

Demons



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

Fyodor Dostoevsky was one of the most influential and important writers of the 19th century. He was born in Moscow, Russia, and his mother died when he was 15 years old. After his mother's death, Dostoevsky studied to become an engineer. While working as an engineer, he published his first novel, *Poor Folk*. He then became a member of the Petrashevsky Circle, a literary group that championed progressive causes. Due to its criticism of the Russian government, the group came under scrutiny from governmental authorities. Authorities arrested several members of the group, including Dostoevsky, and sentenced them to be executed. The execution was called off at the last moment. Dostoevsky's punishment was commuted, and he was sentenced to prison in Siberia for four years. After that, he served a compulsory six-year term in the Russian military. When Dostoevsky finished his time in the military, he traveled throughout Europe and developed a gambling addiction. He went on to publish his most well-known works after that, including the novella *Notes From the Underground* (1864) and the novels *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1869), *Demons* (1872), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Demons is loosely based on historical events and historical people. Specifically, Sergey Nechayev serves as the basis for the character of Pyotr. Sergey Nechayev was a Russian anarcho-communist who led a nihilistic revolutionary group. In 1869, that group murdered one of its former members, Ivan Ivanov. Pyotr's murder of Shatov in *Demons* is then based on the murder of Ivan Ivanov. Sergey Nechayev also wrote a manifesto titled *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, which was published in 1869. Dostoevsky based the ideology and philosophy of the revolutionary faction in *Demons* in part on Nechayev's book. In particular, the manifesto calls for complete commitment to the cause of revolution and impels revolutionaries to be willing to commit any crime or immoral act to destabilize the established political order. In *Demons*, when Lyamshin confesses to his part in the murder of Shatov, he echoes many of those sentiments. Nechayev was involved in the Russian nihilist movement, which represented a radical dissatisfaction with established modes of politics and morality. It also showed a deep dissatisfaction with the attempted incremental social reforms of previous generations. In *Demons*, Stepan can be interpreted as representing the previous generation that the Russian nihilist movement rebels against. Dostoevsky uses the fact that Pyotr is Stepan's son to suggest that the liberal reform movements of

the 1840s (Stepan's generation) directly led to the nihilist movement of the late 19th century (represented by Pyotr).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Demons touches on themes that are hallmarks of Dostoevsky's other novels, including philosophy, theology, morality, and Russian politics. *Crime and Punishment* in particular touches on questions of philosophy and morality similar to *Demons*, while *The Brothers Karamazov* is a wide-ranging philosophical novel that discusses ideas of morality, free will, and theology. One of the characters in *Demons*, Karmazinov, is a satirical representation of the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev. Turgenev's most well-known work is *Fathers and Sons*, published in 1862. Dostoevsky's work has been particularly influential on philosophers, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus. Dostoevsky's novella *Notes from the Underground* is often considered one of the first works of existentialist literature, a movement that Sartre and Camus are often associated with. Modernist writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce both cited Dostoevsky as an influence on their work. Franz Kafka also claimed Dostoevsky as one of his most important influences. Kafka noted Dostoevsky's particular influence on his novel *The Trial*. Dostoevsky was perhaps most influenced by the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. One of Gogol's most well-known works is *Dead Souls*, which, like *Demons*, uses satire to interrogate political and social issues in Russia.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Demons
- **When Published:** 1872
- **Literary Period:** The Golden Age of Russian Literature
- **Genre:** Novel, Literary Fiction, Satire
- **Setting:** A provincial town outside of Petersburg in the 1870s
- **Climax:** The revolutionary faction led by Pyotr murders Shatov.
- **Antagonist:** Pyotr, Nikolay
- **Point of View:** First Person, Third-Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Censored Chapter. The editor of the newspaper in which *Demons* was initially published censored a chapter from Dostoevsky's original manuscript. That chapter, entitled "At Tikhon's," delves into Nikolay's psyche and can be found in the appendix of many modern editions of the novel.

First English Translation. The first complete English translation of *Demons* was published in 1914 and was translated by Constance Garnett, who also translated several other novels by Dostoevsky.



PLOT SUMMARY

Stepan is an academic who lives in a provincial Russian town outside of Petersburg. He likes to think that he has retired to the Russian town to escape persecution from the Russian government after evincing radical ideas. In reality, though, no one in the Russian government knows who Stepan is, and his ideas of persecution come from his impulse toward self-aggrandizement. Stepan lives on Skvoreshniki, a large estate that belongs to Varvara, a wealthy landowner in town. Stepan and Varvara have a platonic relationship, though at times it seems as if they are both in love with each other.

Varvara's only son, Nikolay—who Stepan tutored when Nikolay was a child—returns to the town. He gets into trouble when he kisses another man's wife and pulls another man's nose. Nikolay doesn't seem to have any sense that what he's done is wrong and offers only perfunctory apologies. Not long after, he leaves town. Four years later, Nikolay resurfaces in Switzerland. He's traveling with an old friend of Varvara's named Praskovya and Praskovya's daughter Liza. Liza and Nikolay seem to be romantically involved. Varvara goes to see Nikolay in Switzerland with her confidant, Darya. When Varvara returns to town, she asks Stepan if he would marry Darya. Stepan is surprised. He is in love with Varvara and has always thought that she loves him, too. He begins to think that Varvara wants him to marry Darya because something may have happened between Darya and Nikolay in Switzerland. Stepan agrees to Varvara's plan. Varvara is upset because she harbors feelings for Nikolay as well and secretly wanted him not to agree to marry Darya.

While waiting for Nikolay's return to town from Switzerland, after church one day, Varvara has an interaction with a woman named Marya. Varvara brings Marya and Liza back to her house. While they are at Varvara's house, Nikolay arrives. He is accompanied by Stepan's son, Pyotr, who was raised by relatives of Stepan's late wife. Marya walks up to Nikolay and attempts to take his hand. Nikolay knows her and reminds Marya that he is not her husband or related to her in any way. He then offers to take her home and leaves. When Nikolay returns to the house, Shatov (Darya's brother) rises from his seat and strikes Nikolay in the face. At first, no one knows why. (Later, it becomes clear that Nikolay and Marya are in fact married. Shatov guessed as much and is upset because he thinks that Nikolay married Marya as a kind of joke, something Shatov believes is beneath Nikolay, who he once thought of as a great man.) Shatov then leaves.

Nikolay goes to see another friend who lives in town, Aleksey. Aleksey explains to Nikolay that he plans to take his own life. He hopes that by doing so, he will be able to triumph over the fear of death, which, in his mind, will mean that he will become God. Nikolay then goes to the house where Marya is staying. She lives with her brother, Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin frequently beats Marya, who has epilepsy, when she has seizures. On the way to the house, Nikolay is accosted by a man known as Fedka the Convict. Fedka asks Nikolay for money and implies that in exchange for money, he can help out Nikolay by taking care of Marya. Nikolay tells Fedka to leave him alone and says that if he sees him again, he'll take him to the police.

At Marya's house, Nikolay says that he plans to make his marriage to Marya public soon. Once that happens, Nikolay says, he'll no longer need to send money to Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin is distraught. As Nikolay walks back to his house, Fedka stops him again. Nikolay initially moves to seize Fedka but then lets him go before emptying the contents of his wallet at Fedka's feet. As Fedka collects the money, Nikolay thinks that Fedka could interpret the gesture as Nikolay putting down a deposit to secure Fedka's services to murder Marya. When Nikolay returns home, he talks with Darya, who says that she knows she'll be the one who is by his side at the end of everything. Nikolay says that he may have just become involved in a murder-for-hire plot involving Fedka and his wife Marya. He asks Darya if she would still want to be with him if that were true. Darya leaves the room without responding.

Meanwhile, Pyotr inserts himself into the political life of the town and befriends the governor's wife, Yuliya. Yuliya is planning a literary gala that will be followed by a ball. Pyotr takes advantage of his favored position in Yuliya's entourage to advance the cause of the revolutionary faction he leads and pass out revolutionary manifestos in town.

Pyotr goes to see Aleksey and tells Aleksey that he intends to use Aleksey's planned suicide to support the revolutionary cause. Aleksey agrees. Pyotr then attends a meeting of the revolutionary faction. Believers in the cause like Lyamshin, Liputin, and Virginsky are in attendance along with Shatov and Nikolay, who are not strictly involved in the cause. During the meeting, Pyotr attempts to assess the group's readiness to commit violence in the name of the revolution and to determine whether any of the members may be informers. He asks each person whether they would sanction a political assassination. Shatov gets up and leaves without answering the question, which leads the remaining members to wonder whether he may be an informer.

Pyotr leaves the meeting with Nikolay. As the two walk together, Pyotr reveals his true intentions. He is not really devoted to the kind of revolutionary socialism he claims to support. Instead, he wants to destabilize the established order and then overthrow it so that he can seize power for himself. He wants Nikolay to be the charismatic leader of his movement

after the revolution occurs. Nikolay doesn't agree or disagree with Pyotr's plan and says that he'll think about it.

The governor's assistant, Blum, becomes convinced that Stepan is behind the recent political agitation in town and searches Stepan's house. The governor, Andrey, insists to an angry Stepan that the search was a mistake. The same day, Liza approaches Nikolay and says that she has been receiving cryptic and vaguely threatening letters from Lebyadkin, who claims to be Nikolay's relation. Nikolay says that the man is his brother-in-law, as he is the brother of his wife, Marya. Liza is shocked and enraged because she is in love with Nikolay, although she is engaged to a man named Mavriky.

The day of Yuliya's literary gala and ball finally comes. At the literary gala, chaos breaks loose after Stepan addresses a restless crowd and tells them that the revolutionaries in town overlook the importance of art. Yuliya is disconsolate because the literary gala was a disaster, but the ball goes ahead as scheduled. At the ball, someone cries out that there's a fire raging through a group of houses on the other side of the river. The authorities succeed in putting it out, but they also find another house, away from the others, that seems to have been deliberately set on fire. Lebyadkin, Marya, and a servant's bodies are inside. Their throats have been cut.

At the same time, Liza runs off with Nikolay. People in the crowd hear rumors that Marya was Nikolay's wife and that Nikolay had her killed so that he could marry Liza. Pyotr rushes to find Nikolay, who is with Liza, and tells Nikolay that Lebyadkin and Marya have been murdered. He says that Nikolay is in the clear both morally and legally because the murderer, Fedka, had killed Lebyadkin to try and get the money that Lebyadkin had been waving around. Liza asks if that's true, and Nikolay says it's not. Morally, he's culpable for the murders on some level, he says, because he knew they would happen and didn't intervene. Liza cannot bear what she's heard and runs out of the house.

Mavriky is outside waiting for her. Liza says she wants to see the bodies of the people who were murdered. When they arrive at the scene, people in the crowd point out Liza and say that Marya was killed so Nikolay could marry her (Liza). People begin to strike Liza, and the blows ultimately kill her.

Pyotr then begins to plan the murder of Shatov. He convinces the faction that Shatov plans to inform on them, and he (Pyotr) thinks that if the revolutionary faction bands together to commit a murder, then they will be forced to remain loyal to the cause of the revolution lest they reveal their complicity in the crime. Before the plan goes into effect, Shatov's wife, Marie, returns to his home. The two have been separated for years, though they were never divorced. Marie reveals that she is pregnant, and it later becomes clear that Nikolay is the baby's father.

Shatov is overjoyed that Marie has returned and is excited to

become a father. He looks for a midwife and finds Arina, whose husband, Virginsky, is a member of the revolutionary faction. Arina helps with the birth and then tells Virginsky that Shatov won't inform on them now that he's a father. A representative from the revolutionary faction, Erkel, goes to fetch Shatov and lure him to the outskirts of Varvara's estate, where members of the revolutionary faction lie in wait. As they wait, Virginsky tries to tell the group that Shatov poses no threat to them now that he's a father, but Pyotr disagrees. When Erkel arrives with Shatov, the revolutionary faction seizes Shatov. Pyotr then shoots him in the head. Virginsky cries out that what they've done is wrong, and Lyamshin cries out uncontrollably.

Pyotr then goes to Aleksey's house. He tells Aleksey that he will dictate a suicide note for Aleksey to sign in which Aleksey will confess to murdering Shatov and take credit for distributing the manifestos. Aleksey initially says he won't say anything about Shatov but eventually agrees and writes the note. Pyotr and Aleksey then get into a skirmish. As Pyotr leaves the house, he hears a gun go off. When he goes back to the house, he finds Aleksey's dead body.

Meanwhile, Stepan has departed town on foot and is unaware of the murder of Shatov. In a traveler's hut, Shatov becomes gravely ill. Varvara eventually arrives with Darya. A doctor says that Stepan is on his last legs, and a priest reads Stepan his last rites. Stepan, who has flirted with atheism for much of his life, has a religious conversion on his deathbed. Varvara stays by his side until he dies three days later.

