tended to live outside of Russia, particularly in Germany or France and pursued literary pursuits. Stepan is meant to embody, somewhat comically, this type. Men of the '60s on the other hand had tired of their elders' talking and desired direct revolutionary action for political change. They tended to eschew the arts and culture and to be taken in by materialism and socialism. Peter is an embodiment of this type. They lack education and are filled with bile. We see this theme played out in the disputes between Peter and Stepan as well as Karmazinov and his audience at the fete.

Dostoyevsky himself fills a strange place in this dispute. Himself basically a man of the '40s, he spends large portions of the novel lampooning and satirizing Stepan and Karmazinov. He also, however, viciously attacks Peter and his ilk and was solidly reactionary in his political views. We should see the novel as showing the error of both of these stances. He clearly sees the younger generation as having been possessed by devils and made extreme errors in their spiritual and religious views, while also lamenting the dissolution and waste of the older generation.

Atheism and Religion

Although this novel ostensibly deals with political issues, it is a deeply religious novel. Dostoyevsky believes and tries to show in this novel that many of the political pathologies of his time were really the result of spiritual and religious errors. His own views would seem crazy to the non-Russian modern reader and are best articulated by Shatov in the novel. He believed that only in communion with the Russian national church could Russia and indeed the world be rejuvenated and saved from the madness of atheism and political violence. He sees atheism as not merely being a logical or philosophical error, but also as a kind of psychological disease, a kind of madness. All of the main characters of the younger generation are obsessed with god in some way. Most are atheists, though only Kirilov takes the, according to Dostoyevsky, logical atheist stand. Kirilov realizes that if there is no god then man must become god. Not in some supernatural sense, but in the sense that there is nothing higher than man. Peter realizes this and believes he can build a new Eden on earth in the form of authoritarian socialism. Stavrogin, denies the existence of god, but is lost in a world without the moral anchor that god provides. Shatov is the only believer in god, though even he seems to lack complete faith. The birth of Shatov's child is the first signs of the possibility of the regeneration of the Russian people through love and communion with the Russian



church. The Russian nihilists, however, murder Shatov, the symbol of this view, and the child (the symbol of this regeneration) also dies. Dostoyevsky believed that the madness of atheism would sink his country into violence and despair. The main theme of this novel is the connection between faith in god and political and cultural regeneration.

Radical Politics

This novel is, among other things, a sustained satire of many of the prevalent political views of the time. We see Fourierists, Nihilists, Atheists, and Socialists, among others. The author is trying to satirize these views by making them appear silly and dangerous. He associates these views with the lowest and most base characters in the novel making the reader think that these views could only attract degenerates because they are based on despicable ideas. It is clear that Peter's socialism flows, at least in part, from his desire to rule over others. It is also clear that many of the youth of the fete are disdainful of the higher classes out of envy and hatred. The radical political views of the group then seem to be convenient principles that can be used to justify extreme actions. Furthermore, the more moderate, liberal views of Stepan and Julia are lampooned as incoherent and merely fronts for more radical views.

Dostoyevsky was a notorious reactionary in his own time and his characterization of these views may not entirely be fair. Still, although he does attack many of the radical political views of his time, he clearly recognizes the need for political and cultural change in Russia. He is, however, appalled by the atheism and radicalism of the popular views. Given the results of socialist experimentation in Russia throughout the 20th century, his concerns seem justified and prescient.



Style

Point of View

The author uses an interesting narrator for this novel. He is an unnamed observer of the action in the novel as well as a participant in much of the action. Strangely, though, the author shifts from the direct point of view of the narrator to a more omniscient, impersonal observer from time to time to describe action, which the narrator does not directly observe. Presumably our narrator found out about these episodes from some other source later. The novel itself is a retelling of the events of the town from the narrator's point of view. He often inserts his own opinion of who is to blame for certain events and lets on that he knows what will happen in the future, often with significant foreshadowing.

The narrator is a close friend of Stepan's and a peripheral member of his circle. He is also deeply devoted and possibly in love with Lisa Tushin. Sometimes in the novel other characters will address the narrator directly, which gives the odd sensation that the characters are directly addressing the reader. This is sometimes disconcerting and it is often difficult to know what exactly is going on in some of these scenes. The narrator is not omniscient for most of the novel though he does know many future events. He is ignorant about many events in the past and many of the psychological motivations of other characters. He is a moderate liberal of the upper class who finds much of the radical activities of Peter's group appalling.

Setting

The novel, except for a few flashback scenes, takes place in and around an unnamed provincial Russian town. Many of the scenes are at Mrs. Stavrogin's estate, Skvoreshniki, including the murder of Shatov who is killed in a field behind the estate. Much of the other action takes place in other houses including the Lembke's home and the boarding house where Shatov and Kirilov live.

Some of the action takes place in Petersburg, though this action is told as happening in the past or in Stavrogin's confession. Also, Stavrogin and some of the other characters lived in Switzerland and other parts of Europe, though not during the time of the novel.

The setting is not particularly inventive and despite the number of deaths in the novel, there is not actually that much action in the novel. Most of the plot development occurs in various drawing rooms or meetings between characters who discuss philosophy, politics, or their own motivations. As a result of this, the novel could easily be staged as a play. It is the characters of the novel that provide the real setting for the novel. Dostoyevsky, renowned for the acute psychological insight that he brings to his novels, makes their internal, psychological landscapes of his characters play a central role in the development of the story. Throughout the novel, the reader is constantly wondering



what a given character will do or what their motivation may be. This is the reason that a novel that basically takes place in various rooms and primarily involves talking can be so exciting and riveting.