When Varvara and Darya return home, Darya receives a letter from Nikolay. He says that he wants Darya to join him, and they will live out their days in Switzerland. He adds that he feels guilty for Marya's death. Darya shows the letter to Varvara. Just then, they hear that Nikolay has arrived at the house. They go and search for him but can't find him until they look in the attic. There, they find his body. He has hanged himself.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Stepan – Stepan is Pyotr's father. Anton is Stepan's close friend, and Varvara is Stepan's patron. Stepan also tutored Nikolay and Liza when they were children. Stepan views himself as an exiled academic and believes that he retired from his role as a university professor after his ideas faced scrutiny from the authorities. To this day, Stepan contends the government has him under surveillance. In reality, though, Stepan's idea that he's persecuted comes from his pomposity and the outsized view he has of himself. No one in the government knows who he is, and he hasn't run afoul of the authorities in any meaningful way. Stepan holds weekly gatherings with his friends, where they debate ideas without any expectation that action will follow from those ideas. Stepan's intellectual

gatherings are juxtaposed with the ideas and approaches of Pyotr's revolutionary faction, and Stepan symbolizes 1840s liberalism in Russia. Because Stepan is Pyotr's father and Nikolay's former tutor, the novel suggests that there is a direct connection—both through lineage and through education—between the liberalism of the 1840s and the destabilizing nihilism, socialism, and atheism of the 1870s (when the novel takes place). The novel shows how Pyotr's revolutionary faction has become frustrated by the incrementalism promoted by people of Stepan's generation. In part as a result of that dissatisfaction, the members of the revolutionary faction have decided to advocate for more radical and extremist approaches to political change.

Pyotr – Pyotr is Stepan's son. Pyotr's mother died when Pyotr was a child. After that, Pyotr was raised by relatives of Stepan's late wife. Pyotr is the leader of the revolutionary faction in town. He promotes socialism, atheism, and nihilism, but he confesses to Nikolay that in actuality, he is not especially devoted to any of the ideology that undergirds the revolutionary faction he leads. Instead, Pyotr wants to harness the power of ideology and revolution to destabilize and subsequently overthrow the established political order so that he can seize power for himself. He then wants Nikolay to serve as a charismatic leader after he (Pyotr) has seized power. With that in mind, as a character, Pyotr shows how people with earnest and well-meaning political beliefs (like several people in the revolutionary faction) can be taken advantage of by power-hungry people. Pyotr's relentless manipulations and his endless pursuit of political influence also show how political actors like Pyotr often loudly proclaim their intentions to serve the common good, while in reality, they are solely interested in securing their own power. Pyotr's nihilism is especially pertinent to the novel's argument. Pyotr advocates for an extremist approach to revolutionary ideology, in which morality must be abandoned to support the revolutionary cause. In Pyotr's view, to be a true revolutionary, you must be willing to murder one hundred million people. The novel shows the destructive impact of that kind of nihilism.

Nikolay – Nikolay is Varvara's son, and he is secretly married to Marya. It's also implied that Nikolay has some kind of romantic connection with both Liza and Darya. Shatov's wife Marie also gives birth to Nikolay's baby, and Stepan tutored Nikolay when Nikolay was a child. Nikolay is portrayed as someone who believes that he is beyond good and evil. In his mind, he is not constrained by ideas of right and wrong, which he believes are relics of outmoded ways of thinking. Instead, Nikolay sees as much beauty in an act of "carnal bestiality" as he does in an act of heroism. Nikolay's amorality comes into question after Marya is married. While Nikolay married Marya to entertain himself and his friends, he also seems to care about her as a person. When she is murdered, Nikolay confesses that while he didn't want the murder to happen, he did nothing to stop it. In a

letter to Darya, he confesses that his inaction weighs on his conscience, and he feels like he is guilty of Marya's death. Just after Darya reads that letter, she and Varvara find Nikolay's body after he has hanged himself. The novel suggests that Nikolay's guilt drives him to suicide. With that in mind, Nikolay as a character represents the attempts of nihilism, socialism, and atheism to discard morality as a relic of outmoded religious thought. However, the novel argues that those kinds of ideas are misguided, as Nikolay's conscience ultimately catches up with him, proving his inability to leave behind the morality he claims to have transcended.

Shatov – Shatov is Darya's brother. He is also the orphaned son of Varvara's former valet. Shatov once subscribed to the ideology of Pyotr's revolutionary faction and became involved with that group but has since renounced that group's ideas in favor of a distinctly Russian form of Christianity. He also contends that religion is the basis of morality. Pyotr arranges for Shatov's murder by convincing the members of the revolutionary faction that Shatov plans to denounce them to the authorities. Pyotr also pushes for that murder because he believes that if the members of the revolutionary faction together become implicated in a crime, they will have no choice but to remain loyal to the faction (or else someone will supply evidence to the authorities about their role in the murder). Pyotr's murder of Shatov can be seen as a concrete manifestation of the conflict between socialism, nihilism, and atheism on the one hand (as represented by Pyotr) and theism and morality on the other (as represented by Shatov). In Dostoevsky's telling, Pyotr's murder of Shatov represents the momentous blow atheism has dealt to Christianity. However, after Shatov is murdered, Stepan experiences a religious conversion to Christianity, suggesting that though Christianity has been injured by the incursions of socialism, nihilism, and atheism, there is also an alternative path available for Russia. While that path will involve Christianity (as represented by Stepan's deathbed conversion to the religion), what exactly that path looks like remains an open question.

Aleksey – Aleksey is friends with Shatov, Pyotr, and Nikolay. He has developed a philosophy in which he believes that if he can kill himself without fear, that will mean that he, and the rest of humanity, will become God. Aleksey intends to take his own life to prove his philosophy. Pyotr tries to use Aleksey's suicide for the benefit of the revolutionary cause by having Aleksey write and sign a suicide note confessing to murdering Shatov and distributing manifestos in town.

Varvara – Varvara is Nikolay's mother and Stepan's patron. She is a wealthy landowner in town, and her estate, called Skvoreshniki, is the setting for much of the novel. She not only financially supports Stepan but frequently defends his reputation in town. Varvara and Stepan have a rift in the middle of the novel that leads them to temporarily stop speaking to each other. Though Stepan and Varvara's relationship is

platonic, it becomes clear later in the novel that the two have been in love with each other, in their own idiosyncratic ways, for 20 years.

Marya – Marya is Lebyadkin's sister and Nikolay's wife. Nikolay married Marya in Petersburg about five years before the story takes place. Nikolay keeps their marriage a secret, in part because he seems to have married her out of a desire to entertain himself and his friends. Marya is physically disabled and is depicted as mentally unstable. Fedka approaches Nikolay about murdering Marya early in the novel. Nikolay says he doesn't want Fedka to kill her but then gives Fedka money in a way that he (Nikolay) acknowledges could be interpreted as a down payment for Fedka's murder-for-hire scheme. Fedka then murders Marya and her brother Lebyadkin while he sets part of the town on fire. Pyotr arranged the murder so he could blackmail Nikolay by saying that he was complicit in the crime. Nikolay later reveals that while he didn't want the murder to happen, he feels guilty for it because he knew it would happen and did nothing to stop it.

Liza – Liza is Praskovya's daughter and is engaged to Mavriky. Stepan tutored Liza when she was a child. Liza is in love with Nikolay and is therefore especially determined to find out the true nature of Nikolay's relationship with Marya. When Liza finds out that Marya and Nikolay are married, she is stunned. Liza and Nikolay run away together late in the novel, but Liza leaves him after she finds out that he didn't intervene to stop Marya from being murdered even though he knew she would be killed. Liza is then murdered by a mob that is convinced that she's partly to blame for Marya's death.

Yuliya – Yuliya is Andrey's wife. She has an outsized view of her own importance and is portrayed as out of touch, as she believes that befriending revolutionaries will help her stymie an international revolutionary plot. She hopes that if that happens, it will lead her to an illustrious political career. At the same time, Yuliya is convinced that if she were successful, she wouldn't alienate revolutionaries like Pyotr. In reality, Pyotr successfully manipulates Yuliya to gain political influence in town and advance his revolutionary goals.

Lebyadkin – Lebyadkin is Marya's brother. He is frequently drunk and often beats his sister. He relies on money that Nikolay sends to support Marya. He frequently writes poems and also writes a letter to Andrey, the governor, informing on the revolutionary faction. Fedka kills Lebyadkin at the same time that he kills Marya.

Fedka – Fedka is a former convict who has recently returned to town. He murders Marya, Lebyadkin, and a servant. Notably, Fedka was once one of Stepan's serfs. When Stepan lost a bet, he traded Fedka for that debt, and Fedka subsequently entered into military service. One person argues that Stepan is at root responsible for the chaos Fedka unleashes in town because Fedka would not have been driven to crime if Stepan hadn't exploited Fedka to begin with.

Shigalyov – Shigalyov is Arina's brother. He is a member of the revolutionary faction. He refuses to take part in Pyotr's murder of Shatov, but he does not warn Shatov that he will be killed. At one point, Shigalyov outlines his ideas of what the world will look like after the revolution. He says that the only way to ensure paradise on earth would be if nine-tenths of people were treated like livestock and served the other tenth of society. Some members of the faction are appalled by his ideas while others support them.

Lyamshin – Lyamshin is a member of the revolutionary faction. He is known around town for his antics and pranks and for his piano-playing ability. He takes part in Shatov's murder but begins screaming afterward and becomes the first of the revolutionary faction to confess his part in the crime to the authorities.

Erkel – Erkel is a member of the revolutionary faction. He is in charge of bringing Shatov to the outskirts of Varvara's estate when the revolutionary faction murders him. Erkel is a true believer in the revolutionary cause and refuses to answer questions from authorities even after Lyamshin and Virginsky have confessed and implicated Erkel in Shatov's murder.

Gaganov – Gaganov is the son of a man whose nose Nikolay pulled when he was in town four years before the story takes place. Nikolay formally apologized to the man, and the man forgave him, but Gaganov still holds a grudge. That grudge leads to a duel, which Nikolay agrees to so that Gaganov will stop bothering him. In the duel, Nikolay refuses to fire at Gaganov, and both men survive.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Darya – Darya is Shatov's sister and a close confidant of Varvara. She is the orphaned daughter of Varvara's former valet. At one point, Stepan and Darya become engaged, though they never marry. It's implied that Darya and Nikolay have some kind of romantic connection.

Anton – Anton is Stepan's closest friend and the narrator of the novel. He holds liberal positions but isn't a member of the revolutionary faction.

Liputin – Liputin is a member of the revolutionary faction and assists in the murder of Shatov. Liputin is well known in town for his atheism.

Virginsky – Virginsky is Arina's husband. After Arina tells him that Shatov, as a new father, poses no threat to the revolutionary faction, Virginsky voices his opposition to Pyotr's plan to murder Shatov. Despite that, Virginsky does nothing to stop the murder and remains present while Pyotr kills Shatov.

Karmazinov – Karmazinov is a well-known writer who is a relative of Yuliya. He is depicted as past his prime, self-important, and out of touch with reality. He is reportedly based on the Russian author Ivan Turgenev.

Mavriky – Mavriky is Liza’s cousin, and he and Liza become engaged in the novel. He is a captain in the military.

Andrey – Andrey is Yuliya’s husband and the town’s new governor. He is both jealous and suspicious of Pyotr when Pyotr begins spending more time with Yuliya. While he is portrayed as well-meaning, he is also ineffectual and proves incapable of countering Pyotr’s schemes and manipulations.

Marie – Marie is Shatov’s wife. The two separated after only a few weeks of marriage. Marie shows up in town years later and gives birth to Nikolay’s son. She and her son both die from illness after Shatov is murdered.

Arina – Arina is Virginsky’s wife. She is a midwife and assists when Shatov’s wife Marie gives birth. After assisting with that birth, Arina tells Virginsky that Shatov won’t inform on the revolutionary faction, which causes Virginsky to have doubts about the faction’s plan to kill Shatov.

Sofya – Sofya is a book peddler who Stepan meets when he travels on foot out of town. Sofya ends up caring for Stepan when he becomes sick during that trip. After Stepan dies, Varvara invites Sofya to live on her estate.

Blum – Blum works in the governor Andrey’s office. Blum and Andrey have known each other for years, and Andrey serves as Blum’s patron. Blum takes it upon himself to search Stepan’s home, and Andrey later castigates Blum for performing the search.

Praskovya – Praskovya is Liza’s mother and an old friend of Varvara, though Varvara and Praskovya often find themselves at odds.

Aleksey Yegorych – Aleksey Yegorych is Varvara’s butler.

support the “common good” and install a system of government that would ensure greater equality within Russia. However, after a pivotal meeting with the revolutionary faction, Pyotr reveals to Nikolay, his friend whom he idealizes, that his personal goals are much different than the political positions he claims to support. In truth, Pyotr aims to use the revolutionary faction to overthrow the established political order so that he can amass and hoard power for himself, while installing Nikolay as a charismatic leader. With that in mind, Pyotr’s support of socialism and revolutionary politics is motivated by opportunism rather than genuine belief. He is not, after all, interested in increasing equality in Russia. Instead, he wants to seize power for himself and use that power to do as he pleases. Through the example of Pyotr’s political maneuvering, Dostoyevsky argues that while politicians frequently claim that they are motivated by a desire to support the common good, in reality, politicians often use that rhetoric to obscure their true motivations of advancing their own self-interest and amassing power for themselves.



IDEOLOGY AND EXTREMISM

The revolutionary faction that Pyotr organizes in the town aims to overthrow the established political order and install a new political system in its place that will promote increased equality. Many of the members of the revolutionary faction are genuine adherents of the political ideologies that they promote. That is, they are motivated by a genuine desire to see more equality in the world rather than by their own self-interest, as Pyotr is. However, the members of the revolutionary faction become so devoted to ideology that they are willing to commit violent acts to try and advance their revolutionary cause. As Shigalyov and Pyotr both argue, to be true revolutionaries, they must be willing to take the heads of a hundred million people. In other words, they believe that no price of human life is too high to pay to achieve their goals. The revolutionary faction puts that precept—that human life must be sacrificed to achieve ideological aims—into practice through the murders of Lebyadkin, Marya, and Shatov. Members of the revolutionary faction believe committing crimes like those murders will ultimately demoralize people, which will throw society into chaos and lead people to abandon their beliefs. When society is in the midst of that chaos, people will be desperate for guiding ideas, and the revolutionaries will then step to the fore and install their ideology throughout the country. Those murders then represent how powerfully seductive and potentially dangerous political ideology can be, as the novel shows that ideology can dull one’s sense of others’ humanity. With that in mind, Dostoyevsky argues that one’s devotion to advancing a certain ideology, regardless of how sincere and well-meaning the devotion might be, becomes dangerously extremist when ideological purity is valued more highly than human life.



THEMES

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POLITICS AND SELF-INTEREST

Pyotr is the leader of a small revolutionary faction in a provincial town outside of Petersburg in 1870s Russia. When Pyotr arrives in town, he quickly proves to be the consummate backroom politician, as he wields a significant amount of power without ever holding office. In town, he jostles for political power and works tirelessly to gain political influence, chiefly through his friendship with the governor’s wife, Yuliya. Pyotr’s ostensible goal is to use that political influence to advance the goals of the revolutionary faction that he has assembled in the town. That revolutionary faction subscribes to socialist ideals and purportedly aims to



MORALITY AND NIHILISM

Nikolay conceives of himself as nihilistic and fundamentally amoral in the sense that he is driven by his whims and desires rather than by an awareness of right and wrong. In his mind, he is beyond good and evil. As Shatov says, Nikolay doesn't make a distinction between the beauty of an instance of "bestial carnality" and the beauty of a heroic act. In reality, though, Nikolay is frequently torn between a desire to test the bounds of morality and propriety on the one hand and his conscience on the other. Nikolay's internal conflict comes to a head when Marya is murdered. He first becomes aware of Pyotr's plan to murder Marya when Fedka (working on Pyotr's orders) offers to help Nikolay "take care of" Marya and Lebyadkin in exchange for payment. At first, Nikolay is appalled by the offer and threatens to take Fedka to the police. But Nikolay then throws money at Fedka and later acknowledges that Fedka could interpret the gesture as a tacit acceptance of Fedka's terms. On the one hand, Nikolay cares about Marya and doesn't want to see her harmed. On the other hand, Nikolay wants to flout morality, and his decision to throw money at Fedka can be seen as his attempt to rebuke and rebel against his conscience.

After Marya is killed, Nikolay confesses that while he was not involved in Marya's murder, he knew that a plan was in place and did nothing to stop the murderers. He later adds that, in his conscience, he feels guilty for Marya's death. That guilt then arguably becomes the primary motivating factor for Nikolay's decision to take his own life. Though Nikolay claims to believe in nothing and to be driven by a desire to reject the norms of morality, that rejection leads him to become complicit in the murder of someone he cares about, and he cannot bear the guilt of that complicity. Nikolay's guilt confirms his inability to overcome the norms of morality that he claims to eschew. In that sense, the novel argues that a belief in nothing—represented by Nikolay's amoralistic nihilism—is tantamount to an endorsement of the most abhorrent immorality, and if one commits those immoral acts, one's conscience will overcome one's purported nihilism. Dostoevsky applies that same argument to the revolutionary faction as a whole. Though the members of the faction claim to be proudly nihilistic, after Lyamshin and Virginsky take part in Shatov's murder, they cannot bear the guilt of their complicity and confess to their crimes, making it clear that the nihilistic approach of the revolutionary faction is just as misguided as Nikolay's attempts to subvert morality.



HERD MENTALITY

The novel uses the revolutionary faction, led by Pyotr, to portray the harmful and dangerous impacts of herd mentality. Herd mentality is the phenomenon when individuals conform to the ideas and opinions of a group, often sacrificing their own sense of

morality or their own beliefs to do so. That mentality plays a pivotal role in the revolutionary faction's decision to murder Shatov. The impulse for the murder comes during a revolutionary meeting in which Pyotr asks each member if they would inform on the group to authorities if they knew of a planned political assassination. Shatov defies the group, and goes against herd mentality, by refusing to answer the question. The novel then shows the cost of that defiance, as the group decides to murder Shatov because his lack of deference to the group convinces them that he is an informer.

Herd mentality continues to play a role as the plan to murder Shatov goes forward. Though some individual members of the faction are against the idea, each one signs off on the plan so as not to go against the group. The qualms of individuals' consciences persist up to the moment when Shatov is murdered. Virginsky continues to argue against the plan up to the last minute, and Shigalyov leaves to avoid being part of the murder. Notably, though, no one warns Shatov or acts to stop the murder, showing the extent to which each member remains loyal to the group despite their own individual misgivings. The murder then goes ahead as Pyotr planned, making it clear how the power of the group, and of herd mentality, overcome the resistance of individuals, even when a person's life hangs in the balance. The idea of herd mentality is reinforced by the novel's epigraph, which comes from Luke 8:32-6. In that passage, **demons** leave a man and enter into a herd of swine. That herd then rushes into a lake and drowns. Stepan references that same passage on his deathbed and links it to the fate of Russia. With that in mind, the novel argues that herd mentality, or the willingness to forego one's conscience to avoid upsetting a group, can have dire consequences that will drive Russia, and perhaps the world as a whole, to destruction.



ATHEISM VS. BELIEF IN GOD

The tension between belief in God and non-belief animates much of the novel. That tension is especially noticeable in the storylines of, and debates between, Shatov, Pyotr, and Stepan. Shatov was once an adherent of the revolutionary socialism advocated by Pyotr. He defected, though, and embraced a distinctly Russian form of Christianity. According to Shatov, religion serves the purpose of uniting the people of a country under common ideas of good and evil. In Shatov's telling, the people of a country are the "body of God." Shatov argues that socialism is defined by an overreliance on reason and science and that reason and science can never adequately define good and evil. Pyotr, who embraces socialism and atheism, then murders Shatov. That murder can then be interpreted as socialism and atheism's attempt to kill faith in God. The novel suggests that if faith is abolished and is replaced by atheism, then morality will vanish with it. If that happens, people like Pyotr will then run the world, virtually guaranteeing further immorality, death, and

destruction.

The novel links its narrative chronology to a historical assessment of Russia. In Dostoevsky's telling, socialism and atheism have succeeded in seriously wounding faith, just as Pyotr succeeds in killing Shatov. Shatov cannot come back to life, meaning that the ideas he represents—including his attachment to a distinctly Russian form of Christianity—cannot be revived in the same form now that socialism and atheism have been introduced. Instead, Dostoevsky offers a new path forward through Stepan's deathbed conversion experience. In that sense, after Shatov is killed, his ideas are reborn in Stepan, but they must take a different form going forward. On his deathbed, Stepan says that belief in God is paramount, but the particular ideas of what that faith looks like remain open. Fundamental to Stepan's idea of God, though, is that God represents something "immeasurably just" and happy. That justice provides a necessary alternative to Pyotr's lawlessness. With that in mind, the novel suggests that the introduction of atheism has made it impossible for Russia to return to the distinctly Russian theism represented and advocated by Shatov. Instead, Russia must chart a new path forward while retaining faith in God, a transformation that is represented by Stepan's conversion experience. While that new version of faith has yet to be fully defined, Dostoevsky argues that it is necessary to save Russia from the immorality, death, and destruction promised by the atheism that Pyotr represents.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



DEMONS

The demons referenced in the novel's title and epigraph symbolize the seductive but dangerously corruptive force of the ideology promulgated by people like Pyotr. The novel's epigraph comes from Luke 8:32-6. In that biblical passage, demons are exorcised from a man and enter a herd of swine. That herd of swine then runs into a lake and drowns. Stepan references that passage when he is on his deathbed. Stepan compares the man from whom demons are exorcised to Russia as a country. According to Stepan, Russia has been possessed by the demons of the ideology championed by his son Pyotr and "all of the rest" of Pyotr's accomplices. That ideology includes atheism, socialism, nihilism, and Pyotr's precept that revolutionaries must be ready to abandon morality to support the revolution at any cost. According to Stepan, Russia must exorcise those ideological demons from itself, leaving the swine—including Pyotr and his accomplices—to drown. In the biblical passage, after the demons are exorcised from the ailing man, he bows at Christ's

feet. In Stepan's telling, Russia must be exorcised of the demons of destructive ideology represented by Pyotr. Then, Russia can bow at Christ's feet, symbolizing an embrace of Christianity that, Stepan believes, could save Russia as a country.



ICONS

Icons—depictions of religiously significant people or scenes, often painted on wood and venerated—symbolize Russia's connection to its religious and, in Dostoevsky's view, moral history. In several instances, members of Pyotr's revolutionary faction and those with sympathetic views break or destroy religious icons. In one case, a second lieutenant in the military throws two icons from his landlady's window and destroys another with an axe. He's then arrested with several revolutionary manifestos on him. The lieutenant's decision to break the icons, then, represents the revolutionary faction's attempts to break the hold that Christianity has over Russia. In Dostoevsky's view, that also means abandoning morality, as Dostoevsky contends that religion and morality are inextricably linked. In another instance, Fedka and another person steal an icon of the Virgin Mary from a shrine and replace it with a live mouse. People in town view the mouse as particularly sacrilegious. Fedka's actions show again how the revolutionary faction destroys or steals icons as a way to destabilize the town and chip away at the townspeople's connection to Russia's religious history. Ultimately, the revolutionary faction hopes that if they wear down townspeople's connection to religion, those people will more readily accept the tenets of their revolutionary ideology.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Demons* published in 2008.

Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 3 Quotes

●● There are strange friendships: two friends almost want to devour each other, and they spend their entire lives living that way, but meanwhile they cannot part. There is not even a way they can part: the one who takes to acting up and breaks the tie will be the first to fall sick and perhaps die, if that should happen. I know for a fact that on several occasions, Stepan Trofimovich, sometimes even after the most intimate effusions to Varvara Petrovna in private, would suddenly jump up from the sofa as soon as she left and begin beating his fists against the wall.

Related Characters: Stepan, Varvara

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

This passage introduces Stepan and Varvara's fraught relationship at the beginning of the novel. The description of their dynamic provides insight into why, though they have been in love with each other for decades, the two have never entered into a romantic relationship. The quote also explores Stepan's psyche. Though he will act effusively and affectionately toward Varvara in one moment, he'll become frustrated and annoyed as soon as she leaves. That shows how unsettled Stepan feels in life, as in both his professional and personal lives, Stepan senses that there is more out there for him, but he doesn't know how to pursue it—or is perhaps afraid to.

The quote also foreshadows the end of the novel. As soon as Stepan leaves town and separates himself from Varvara, he becomes ill and ultimately dies. With that in mind, the quote suggests that Varvara and Stepan are bound together by fate, but that the love they have for one another is tragic, considering that they often cannot bear to be around each other, but they cannot survive apart.


1860s. The first and arguably most important of those reforms was the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. Through that reform, 23 million former serfs were granted freedom and autonomy. Stepan's practiced "huzzah" in favor of the reforms perhaps comes off as forced and overly zealous, which leads to a socially awkward moment that displeases Varvara, who is trying to impress the baron.