Language and Meaning

This novel was originally written in Russian so it is hard to know exactly what the style of the novel is given that each translator will tend to translate the language with their own particular voice. Still, the style of the writing is consistent with the style of the time and the novel reads like Dickens or another mid-19th century British novel. It is important to keep in mind while reading that the story is meant to be a retelling of the events of the town by one of the peripheral participants. As a result of this the language is that of a well-educated aristocrat who has strong opinions about many of the characters and much of the action.

Much of the language in the novel used by the characters is somewhat deceptive. They discuss politics, but often they are really discussing religion or their own base, non-political motives. Part of the fun of the novel is that Dostoyevsky uses political talk and melodramatic, murderous action to cover his satire of the political movements of the day. So, what seems like deadly serious melodrama is, in many ways, a kind of black political comedy. Many of the characters are overdrawn and the language that they use reflects this fact. Dostoyevsky mercilessly mocks Stepan who pretentiously spices his language up with a variety of superfluous French phrases. This is meant to accentuate how silly and pretentious Stepan and his generations are. Aside from these flourishes, the novel is fairly conventional in language and straightforward in meaning.

Structure

The novel is composed of three parts. Each part is analogous to a typical three-act play. Part one involves much of the back-story of the main characters especially the older generation. Part two is establishing the main conflicts of the novel especially between Peter and many of the other characters. Part three is the climax and the resolution of the major conflicts. Most of the resolution ends in death, murder or suicide.

Like many of Dostoevsky's novels and other novels of the time period there are numerous sub-plots and many extraneous characters. This is often distracting and it is not clear to the reader what is important and what is not important. The novel could reasonably be pared down both in length and in terms of characters and sub-plots. As it is not as tight as it could be, the novel seems more melodramatic than it should be and the extreme violence at the end of the novel is not as striking as it could be. Part of the reason for this may be that Dostoyevsky may have never intended the novel to be a serious tragedy. Much of the novel is satirical or comical despite the high body count. It is important to remember that the author has an axe to grind in this novel. He is trying to convince the readers that the political and cultural radicals are both destructive and ridiculous. The novel builds to such an intense climax because both elements are

present. The reader is meant to feel repulsed and believe that the radicals are also ridiculous.



Quotes

"At one time they used to say in the town about our circle that it was a hotbed of free-thinking, vice, and atheism; this rumor, by the way, always persisted. And yet all we did in our circle was to indulge in the most innocent, amiable, jolly typically Russian liberal chatter." (47)

"'The higher liberalism' and the 'higher liberal'—that is to say, a liberal without any aim whatever—are possible only in Russia." (47)

"Goodness only knows who they think they are—gods at least. People said about Karmazinov that his connection with high society and persons of great consequence were almost dearer to him than his own soul." (97)

"Deception will be killed. Everyone who desires supreme freedom must dare to kill himself. He who dares to kill himself has learnt the secret of the deception. Beyond that there is no freedom; that's all, and beyond it there is nothing. He who dares to kill himself is a god." (126)

"There is a point where he [Peter] stops being a clown and is transformed into—a madman." (250)

"Do you know who are now the only 'god-bearing' people on earth, destined to regenerate and save the world in the name of the new god and to whom alone the keys of life and of the new word have been vouchsafed—do you know which is that people and what is its name?" (253)

"An Atheist can't be a Russian...An atheist at once ceases to be a Russian." (255)

"You believe that Roman Catholicism is not Christianity; you maintained that Rome proclaimed a Christ yielded to the third temptation of the devil, and that, having proclaimed to the whole world that Christ could not hold out on earth without an earthly kingdom, Catholicism had thereby proclaimed the Antichrist and ruined the whole western world." (255)

"Not one people has yet ordered its life in accordance with the principles of science and reason. There has never been an instance of it, except only for a moment, out of folly. Socialism by its very nature bound to be atheistic because it has proclaimed from the very first that it is an atheistic institution and that it intends to organize itself exclusively on the principle of science and reason." (257)

"I believe in Russia. I believe in the Greek Orthodox Church. I—I believe in the body of Christ—I believe that the second coming will take place in Russia." (259)

"He [Shigalyov] proposes as a final solution of the problem to divide humanity into two unequal parts. One-tenth is to be granted absolute freedom and unrestricted powers over the remaining nine-tenths. Those must give up their individuality and be turned into



something like a herd, and their boundless obedience will by a series of regenerations attain a state primeval innocence, something like the original paradise." (405)

"I [Kirilov] cannot understand how an atheist could know that there is no god and not kill himself at once! To realize that there is no god and not to realize at the same instant that you have become god yourself—is an absurdity, for else you would certainly kill yourself." (614)



Topics for Discussion

What is the role of Stepan in the plot? Why does the novel start with background about Stepan?

How committed is Peter to revolutionary politics? How much of his scheming is related to achieving specific political goals?

Explain the relationship between Kirilov, Shatov, and Stavrogin.

Why does Stavrogin give his confession to the monk? How does the monk react to his story?

Describe the relationship between Mrs. Stavrogin and Stepan. Why does Mrs. Stavrogin support Stepan?

Explain Kirilov and Shatov's philosophy and ideas about God.

What role does Stavrogin's confession play in the novel?