The baron in this passage is a member of the nobility, meaning that he is a landowner who stands to lose economically when the emancipation of the serfs goes into effect. With that in mind, at the heart of Varvara's displeasure, though, seems to be Stepan's attempt to voice political support for the movement of the great reforms, therefore tacitly challenging the baron, who, because he benefits from the status quo, would have most likely opposed the reforms. The baron uses his social graces to move smoothly past the moment. Varvara, though, becomes angry at Stepan for the outburst and says that she will "never forgive him" for what he's done, showing how much value she places on social niceties and maintaining the status quo. With regard to Stepan, his exclamation of approval for the planned reforms shows that he supports progressive causes but also that he doesn't necessarily do much to show his support for those causes other than voice his opinions in relatively low-stakes situations.

Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 4 Quotes

☝☝ When the baron gave positive confirmation of the reliability of the first rumours about the great reform that were just then beginning to spread, Stepan Trofimovich suddenly could not restrain himself and cried "Hurrah!" and even made a gesture with his hand that signified his delight. His exclamation was not loud, and was even genteel; his delight was perhaps even premeditated, and his gesture purposely practised in front of the mirror half an hour before tea. But something must not have quite come off, since the baron permitted himself a faint smile, although he promptly put in an extraordinarily polite phrase about the appropriate swell of emotion in all Russian hearts in view of the great event.

Related Characters: Stepan, Stepan, Varvara, Varvara

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator Anton describes Stepan and Varvara's relationship, focusing on times when Varvara has been displeased with Stepan before forgiving him. The quote references the "great reform," which was a period of political reforms that occurred in Russia in the

Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 8 Quotes

☝☝ While abroad Shatov radically revised certain of his former socialist convictions and jumped to the opposite extreme. He was one of those idealistic Russian beings who are suddenly struck by some powerful idea and immediately, then and there, seem to be crushed by it, even sometimes permanently. They are never equipped to deal with it, and instead come to believe in it passionately, and so their entire life from then on passes in its final throes, as it were, under the stone that has fallen upon them and already crushed them half to death.

Related Characters: Stepan, Pyotr, Shatov, Anton

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Anton, the story's narrator, introduces each of the people who frequents Stepan's gatherings; here he introduces Shatov. The passage describes Shatov's conversion from socialism to Christianity. It describes that conversion as being "suddenly struck by some powerful idea." After Shatov is struck by that idea, he struggles to grapple with the power

of his beliefs. The quote lays the groundwork to show that Shatov adheres to his beliefs in an unbending and absolute way. He cannot be swayed away from those beliefs no matter what, even if those beliefs might kill him. That foreshadows the end of the novel when Shatov's opposition to the revolutionary faction lands him in hot water and ultimately leads to his murder.



Notably, the passage identifies Shatov's conversion to Christianity as the "opposite extreme" of socialism, suggesting that, in the novel's view, Christianity and socialism are diametrically opposed and necessarily incompatible. (The novel will later double down on that point by arguing that socialism must necessarily be based on a foundation of atheism.) Because Shatov is so single-mindedly and absolutely devoted to a creed that is, in the novel's view, incompatible with socialism, he comes to represent the ultimate enemy of Pyotr and his revolutionary faction. In that sense, Shatov also represents the idea that the biggest obstacle Christianity faces in Russia at the time is the burgeoning socialist movement.

Part 1, Chapter 3, Section 8 Quotes

☝☝ 'Man is afraid of death because he loves life, that's how I understand it,' I observed, 'and nature has ordained it so.'

'That's vile, and that's the basis of the whole deception!' His eyes began to flash. 'Life is pain, life is fear and man is unhappy. Now all is pain and fear. Now man loves life because he loves pain and fear. And that's how he's been made. Now life is given in exchange for pain and fear, and that's the basis of the whole deception. Now man is still not what he should be. There will be a new man, happy and proud. Whoever doesn't care whether he lives or doesn't live, he will be the new man. Whoever conquers pain and fear, he himself will be God. And that other God will no longer be.'

Related Characters: Aleksey, Aleksey, Anton (speaker), Nikolay, Nikolay

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

Anton goes to Aleksey's house after he first meets Aleksey at Stepan's house. In this meeting, Aleksey explains to Anton his philosophy of God and describes how he aims to take his own life to show that humanity can become God. The crux of Aleksey's argument rests on fear of death. He thinks by abolishing that fear, humanity will essentially wrest power



back from God, thereby becoming God-like themselves. In Aleksey's view, the idea that life is worth living is a "deception," a charade that God essentially tricks humans into believing. In that sense, he suggests that taking one's own life without fear will banish the illusion that God has trapped humanity within.

This passage lays the foundation for the reader to begin to understand Aleksey's philosophy, which becomes a pivotal plot point later in the novel when Pyotr orders Aleksey to take his own life in service of the revolutionary faction's aims. At that point, though, Aleksey seems unable to vanquish his fear of death and seems to fail to put his theory into practice. In that sense, the novel argues that Aleksey, like Nikolay, has come up with a theory to try and abolish the need for God. In both cases, though, Nikolay and Aleksey are proven to be incorrect, thereby affirming (in the novel's view) the necessity for religious faith and for God.

Part 2, Chapter 1, Section 7 Quotes

☝☝ 'Each people has its own concept of evil and good, and its own evil and good. When many different peoples begin to hold concepts of evil and good in common, then the peoples die out, and then the very difference between evil and good begins to blur and disappear. Reason has never had the power of defining evil and good or separating evil from good, even approximately. On the contrary, it has always mixed them up in a shameful and pitiful fashion, whereas science has found solutions by sheer force.'

Related Characters: Shatov, Shatov (speaker), Pyotr, Pyotr, Nikolay, Nikolay

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

Shatov talks to Nikolay about his ideas regarding faith, socialism, reason, science, and atheism. Notably, Shatov once believed in and espoused the ideas of revolutionary socialism. Since then, though, he has made a hard pivot to embrace Christianity, as evidenced in this passage. In Shatov's telling, concepts of good and evil are not only directly related to religion and faith, but those spiritual ideas are also essential in providing the foundation for a functioning society. Shatov suggests that socialism is fundamentally incompatible with religion because it relies solely on science and reason, which Shatov believes are opposed to religion. According to Shatov, because reason

and science cannot produce adequate concepts of good and evil, or right and wrong, then socialism can never be the guiding philosophy of a functioning society.

This passage establishes Shatov as the ideological enemy of the revolutionary faction led by Pyotr. For the revolutionary faction to achieve their aims, they believe they must murder Shatov. By murdering Shatov, though, the revolutionary faction essentially proves Shatov's point. During that murder, the faction shows that they are willing to abandon the ideas of right and wrong or good and evil. Not long after, the revolutionary faction implodes and disbands, riven apart by their futile attempts to throw off the kind of morality that they view as a relic of outmoded religious thought.



☛ 'And is it [...] true that in Petersburg you belonged to some secret society that practised bestial carnality? Is it true that the Marquis de Sade could have taken lessons from you? Is it true that you seduced and debauched children?' [...]

'I did say these words, but I didn't harm any children,' Stavrogin pronounced, but only after a very prolonged silence. He had turned pale, and his eyes blazed.

'But you said them!' Shatov continued imperiously, not taking his flashing eyes off him. 'Is it true that you stated you didn't make a distinction between the beauty of any instance of bestial carnality and a heroic deed of any kind, even the sacrifice of one's life for humanity? Is it true that you found equal beauty and identical pleasure in both these extremes?'

'It's impossible to answer like this... I don't want to answer,' Stavrogin muttered.

Related Characters: Nikolay, Nikolay, Shatov, Shatov (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 281-282

Explanation and Analysis

While Shatov talks to Nikolay about his ideas about God, religion, faith, and socialism, he confronts Nikolay about rumors he's heard concerning Nikolay's time in Petersburg. Shatov specifically accuses Nikolay of believing that there is no distinction between the beauty of a heroic deed and the beauty of an act of "bestial carnality." Nikolay doesn't refute Shatov's assertion. Instead, he says that while he may have spoken words advocating for harming children, he himself never harmed children. Shatov's accusation coupled with Nikolay's response points to Nikolay's working philosophy

that morality is a relic of a previous way of thinking. He believes that he can transcend the need for morality and is beyond good and evil.

It's worth noting, though, that while Nikolay doesn't dispute Shatov's accusations and doesn't deny that he said what Shatov accuses him of saying, he is also reluctant to steadfastly defend himself. That reluctance points to Nikolay's ambivalence about his idea that he is beyond good and evil. While part of him wants to believe that he is not bound by morality, personal experience seems to have shown him that he cannot escape the pangs of conscience when he commits immoral acts. Nikolay himself feels conflicted about his past words and deeds, as can be seen in his hesitancy when Shatov brings up Nikolay's past. That internal conflict is all the evidence Nikolay needs to know that he is not truly beyond good and evil or free from the bonds of morality.

☛ 'You got married out of a passion for inflicting torment, out of a passion for feeling the pangs of conscience, out of moral carnality [...] When you bit the governor's ear, did you feel a surge of carnality? Did you feel it? You idle, footloose son of a landowner, did you feel it?'

'You're a psychologist,' Stavrogin was growing increasingly pale, 'although you are partly mistaken about the reasons for my marriage...'

Related Characters: Nikolay, Shatov (speaker), Marya

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

While Shatov talks to Nikolay about God, faith, morality, and socialism, he presses Nikolay about his marriage to Marya and other past actions. Shatov's assessment of Nikolay's reasons for marrying Marya provides the first explanation for why Shatov previously struck Nikolay at Varvara's house. According to Shatov, he hit Nikolay because Nikolay, who once meant a great deal to Shatov, debased himself by treating other people, like Marya, with malice. Shatov was then overtaken with anger when he saw the Nikolay he once idolized transformed in front of him into a fallen person. Shatov then struck him out of anger and disappointment.

Nikolay, for his part, doesn't argue with Shatov's assessment of why Nikolay bit the former governor's ear. In that sense, Nikolay seems to agree that he wanted to feel the joy that came with testing the bounds of propriety and finding that


he could flout those apparent constraints with no real penalty. However, he disputes Shatov's descriptions of his motivations for marrying Marya. That dispute is a hint that while Nikolay may have married Marya to entertain himself and his friends, he also seems to genuinely care about her. Later in the novel, the care that Nikolay feels toward Marya will provide further insight into the limitations of Nikolay's philosophy that he is beyond good and evil.

Part 2, Chapter 2, Section 2 Quotes

☞ 'Nikolay Vsevolodovich, Nikolay Vsevolodovich, this cannot be, perhaps you'll give it some more thought, you won't want to lay hands on... What will people say, what will the world say?'

'Oh, I'm hardly afraid of your world. After all, I did marry your sister then, when I felt like it, after a drunken dinner, on a bet for wine, and now I'm going to proclaim it for all to hear — why not, if it amuses me now?'

Related Characters: Nikolay, Lebyadkin (speaker), Shatov, Varvara, Marya

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 296-297

Explanation and Analysis

After the events at Varvara's house which led to Shatov striking Nikolay, Nikolay visits Lebyadkin and tells him that he intends to make his (Nikolay's) marriage to Marya public. Lebyadkin's immediate response is, "But what will people think?" Nikolay responds by saying, essentially, that he does not care what people think. He also describes for the first time exactly what circumstances led to him marrying Marya. In Nikolay's telling, he married Marya to entertain himself and his friends during a night of drinking. With that in mind, when Nikolay responds to Lebyadkin, he essentially says that he didn't care what other people thought when he married Marya, so why should he care now?

Nikolay's lack of concern about what other people think is an example of his rejection of morality and propriety. He considers himself above the norms that govern others. That includes norms like marriage. While some might consider the institution sanctified or otherwise meaningful, Nikolay seems intent on making a mockery of it. With that in mind, his decision to marry Marya, and to make that marriage public, is another example of his attempts to prove to himself (and others) that he is not bound by the norms that govern others.

☞ 'Oh, Nikolay Vsevolodovich,' he exclaimed, 'what troubled me most of all was that this was completely against all civil laws, and primarily those of the fatherland! Suddenly they would print that people should go out with pitchforks, and remember that he who went out poor in the morning could return home rich in the evening. Just think of it, sir! I was shaking in my boots, but I was distributing them. Or suddenly there would be five or six lines addressed to all of Russia, for no good reason: "Lock the churches as soon as you can, destroy God, violate marriages, destroy the rights of inheritance, take up knives", that's all, and the Devil knows what else. That was the piece of paper, with the five lines, that I was almost caught with, but the officers of the regiment gave me a good beating and then, God bless them, let me go.'

Related Characters: Lebyadkin, Lebyadkin (speaker), Pyotr, Pyotr, Nikolay, Nikolay, Varvara, Varvara

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 298-299

Explanation and Analysis

When Nikolay visits Lebyadkin after the events at Varvara's house, Lebyadkin explains how he got mixed up in revolutionary politics years ago when he lived in Petersburg. Lebyadkin's account of the manifestos he unwittingly passed out provides the most thorough description of the content of those manifestos. Similar manifestos become a major plot point later in the novel, as Pyotr works diligently to ensure that they are distributed throughout the provincial town. Lebyadkin's explanation of the manifestos shows just how radical and extreme the political exhortations in those works can be, as they explicitly advocate violence as a means to achieve revolutionary ends. His description of the manifestos also shows the approach, adopted by the revolutionary faction, to try and destabilize all norms, including norms of morality and religion, to try and undermine society and demoralize others. Amid that chaos and the resulting power vacuum, the revolutionaries would then seek to gain power.

Lebyadkin's description of the manifestos is also intended to show the wide gap between the ideas of an average Russian person, represented by Lebyadkin, and the extreme positions of the revolutionary faction. In the novel's telling, even someone as morally compromised as Lebyadkin (who regularly beats his sister and deprives her of food) can see how morally wrong the actions advocated by the revolutionaries are.

●● 'That's to say, that watchman and me, we brung all the stuff together, and later on, towards mornin', by the river, we got to quarrellin' as to who was gonna carry the sack. I sinned, I lightened his burden a bit.'

'Kill some more, steal some more.'

'Pyotr Stepanovich is handin' me that same advice, in them same words as you, 'cause he's a real stingy and hard-hearted man when it comes to givin' assistance. Besides which, he ain't got no belief at all in the heavenly creator, who fashioned us out o' the dust of the earth. He says it's jes' nature made everythin', even down to the last animal.'

Related Characters: Nikolay, Fedka (speaker), Pyotr

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 311

Explanation and Analysis

After visiting Lebyadkin and Marya, Nikolay returns to town. On his way back, Fedka accosts him again on the bridge and again asks Nikolay for money. After Fedka explains that he recently killed the watchman who helped him rob a church, he says that when he asks Pyotr for money, Pyotr tells him to kill and steal more. Notably, Fedka, who has just admitted to killing someone, claims that Pyotr is a hard-hearted person for encouraging Fedka to kill more. Fedka then says that Pyotr's hard-heartedness stems from his lack of faith in God. Fedka directly connects that lack of faith to Pyotr's embrace of science by saying that Pyotr believes that nature made everything, meaning that Pyotr believes in evolution. (Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, not long before *Demons* was published in 1872.)

Fedka's statement again links socialism to reason and science, which, in the novel's view, is incompatible with faith and God. The novel contends that that lack of faith spells disaster for society. As Fedka puts it, if one has no religion, then one doesn't see any issue with killing and stealing with abandon. The quote as a whole provides insight into the novel's view of the nihilist movement represented by Pyotr and Nikolay. According to the novel, a person like Fedka is misguided and perhaps evil because he kills people for his own gain. However, it suggests that people like Pyotr and Nikolay are even worse than Fedka because they kill others and don't see a problem with it.

Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2 Quotes

●● 'Lizaveta Nikolayevna, really and truly, you can grind me in a mortar, but he's innocent; on the contrary, he's been crushed and is raving, as you can see. He's not guilty of anything, of anything, even in thought! It's all the doing of robbers who will certainly be found in a week and punished by flogging. It's all the fault of Fedka the Convict and the Shpigulin workers; the whole town is chattering about it, and that's why I am too.'

'Is that so? Is that so?' Liza was waiting, all atremble, for the final verdict.

'I didn't kill them and I was against it, but I knew they would be killed, and I didn't stop the killers. Step away from me, Liza,' Stavrogin said, and he went into the drawing room.

Liza covered her face with her hands and went out of the house.

Related Characters: Pyotr, Nikolay, Liza (speaker), Marya, Lebyadkin, Fedka

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 589

Explanation and Analysis

After Marya and Lebyadkin's bodies are discovered, Pyotr goes to see Nikolay and tells him that from both a moral and legal standpoint, Nikolay is in the clear with regard to the murders. Nikolay then disagrees and comes clean when he says that he's at fault because he knew the murders would happen but didn't step in to stop them. Nikolay's comments can be interpreted as a step for him toward acknowledging his conscience and accepting morality. Throughout much of the novel, Nikolay considers himself beyond good and evil. In his view, morality is a relic of outmoded ways of thinking, particularly modes of thought originating in religion. He believes that he can operate outside the bounds of morality and face no consequences.

Nikolay's decision to take responsibility for Marya's murder, though, shows the limits of his idea that he is beyond good and evil. When a profoundly immoral act is committed and Fedka kills Marya, Nikolay begins to see the true impacts of his amoralistic approach to life. Nikolay's guilt regarding Marya's murder will continue to weigh on him and ultimately lead him to take his own life.

Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 4 Quotes

☛ ‘[...] Yesterday on the bridge one little demon offered to kill Lebyadkin and Marya Timofeyevna to solve the problem of my lawful marriage and leave no traces of it behind. He asked for three silver roubles as an advance, but let it clearly be known that the whole procedure would cost no less than fifteen hundred. There’s a calculating demon for you! A bookkeeper! Ha, ha!’

[...]



‘[...] It was just Fedka the Convict, a robber who’s escaped from hard labour. But that’s not the point. What do you think I did? I gave him all the money in my wallet, and he’s now utterly convinced that I gave him an advance!’ [...]

‘You ran across him at night and he made you an offer like that? Can you really not see that they’ve completely entangled you in their net!’

‘Oh, let them!’

Related Characters: Nikolay, Nikolay, Darya, Darya (speaker), Pyotr, Pyotr, Marya, Marya, Lebyadkin, Lebyadkin, Fedka, Fedka

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 325

Explanation and Analysis

After Fedka accosts Nikolay and asks for money, Nikolay explains to Dasha that Fedka wanted Nikolay to give him money as part of a murder-for-hire scheme to kill Lebyadkin and Marya. Darya then surmises that Pyotr is attempting to lure Nikolay into committing a crime so that Pyotr will have evidence that he can use to blackmail Nikolay and keep Nikolay under his control. Notably, when describing the situation, Nikolay repeatedly refers to Fedka as a demon. In the epigraph of the book, which comes from a biblical passage, a man is exorcised of demons. The demons possess a herd of swine and run into a lake before drowning. The man then throws himself at the feet of Christ and is healed.

In the novel, demons symbolize the ideologies of socialism, atheism, and nihilism and the people who advocate those ideas, like Pyotr. In the novel’s view, those demons have infected Russia just like the demons afflicted the man from the biblical passage. Fedka is one of those demons because he is acting as Pyotr’s accomplice and threatens to throw Russia into a further state of chaos as it grapples with being “possessed” by demons. Darya warns Nikolay that he may, in effect, become possessed by those demons as well if he

becomes tangled in Pyotr’s web.


The maliciousness of Nikolay’s response is a sign that part of him has already accepted the terms of nihilism. As he explains to Darya, he threw money at Fedka knowing that Fedka might interpret the money as a down payment to murder Marya and Lebyadkin. That makes it clear that Nikolay believes, or wants to believe, in the tenets of nihilism that argue that morality is an outmoded way of thinking, and that humanity can move beyond good and evil.

Part 2, Chapter 4, Section 3 Quotes

☛ ‘Please don’t worry about Verkhovensky,’ she said, concluding the conversation. ‘If he had been party to any mischief, then he wouldn’t have talked as he has with you and with others here. Phrasemongers aren’t dangerous, and let me say that even if something should happen, I will certainly be the first to find out about it from him. He is fanatically devoted to me, fanatically.’

I will note, in anticipation of events, that if it hadn’t been for Yuliya Mikhaylovna’s self-importance and ambition, perhaps everything that these wretched little people managed to inflict on us wouldn’t have happened. She had a great deal to answer for!

Related Characters: Yuliya, Yuliya (speaker), Pyotr, Pyotr, Anton, Anton, Andrey, Andrey

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 352

Explanation and Analysis

The governor Andrey talks to his wife Yuliya about Pyotr, who he thinks may pose a threat to the government because he is a political agitator with, Andrey believes, revolutionary aims. Yuliya responds by saying that Pyotr is all bluster and words but no action. Besides, she says, she has complete control over Pyotr. As later events in the novel make clear, Yuliya couldn’t be more wrong in her assessment of Pyotr, as Pyotr does act and murders, or directs others to murder, multiple people.


With that in mind, the quote shows how Pyotr is able to manipulate people in power—or those close to power, like Yuliya—in order to gain political influence. Pyotr manipulates Yuliya by playing into her view of herself as someone who understands behind-the-scenes political machinations and by flattering her intelligence. At the same time, he portrays himself as someone who shouldn’t be taken seriously. Yuliya falls into his trap, which enables

Pyotr to gain political influence in the provincial town. He later uses that political influence to help carry out his plan to destabilize society in the provincial town.

Part 2, Chapter 5, Section 2 Quotes

☞ When the expedition had ridden down from the bridge and had drawn up beside the town hotel, someone suddenly announced that the body of a guest who had shot himself had just been discovered in one of the hotel rooms, and that they were waiting for the police. Immediately the idea was floated of having a look at the suicide. The idea found support; our ladies had never seen a suicide. I remember that one of them said aloud, then and there, that ‘everything’s become so boring that there’s no point in being fastidious about one’s amusements as long as they were diverting.’

Related Characters: Pyotr, Nikolay, Liza, Yuliya, Anton, Mavriky

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 362

Explanation and Analysis

As the preparations for Yuliya’s gala reach their final stages, Anton sees a group headed to talk with Semyon, a man who lives on the outskirts of town and is considered a kind of prophet. On the way, they hear about a man who has taken his own life in a nearby inn. The novel portrays the group’s lurid interest in seeing the man’s body as symptomatic of a society and culture that has lost its way. That idea is exemplified in the woman’s comment that the world has become so boring that there’s no point in being uptight about one’s interests. In essence, the woman claims that morality and propriety—particularly the kind of propriety that would customarily require a person to show respect for the dead—are pointless. What’s more important, she implies, is entertainment.

Dostoevsky uses the group’s fascination with the dead body to shine a light on what he sees as the moral degradation of Russian society. Notably, the group is comprised of young people in town. In that way, the novel criticizes the lack of propriety and morality of a younger generation, essentially saying that that generation must regain a sense of moral norms, lest society continue to head in the wrong direction.

Part 2, Chapter 6, Section 5 Quotes

☞ ‘As far as I can see and as far as I can judge, the whole essence of the Russian revolutionary idea is contained in the denial of honour. I’m pleased that this is so boldly and fearlessly expressed. No, in Europe they can’t yet understand this, but here in Russia this is precisely what they will seize upon. For a Russian, honour is only an unnecessary burden. What’s more, it has always been a burden, for his entire history. He can be carried away by an open “right to dishonour” sooner than anything else. I’m of the old generation, and I still stand for honour, I admit it, but it’s really only out of habit. The only reason I like the old forms is, let’s say, out of faint-heartedness; one really must finish out one’s days somehow.’

Related Characters: Karmazinov, Karmazinov (speaker), Pyotr, Pyotr, Andrey, Andrey

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 412

Explanation and Analysis

Pyotr goes to see Karmazinov after he has tried to manipulate the governor, Andrey, to get Andrey to unwittingly do his bidding. Pyotr and Karmazinov then talk about socialism and the possibility of impending revolutionary action. Karmazinov says that socialism in Russia is predicated on a disavowal of honor, by which he seems to mean that the rise of socialism rests on an abandonment of morality. Karmazinov contends, though, that a desire to act morally is a burden that people want to shake off, and he suggests this desire is understandable and deserves sympathy. Pyotr is attempting to do just that by pushing his revolutionary faction to commit more and more heinous acts in the name of advancing the revolutionary cause.

In this conversation in particular, the novel satirizes Karmazinov’s lack of integrity. While Karmazinov practices the honor and morality that he claims is on the way out, the novel suggests that he doesn’t have the integrity to claim that there is something worthwhile in and of itself about that morality. Instead, he argues that his propensity to act morally is more or less a result of his age and or the prejudices he learned from being brought up in an earlier generation. The novel argues, though, that morality is an essential and invaluable aspect of the human experience and of human society and should therefore not be dismissed as a mere trifle.

Part 2, Chapter 6, Section 7 Quotes

☛ 'Here's something to make you laugh: the first thing that has a tremendous effect is a uniform. There's nothing more powerful than a uniform. I make a point of dreaming up ranks and offices: I have secretaries, secret agents, treasurers, chairmen, registrars, their colleagues — it's a lot of fun and it has really caught on. After that, the second most powerful force is, of course, sentimentality. You know, socialism in Russia is spreading primarily out of sentimentality.'

Related Characters: Pyotr (speaker), Nikolay, Liza, Mavriky

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 427

Explanation and Analysis

After Nikolay talks to Mavriky—who tries to tell Nikolay to marry Liza before learning that Nikolay is already married—Nikolay talks to Pyotr. In that conversation, Pyotr discusses what draws people to socialism. Pyotr's explanation of the appeal of socialism reflects his cynicism about the revolutionary faction he leads and the political ideas he claims to support. In essence, Pyotr argues that people are not drawn to socialism because they want meaningful social change. Instead, they are seduced by the pageantry of it. This suggests that in his view, people are embracing socialism because they want to be superior to others and hold power over them through rank. A fun new uniform, he suggests, doesn't hurt either.

Pyotr's argument that people are also drawn to socialism out of sentimentality again suggests that people embrace socialism for essentially shallow reasons. They are not driven by evidence that socialism will evince meaningful political change. Instead, they're driven by a kind of mawkishness that, in Pyotr's view, shows how easily manipulatable they are. In that way, Pyotr suggests that people's support of socialism is essentially hollow. Pyotr, though, doesn't actually care what people's reasons are, or about socialism at all, as he sees supporting it as just an effective way to gain power for himself.

Part 2, Chapter 7, Section 1 Quotes

☛ Every one of these five operatives formed the first group in the fervent belief that it was merely a unit that linked hundreds and thousands of similar groups of five, just like theirs, scattered throughout Russia, and that everything depended on some huge but secret central organization that, in turn, was organically linked with the universal European revolution.

Related Characters: Pyotr, Liputin, Virginsky, Shigalyov, Lyamshin

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 433

Explanation and Analysis

The revolutionary faction holds a meeting at Virginsky's house. About 10 or 15 people arrive at the meeting. Of those 10 or 15 people, five belong to a "group of five," which, in theory, acts as the extremist splinter cell of the revolutionary faction. Those five people are Liputin, Virginsky, Shigalyov, Lyamshin, and a man named Tolkachenko. The description of the role of groups of five, and the interconnected network of groups to which this group of five supposedly belongs, points to the role that herd mentality plays in the novel. Though the group of five in the provincial town functions essentially in isolation, each member is convinced that they are part of a much larger group. For that larger group to achieve its goals, each of the smaller groups must act in concert.

In that way, the group of five in the provincial town believes that they are compelled to undertake actions, even ones they might not personally agree with, to support the larger mission of the international network of groups of five. By doing that, each member of the group of five is encouraged to sacrifice his personal conscience to avoid upsetting not just the immediate group of five but also the network of groups to which his group belongs. Notably, it's not clear whether the larger, interconnected network of other groups of five actually exists. With that in mind, the novel shows that just the threat of disapproval from a group, even if that group might be fictitious, can be enough to compel compliance.

Part 2, Chapter 7, Section 2 Quotes

☞ ‘People cry: “A hundred million heads”. That’s perhaps just a metaphor, but why be afraid of them, if despotism, with its slow paper daydreams, in a hundred years or so will consume not a hundred but five hundred million heads? [...] therefore I respectfully ask this worthy company not to vote, but to declare, directly and simply, what makes you happier: a tortoise-like procession in the swamp, or crossing the swamp under full sail?’

‘I’m absolutely for full sail!’ the high-school student cried enthusiastically.

‘So am I,’ replied Lyamshin.

[...]

‘I must admit that I’m more for a humane solution,’ said the major, ‘but since everyone is for yours, then I’ll go along with the rest.’

Related Characters: Pyotr, Pyotr, Lyamshin, Lyamshin (speaker), Liputin, Liputin, Virginsky, Virginsky, Shigalyov, Shigalyov, Lyamshin, Lyamshin

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 452-453

Explanation and Analysis

During the meeting of the revolutionary faction, Pyotr brings up a rallying cry in the movement that for the revolution to be successful, everyone must be prepared to take “a hundred million heads,” or to kill a hundred million people. Pyotr at first says the idea may be metaphorical, but he then exhorts each member of the group to declare that they are “all-in,” implicitly asking whether they, if needed, would go along with a plan to kill a hundred million people. That idea puts the ideological extremism of the revolutionary faction front and center. In Pyotr’s view, no cost of human life is too high to pay for them to try and achieve their revolutionary goals.

Several people respond enthusiastically, while a man known as the major shows the impact of herd mentality on the group. He perfectly summarizes the impact of that mentality by saying that while he personally is more in favor of a humane solution that wouldn’t involve murdering a hundred million people, he’s willing to sacrifice his own conscience to go along with the group.

Part 2, Chapter 8, Section 1 Quotes

☞ ‘But one or two generations of debauchery are essential now — unprecedented, utterly vile debauchery, when people turn into nasty, cowardly, cruel, self-centred scum — that’s what we need! And with “a little fresh blood” besides, so that they can get used to it. Why are you laughing? I’m not contradicting myself. I’m only contradicting philanthropists and Shigalyovism, but not myself. I’m a scoundrel, and not a socialist.’

[...]

‘So you’re not really a socialist, but some sort of political... self-seeker.’

‘A scoundrel, a scoundrel [...] the whole carnival sideshow will collapse, and then we’ll think about how to put up a structure of stone. For the first time! We shall do the building, we, we alone!’

Related Characters: Pyotr, Pyotr, Nikolay, Nikolay (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 466-468

Explanation and Analysis

After the meeting of the revolutionary faction, Pyotr discloses his true aims to Nikolay. In that conversation, Pyotr confesses that he doesn’t truly believe in the socialist ideas he espouses. Instead, he is trying to harness that ideology, and the movement supporting it, to destabilize society and seize control once society has been wrecked. Out of that wreckage, Pyotr intends to build his own political apparatus. In that system, Pyotr would ostensibly hold absolute power while Nikolay would act as a charismatic figurehead.

Nikolay succinctly assesses Pyotr’s true nature when he says that Pyotr, instead of being a socialist, is actually a “political self-seeker.” That comment shows that Pyotr, who seems to be the leader of a revolutionary faction and the most radical member in its ranks, is manipulating other people to try and gain and hoard power for himself. In that sense, the novel uses Pyotr to show how people’s potentially legitimate political grievances—like those coming from socialism’s genuine adherents—can be hijacked by bad actors who are only involved in politics for their own gain. And those bad actors then use the rhetoric of the “common good” to mask their self-interested motives.

Part 3, Chapter 2, Section 4 Quotes

☝☝ What's he doing there?

'He's putting out the fire, Your Excellency.'

'That's impossible. The fire is in people's minds, and not on the roofs of houses. Pull him down and leave everything!'

Related Characters: Andrey, Andrey (speaker), Pyotr, Pyotr, Marya, Marya, Lebyadkin, Lebyadkin

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 571

Explanation and Analysis

After people at the gala shout that there's a fire across the river, Andrey travels to the fire and tries to help put it out. While there, he sees Pyotr and orders those who work for him to seize Pyotr. The people who work for him say that Pyotr is only helping to put the fire out. The fact that Pyotr—the mastermind behind the arson and the murder of Lebyadkin and Marya—can travel to the scene of the crime and avoid any suspicion other than Andrey's shows just how successful Pyotr's manipulations have been. He has carried out a major strike in his attempt to undermine the established order, committing several serious crimes in the process, all while remaining undetected.

The conversation also shows that Andrey is becoming increasingly mentally unstable and, as a result, is losing the confidence of people in town, who view his outburst against Pyotr as evidence of mental decline. That's especially notable considering that Andrey is correct in denouncing Pyotr and saying that he is responsible for the arson. Andrey takes it one step further by saying that Pyotr has set people's minds on fire, showing that he understands that Pyotr has been surreptitiously leading a revolutionary faction that has successfully introduced an atmosphere of hysteria into the town. He suggests that the fire in people's minds will be much harder to put out than a physical fire, and the novel ultimately shows that he's correct in this assessment.

☝☝ A curious fact had come to light: on the very outskirts of the quarter, on a piece of empty ground, beyond the vegetable gardens, no less than fifty paces from the other buildings, stood a small wooden house that had just been built, and this isolated house had caught fire almost before all the others, at the very beginning of the conflagration. [...] As it turned out, the house had caught fire on its own and independently, and therefore suspiciously. But the main thing was that it had not actually burned down, and inside it, towards dawn, surprising things were discovered [...] there were tenants in the house — a captain who was well known in the town, his sister and an aged servant of theirs; and these tenants — the captain, his sister and the servant — all three of them had had their throats cut during the night, and had evidently been robbed.

Related Characters: Pyotr, Pyotr, Nikolay, Nikolay, Marya, Marya, Lebyadkin, Lebyadkin, Fedka, Fedka

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 572

Explanation and Analysis

While putting out the fire, people in town discover that the house where Lebyadkin and Marya ("the captain" and "his sister") had been staying was also set on fire. Inside, they find the brutalized bodies of Marya, Lebyadkin, and a servant. This quote describes the culmination of one of the major storylines in the novel, namely Pyotr's attempts to get Nikolay to pay Fedka to murder Marya. Pyotr initially tried to get Nikolay to go along with that scheme so that he would have evidence of Nikolay committing a crime that he could then use to blackmail and control Nikolay.

The description of the discovery of the house and the bodies suggests that when Fedka carried out the murders, he had hoped that the fire would char the bodies to the point where no one would be able to tell that they were murdered. In that way, it seems that Pyotr still wanted Marya murdered in secret so that he could threaten Nikolay with that information, whether Nikolay was directly involved in the murder or not. Pyotr's willingness to order those people to be killed for no reason other than to control Nikolay shows again his extremism and how his disavowal of morality leads him to commit heinous and unconscionable acts.

Part 3, Chapter 3, Section 3 Quotes

☝☝ Suddenly someone shouted: 'It's Stavrogin's woman!' Then: 'It's not enough for them to commit murder, they have to come and look!' Suddenly I saw someone's hand raised above her head from behind, and then it came down; Liza fell. Mavriky Nikolayevich let out a dreadful cry and rushed to help her, hitting with all his strength a man who was trying to block his way. But at that very instant the tradesman grabbed him from behind with both hands. For some time it was impossible to make anything out in the scuffle that ensued. Liza seemed to get up, but fell again from another blow.

[...]

As an eyewitness, albeit a distant one, I had to give evidence at the inquest: I stated that everything had happened quite accidentally, the work of people who, though perhaps incited, were scarcely aware of what they were doing as they were drunk and disorderly. I hold this opinion even now.

Related Characters: Anton (speaker), Nikolay, Marya, Liza, Lebyadkin, Fedka, Mavriky

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 597-598

Explanation and Analysis

After Liza hears Nikolay's account of his involvement in Marya's murder, she goes with Mavriky to see the bodies of the people who have been killed. The mob's reaction to Marya shows that Pyotr's efforts to sow distrust and destabilize the established order are beginning to have the desired effect in town. In this case, people in the mob are moved to violently attack Liza due to rumors that she was involved in Marya's murder. Those rumors aren't verified at this point and later turn out to be false, but that doesn't stop people from acting on them as if they were true. That shows how Pyotr's efforts to throw the provincial town into chaos by challenging established norms of propriety and morality have begun to work, as the town has descended into a hysterical kind of chaos that results in Liza's death. Anton points to that idea when he says that the people who kill Marya are "perhaps incited," meaning that Pyotr's efforts perhaps brought them to the point where they were ready to commit murder.

Liza's death also shows the dangers of herd mentality. Anton attests that he's convinced that people, when killing Marya, acted as if completely unaware of what they were doing. That underlines the idea that the novel proposes that groups have a tendency to drive people to sacrifice their individual morality to go along with the group and stay in a group's good graces.

Part 3, Chapter 5, Section 5 Quotes

☝☝ 'There are seconds — they come only five or six at a time — when you suddenly feel the presence of an eternal harmony that has been fully attained. This is not something earthly. I'm not saying that it's heavenly, but that man in his earthly form cannot endure it. He must change physically or else die. It is a clear and unambiguous feeling. It's as if you suddenly have a sense of nature as a whole, and you suddenly say: yes, this is true. God, when he was creating the world, said at the end of each day of creation: "Yes, this is true, this is good." This... this is not deep emotion, but is simply joy. [...] If it lasts longer than five seconds, your soul can't endure it and must disappear. In these five seconds I live an entire lifetime, and for them I will give my entire life, because it's worth it.'

Related Characters: Aleksey (speaker), Nikolay, Shatov, Marie, Arina

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 653

Explanation and Analysis

While Shatov's wife is in labor, the midwife Arina asks Shatov to fetch some necessary supplies. Shatov goes to Aleksey's house to look for the supplies. Aleksey then talks to Shatov about the sense of eternal harmony that he often experiences. Aleksey's description of that harmony points to his underlying faith in God. He describes those sensations as akin to a direct experience of the kind of joy that God felt upon creating the world, suggesting that, in his view, he is communing with a trace of God that permeates eternally through God's creation. Notably, Aleksey says that he would give his entire life for five seconds of that experience of eternal harmony.

That statement adds nuance to Aleksey's decision to take his own life. By taking his own life, he hopes that he will prove that humanity can become God. However, when push comes to shove, as Aleksey readies himself to take his own life, he struggles to go through with the act. This passage provides insight as to why. In particular, with this passage in mind, Aleksey's hesitation when he comes face to face with suicide can be interpreted as his awareness of the flaws of his philosophy. He seems to recognize, here in this passage, that humanity and God are fundamentally separate, and a person can only come into contact with God, or aspects of God's eternal harmony, for brief instances. If a person achieved union with God for longer, per his theory, that person would be destroyed. With that in mind, this passage shows the hubris of Aleksey's idea that he can become God, similar to how the novel points out Nikolay's hubris in

thinking that he is beyond good and evil.

their individual morality and embrace extremism.

Part 3, Chapter 6, Section 1 Quotes

“Virginsky suddenly flared up, ‘I protest... I protest as vigorously as I can... I want... This is what I want: when he gets here, I want all of us to come out and ask him. If it’s true, then we accept his repentance, and if he gives his word of honour, then we let him go. In any case, we’ll have a trial; we’ll have a trial; we’ll act only after a trial. And not us hiding, and then falling upon him.’

‘To put the common cause at risk because of someone’s word of honour is the height of stupidity!’

Related Characters: Pyotr, Pyotr, Virginsky, Virginsky (speaker), Shatov, Shatov

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 665

Explanation and Analysis

As the revolutionary faction prepares to murder Shatov, Virginsky protests because he has been convinced that Shatov, as a new father, no longer poses a threat to the group. He suggests that the group should utilize some form of justice, through a trial, to decide Shatov’s fate. Virginsky’s idea allows for the possibility that Shatov will walk free regardless of whether he once planned to inform on the group or not. In that way, Virginsky advocates for a kind of morality that makes room for mercy, which Pyotr utterly lacks.

Pyotr’s response underlines his lack of morality and mercy as well as his extremist ideology. His statement that one person’s honor means nothing when compared to the common cause is especially telling. Through that statement, Pyotr reiterates his idea that the common cause of the revolutionary faction is worth more than human life, especially when a human life in question opposes him. Moreover, he’s not concerned with whether Shatov is guilty or not. Instead, Pyotr wants to kill Shatov so he will be able to further manipulate the people who take part in the murder. In Pyotr’s view, Shatov’s innocence or guilt is irrelevant, which again makes it clear how extremist Pyotr’s actions are.

Notably, while Virginsky argues against the murder, he doesn’t leave or warn Shatov. With that in mind, the quote shows how Pyotr wields ideological purity as a way to compel members of the revolutionary faction to sacrifice

“‘Having given the matter a great deal of thought, I have decided that the proposed murder is not only a waste of valuable time, which could be used in a more essential and relevant way, but above and beyond that, it represents the sort of pernicious deviation from the normal path that has always done the utmost harm to the cause and has sidetracked its successes for decades, by subordinating itself to the influence of frivolous and primarily political people, instead of pure socialists.’

Related Characters: Shigalyov, Shigalyov (speaker), Pyotr, Pyotr, Shatov, Shatov

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 666

Explanation and Analysis

Just before Pyotr and other members of the revolutionary faction murder Shatov, Shigalyov decides that he cannot take part in the murder and explains why he’s reached that conclusion. Shigalyov’s assessment of the situation shines a light on the tactics that Pyotr has used throughout the novel to hijack socialist politics to promote his own self-serving agenda. Shigalyov says that far from being an isolated incident, Pyotr’s attempt to hijack socialism for his own aims is an all too common occurrence in the socialist movement, which has set the movement back immeasurably.



Shigalyov’s understanding of the situation points to the ways that political figures like Pyotr can co-opt the legitimate grievances of people and then exploit those people to suit their own ends. Pyotr uses the rhetoric of socialism to mask his fundamentally self-serving goals. As Shigalyov points out, Pyotr is a “frivolous and primarily political” person who does not actually believe in the socialist policies he claims to support. That is evident in Pyotr’s decision to murder Shatov as well. Pyotr has repeatedly justified the murder of Shatov by saying that it is necessary to advance the goals of the common good, when really he wants the group to murder Shatov so he can have more control over them. Shigalyov also notably denounces Pyotr’s extremism by saying extremist approaches deviate from the “normal path” and significantly harm the socialist movement. In that way, the passage suggests that the novel is not necessarily criticizing all socialists or socialism as an idea. Instead, the novel criticizes the way that self-interested politicians from many movements can exploit people and movements for their own aims.

Part 3, Chapter 6, Section 2 Quotes

☞ ‘For me there is no higher idea than the nonexistence of God. Human history is behind me. Man has done nothing but invent God in order to live without killing himself; that’s the essence of world history to this point. I am the only one in world history who hasn’t felt like inventing God for the first time. Let people find that out once and for all.’

‘He won’t shoot himself,’ an alarmed Pyotr Stepanovich was thinking.

Related Characters: Pyotr, Pyotr, Aleksey, Aleksey (speaker), Nikolay, Nikolay, Shatov, Shatov

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 684

Explanation and Analysis


After Pyotr and the revolutionary faction kill Shatov, Pyotr visits Aleksey to ensure that before Aleksey takes his own life, he will write a suicide note claiming responsibility for murdering Shatov and distributing revolutionary manifestos throughout the provincial town. In this quote, Aleksey succinctly describes his philosophy concerning God and how it relates to his decision to take his own life. In essence, Aleksey argues that humans invented God to make meaning in life and ease the pain and suffering that come with a fundamentally meaningless existence. Aleksey aims to show that he does not need the illusory comfort offered by the concept of God. Instead, he intends to prove that God is an invented human concept by taking his life and showing that he is not afraid of death in the process.


Immediately after Aleksey offers that explanation, Pyotr senses that Aleksey won’t take his own life. Pyotr seems to think that Aleksey “doth protest too much” in the sense that Aleksey talks about his philosophy so much because he cannot bring himself to carry it out. That proves to be true, as Aleksey later struggles to put his plan into action. Aleksey’s hesitation when it comes time to take his own life contradicts his philosophy by showing that he is still afraid of death. He is therefore, in his own terms, not above the need for God. That puts Aleksey’s failure to take his own life without fear in conversation with Nikolay’s failed attempts to live beyond morality. In essence, the novel argues that both Nikolay and Aleksey are fundamentally misguided in their philosophies, and the failures of both of those philosophies provide evidence of God’s existence.

Part 3, Chapter 7, Section 2 Quotes

☞ ‘A great many ideas are coming to me now: you see, it’s just like our Russia. These demons who come out of the sick man and enter the swine — these are all the sores, all the contagions, all the uncleanness, all the demons, large and small, who have accumulated in our great and beloved sick man, our Russia, over the course of centuries, centuries! [...] and I perhaps am the first, standing at the very head; and we shall throw ourselves, the madmen and the possessed, from a rock into the sea and we shall all drown, and that’s no more than we deserve, because that’s precisely what we’re fit for. But the sick man will be healed and “will sit at the feet of Jesus.”’

Related Characters: Stepan (speaker), Pyotr, Nikolay, Sofya

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 724

Explanation and Analysis

As Stepan lies on his deathbed, he asks Sofya to read him the bible passage about a man being exorcised of demons. After the exorcism, the demons enter a herd of swine. The swine then stampede into a nearby lake and drown, while the man throws himself at the feet of Christ. After Stepan listens to the passage, he compares the passage to what is happening in Russia. He argues that Russia has been infected by the “demons” of nihilism and atheism, which have found hosts in figures like Pyotr and his followers.



Notably, Stepan doesn’t exclude himself from the list of those afflicted by demons, showing that he recognizes the role he played, as a symbol of the 1840s liberal movement, in contributing to the rise of an atheistic nihilist movement in the 1870s, which is represented by Pyotr and his followers. In Stepan’s telling, Russia must be exorcised of those harmful “demons.” Only then will the “sick” Russia be healed. At that point, Russia will throw itself at the feet of Christ, symbolizing, in Stepan’s view, a return in Russia’s future to the guidance of Christianity.

Part 3, Chapter 8, Section 1 Quotes

☛☛ To the question of why so many murders, scandals and vile acts had been committed, [Lyamshin] answered with feverish haste that it was for the purpose of ‘systematically shaking the foundations, systematically undermining society and all principles; for the purpose of demoralizing everyone and throwing everything into chaos, and then, once society had begun to totter as a result — and was sick and weakened, cynical and devoid of beliefs, yet still yearning for some guiding idea and self-preservation — they would suddenly take it into their hands, raising the banner of rebellion and relying on a complete network of groups of five, which would all be active at the same time, recruiting and making practical efforts to search out all the means and all the weak spots that could be exploited’.

Related Characters: Lyamshin, Lyamshin (speaker), Stepan, Stepan, Pyotr, Pyotr, Shatov, Shatov

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 740

Explanation and Analysis

After Pyotr and the revolutionary faction murder Shatov, Pyotr leaves town. In the wake of Shatov’s death, several of the people who took part in murdering him grapple with their consciences. That includes Lyamshin, who is the first to confess to the murder and then tells authorities about the revolutionary faction’s role in the chaos that overtook the

town. Lyamshin’s explanation of the guiding idea behind that rise in chaos provides the most detailed and thorough explanation of the revolutionary faction’s motives. (Later, the novel clarifies that when describing those motives, Lyamshin is quoting from a document of the revolutionary faction’s plans in Pyotr’s handwriting.)

Lyamshin’s explanation shows that the revolutionary faction led by Pyotr planned to commit both large and small acts—ranging from the pranks undertaken at the gala to arson and murder—to try and throw society into chaos. Out of that chaos, the faction aimed to rise as a kind of guiding beacon to bring people into a new society founded upon the principles of socialism. Lyamshin’s explanation shows that challenging well-established norms of morality and propriety was central to the revolutionary faction’s aims.

Notably, Lyamshin also uses language similar to the language Stepan uses when describing how the influence of socialism, atheism, and nihilism have impacted Russia. In particular, both Stepan and Lyamshin describe Russia as becoming “sick.” In Stepan’s telling, though, Russia must expel its demons and find healing through Christ. In contrast, in Lyamshin’s view, the revolutionary faction aimed to induce sickness and then the revolutionaries would help the country heal. In the end, though, the revolutionary faction’s plans hit a snag when people like Lyamshin begin to confess to their crimes. That confession, and the defection of people like Lyamshin from the revolutionary faction, reveal the novel’s hope that perhaps Russia will expel the sickening forces from itself before it is utterly destabilized and overcome by them.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 1

Stepan arrives in a provincial town outside of Petersburg in the 1840s. He is initially a university lecturer but ends up only giving a few presentations. Those presentations are devoted to challenging the Slavophiles of the time. Stepan believes his enemies prevent him from delivering more lectures, and he considers himself a political dissident who has been exiled from Moscow. Because of that, Stepan is also convinced that the town's governors keep a watchful eye on him. In reality, Stepan's vision of himself as a censored and surveilled political ideologue stems more from his ego than anything else. Almost no one knows who he is, and the ones who do aren't concerned with what he does, politically or otherwise.

Before Stepan came to the provincial town, he wrote a long, allegorical poem while living in Berlin. That poem was later seized by the government in Moscow around the same time that an anti-government organization was raided in Petersburg. Anton (the novel's narrator) has a copy of the poem at hand with a personal inscription from Stepan. Anton has a hard time understanding the allegory of the poem, but he thinks the poetry has merit. He encourages Stepan to publish it and says that surely it won't be censored, as the poem is clearly innocuous and wouldn't be perceived as threatening to the government.

Stepan is taken aback by the idea that the poem is unthreatening and acts with bitterness toward Anton for a month. Around the same time, the poem is published abroad in a revolutionary anthology. Stepan hadn't known it would be published, and he is now frightened. He goes to see the governor and assures him that he (Stepan) means no offense to the government. Stepan also writes a letter to Petersburg, reiterating that he means no harm, but he never sends the letter because he's not sure to whom to address it. Every day, Stepan awaits some censure of himself or his work via telegram, but the telegram never arrives. Secretly, Anton knows that Stepan is proud to have been included in the revolutionary anthology. He thinks that Stepan virtually sleeps with the book in hand.

Stepan is portrayed as vain and self-important to the point that it clouds his perception of reality. It's worth noting that Stepan considers it appealing to be at odds with the established political order, as it burnishes his reputation as a renegade. In reality, though, he doesn't seem to actually do or say anything that might earn governmental scrutiny, suggesting that whatever critiques of the government Stepan makes are limited to intellectual exercises that won't lead to action.



Stepan's poem suggests that he still sees himself as intellectually engaged and that, on some level, he wants recognition for his work. Stepan apparently considers that work important and noteworthy enough that he gives it as a gift to his friend Anton. Anton's reaction to the work and his inability to grasp its themes suggests that Stepan, despite his ego, may simply not be an especially talented writer—he seemingly isn't skilled at getting his point across.



This passage further portrays Stepan's personality. He desperately wants to be seen as someone at the political vanguard who is respected by revolutionaries. At the same time, though, he is deathly afraid of the potential consequences of being associated with revolutionary movements. Notably, much of the drama appears to be in Stepan's head. The revolutionaries he wants to respect him seem to be only dimly aware of him (considering that he didn't know that they would print his poem), and the authorities take no notice of him whatsoever. To wit, Stepan readies a letter to defend himself to the authorities, but that letter ultimately proves pointless because he has no reason to send it and no one to send it to.



PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 2

The real reason Stepan stopped his career as a lecturer was due to a job offer from his friend, Varvara. The two first met in Berlin, where Varvara proposed that Stepan become the exclusive tutor of her only child, Nikolay. Stepan initially declined. He was married at the time and had a son of his own. His wife died after five years of marriage, and the son was raised in Russia by his wife's relatives. Stepan remarried a German woman, but she died within a year. After that, Stepan went to live at a property his first wife had owned. By coincidence, that property was right next to Varvara's estate, named Skvoeshniki. Stepan struggled as a lecturer and believed he was being persecuted. As a result, he eventually accepted Varvara's offer to become her son's tutor.

This prosaic explanation of Stepan's career path differs from the dramatic version of persecution from an authoritative government that Stepan chooses to believe. This passage also introduces Varvara, one of Stepan's closest friends and confidants. Notably, Varvara is wealthy enough that she has an estate and can privately employ people like Stepan. That puts Stepan's view of himself further in question. While Stepan likes to think of himself as sympathetic to revolutionary ideas, he is also happy to cozy up to people like Varvara who have benefited from the established order. By extension, Stepan then clearly also benefits from that status quo (which revolutionaries aim to overthrow) when he accepts Varvara's job offer.



PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 3

Stepan and Varvara grow close as friends, though they're often at each other's throats. Stepan is moved on several occasions to write letters to Varvara detailing his grievances. He writes those letters even when he and Varvara are living under the same roof. The difference between Stepan and Varvara, Anton says, is that Varvara never would have written those kinds of letters. It's true that she often seems to detest Stepan, but really, she loves him. She fiercely defends him if anyone impugns his character. She does require a lot from Stepan as a result, though, but she is also very forgiving.

Again, Stepan is portrayed as moody and dramatic, as his relationship with Varvara seems to be marked by outbursts of stress and a desire to defend or explain himself. Varvara responds to the conflicts in their relationship through an apparently stoic kind of silence, while Stepan struggles to make himself known and heard every time the two are at odds.



PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 4

Anton says that he will tell two stories to illustrate how forgiving Varvara can be. At one point, rumors swirled about the "emancipation of the peasants" (a reform bill passed in 1861 to eliminate serfdom in Russia). A baron visited Varvara's house. Varvara was eager to entertain the lord, considering that her social position had fallen slightly after her husband's death. She invited Stepan to help her entertain the lord. During that visit, the lord confirmed the rumors about the prospective emancipation of the peasants. Stepan cried, "Hurrah!" It's possible that he even planned the outburst. Varvara was mortified. After the lord left, she told Stepan that she would never forgive him. The next day, she treated him as if nothing had happened. That was the second time Varvara told Stepan she would never forgive him.

Stepan's cry of "hurrah" doesn't quite come off as he had planned. It's possible that the moment is simply socially awkward, and Varvara holds it against Stepan because she values good manners and social etiquette. The baron is also from the noble class. He would have held serfs and benefitted from the previously established order prior to the great reform of the 1860s. In that sense, Stepan's cry of "hurrah" can be interpreted as an attempt to express his opposition to the baron and the noble class in general. With that in mind, the cry of "hurrah" also shows that Stepan, while he supports progressive causes, doesn't risk much more than expressing a private opinion that may not be met with approval by all present.



The first time Varvara told Stepan she would never forgive him came near 1855, after Varvara's husband died. Stepan was constantly at Varvara's side while she grieved. At some point, Stepan became convinced that Varvara would be expecting a marriage proposal from him once her period of mourning for her husband expired. Stepan began to act differently around Varvara, and Varvara gradually picked up on why his behavior had changed. One day, after they had one of their long conversations and parted amicably, Varvara went to find Stepan and said to him, "I shall never forgive you for that!" Stepan was so petrified he didn't see Varvara leave. He couldn't believe what had happened and spent years waiting for Varvara to follow up on what she said, which she never did.

This passage further underlines the idea that there is a romantic connection between Varvara and Stepan. While Anton (the novel's narrator) has previously disclosed that Varvara and Stepan love each other in one way or another, this passage makes it clear that, for Stepan at least, marriage at one point seemed imminent. Varvara seems to have taken offense to Stepan's overfamiliarity. The two didn't end up getting married, which raises the question of what their relationship has looked like since then and what has happened to the romantic connection the two seem to have shared.



PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 5

Varvara feels so much of a sense of ownership over Stepan that she devises a set of clothes for him to wear, which she bases on a portrait of a poet from the 1830s. During the first half of Stepan's years with Varvara, he believes that one day he'll complete a great work. The only issue is that when he sits down to work, all the thoughts leave his mind. After those first few years, Stepan seems to forget about the project altogether. Stepan also feels like he's been forgotten by the world.

Again, this passage delves into the differences between how Stepan sees himself and who he actually is. He believes that he'll write a great work despite his inability to complete any work, just as he thinks of himself as a persecuted intellectual despite no evidence of persecution. Stepan's image of himself can then be understood as his attempts to overcompensate and shield himself from his latent awareness that he has, in essence, been unable to succeed in all that he has set out to do.



There is something in the air at that time, which suggests a historical split with the past might be imminent. Stepan, though, is more concerned with his own obsolescence than with the shift in history. However, out of nowhere, Stepan's name begins appearing in print, first in foreign journals, where he is called an exiled martyr. His name then appears in a Petersburg journal, where he is said to be an intellectual star. Stepan becomes interested in being involved in whatever historical change might be afoot. Varvara is interested as well, and the two travel to Petersburg together to see if they can find out what is going on. Varvara also wants to make the trip to see her son, who is studying in Petersburg.

This passage makes it clear that Stepan is first and foremost motivated by his own ego. He wants to be associated with progressive politics and historic change not because he thinks that it would be beneficial to others but because he thinks it would make him appear more important. He sees the opportunity to join those political causes as a chance to escape the obscurity that he has fallen into. In other words, he aims to exploit those political movements for his own gain.



PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 6

Varvara and Stepan spend almost an entire winter in Petersburg. Varvara attempts to insert herself into the group of those advocating the "new ideas." Before long, she begins holding well-attended soirees at her house. Writers, intellectuals, and other advocates for this new cause all come to those meetings. Some of the people who attend the parties are scoundrels, though some are honestly interested in the shift in politics. Stepan has success, too. He's invited to speak by several groups and ingratiates himself with the highest circle of those who are advocating for the "new ideas."

This passage points out the distinction between people who are interested in progressive political change (or the "new ideas") for its own sake and those who are interested in political change for how the political movement might benefit them. The second group consists of the "scoundrels" referred to in the passage. The novel will explore in more detail later what can happen when "scoundrels" and earnest changemakers intermingle.



Varvara announces that she intends to begin a magazine. More people come to her parties, but Varvara is then accused of being a capitalist who exploits laborers. At that same time, a general who has long been friends with Varvara gets into a fight with an agitator advocating for the “new ideas” at one of Varvara’s parties. The incident is reported in the press. A petition circulates urging people to take a stand against Varvara for not banishing the general from her house. Stepan faces difficulties, too. He gives a presentation in which he argues in favor of the importance of art and claims that art is more important than material concerns. The audience hisses and boos Stepan off the stage, and Stepan breaks into tears as they watch.

Five men then approach Varvara at home. They tell her she should renounce control of the magazine while still providing its funding. She should hand control of the magazine over to them, and they’ll take over running it as a cooperative association. They also tell Varvara that she should leave Petersburg and bring Stepan with her, as he has, in their words, “grown old.” In exchange, they’ll send her a sixth of the magazine’s profits annually. Stepan and Varvara then leave Petersburg and return to the provincial town together.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 7

After Varvara and Stepan return from Petersburg, Varvara needs a break from Stepan, so she sends him abroad to Berlin. Stepan looks forward to the trip at first, but when he writes from Berlin, he says that he misses the people back home, and he misses his two late wives. He also misses his son, he writes. Stepan has only seen his son twice in his life, once when his son was born and another time in Petersburg. His son is being raised by Stepan’s wife’s sisters. In the second letter Stepan writes from Berlin, he says that he’s working 12 hours a day and enjoying evenings, when he stays up and talks with young people all night.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 8

After Stepan returns to the provincial town from Berlin, there’s a period of calm that lasts for nine years. During that time, a group of friends forms around Stepan. That group includes Liputin, Shatov, Virginsky, and Anton. Liputin is the senior member of the group. He’s a liberal, and rumors say he’s an atheist. He’s not of a high rank, but Stepan and his friends enjoy Liputin’s wit and inquisitiveness. Shatov is the son of Varvara’s valet. Varvara took Shatov and his sister, Darya, under her care after their father died.

Those who advocate for progressive, socialistic policies turn against Varvara and Stepan, showing that, at least from the progressives’ perspectives, Varvara and Stepan push ideas that will uphold established political systems. Stepan’s assertion about the importance of art over material concerns points to the novel’s contention that socialism elevates science and reason above all other matters, including art and spirituality. The novel will later explore the impacts of socialism’s apparent disavowal of art and spirituality in more depth.



This passage satirizes the socialistic movement in Russia at the time. While the movement wants to distance itself from people like Varvara and Stepan, whose ideas people in the movement find outdated, that movement is still plenty willing to accept Varvara’s money with no apparent qualms about where that money came from or what accepting it might mean.



This passage introduces Stepan’s son (Pyotr), albeit from a distance. Notably, Stepan has taken no part in raising his son, letting his wife’s sisters look after raising him and securing an education for him. This passage also reinforces Stepan’s fickle personality, as he seems disconsolate in his first letter, but by the time he writes a second letter, he appears to be feeling completely different.



Despite his occasional histrionics, Stepan appears to live a quiet life in a provincial Russian town surrounded by a group of friends. Notably, Stepan’s friends seem to be at the political vanguard, including Liputin who gains a reputation in town for being an atheist, which suggests that Liputin, like Stepan, has an affinity for the “new ideas” circulating in Russia at the time.



Varvara adores Darya but doesn't like Shatov. Varvara paid for Shatov to go to university, but Shatov was expelled. After he was expelled, Shatov became a tutor to a wealthy family traveling abroad. The family fired their governess for "freethinking," and Shatov went with her. Shatov and the governess were married, but they parted ways after only three weeks. Shatov then spent an unknown amount of time traveling in poverty through Europe. He recently returned to the provincial town, where he now lives alone. He is almost always disheveled. He embraced atheism and socialism while in college but now he has firmly swung in the opposite direction and embraces Christianity.

One of the other members of Stepan's group of friends is Virginsky. He is extremely quiet. He once had a run-in with a man named Lebyadkin. Virginsky's wife told him that she was leaving him, and she took up with Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin said he was a staff captain on a ship, which turned out not to be true. Eventually, Lebyadkin even moved into Virginsky's house. At first, Virginsky said he was not bothered by what was happening. But one day, while Virginsky, his wife, and Lebyadkin were on a picnic, Virginsky seized Lebyadkin by the hair and dragged him across the ground. Lebyadkin disappeared from town after that, but he recently returned.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 9

New rumors say that the provincial town is a hotbed of liberalism and atheism. Anton thinks those rumors are overblown. In reality, people like Stepan and his friends gather and discuss liberal ideas, but they do so in the spirit of debate. They have no expectation that any action will follow. They debate the fate of the peasants and serfs in Russia and the burgeoning idea of "public opinion." In one of those discussions, Stepan says that he believes in God, though he's not a Christian. Instead, he's a pagan like Goethe or the ancient Greeks. Shatov says that "anyone without a people has no God" and explains that he means that without a national or collective identity, people will lose faith in those who came before, which will lead them to atheism or indifference.

Shatov's introduction traces his path from promoting socialism and atheism to his newfound embrace of Christianity. Through that introduction, the novel introduces some of its themes and also shows how those ideas relate to one another. In particular, atheism and socialism are presented together, suggesting that, in the novel's view, the two go hand in hand. Those ideas are then set in opposition to Christianity, showing that the novel will explore the conflict between the "new ideas" of atheism and socialism versus Christianity.



This passage introduces both Virginsky and Lebyadkin. Virginsky's defining trait is his quietness, and it seems to take a long time before he resorts to action to solve his problems, as he lets Lebyadkin move into his house and continues to live there before he is driven to confront his rival. Lebyadkin, on the other hand, seems to be the kind of person who is driven by action and doesn't seem to put much consideration into propriety or how his actions impact other people.



Shatov supports a view of Christianity that is explicitly tied to national identity. In Shatov's view, collective faith leads to a collective idea of morality. With that in mind, according to Shatov, atheism is tantamount to a rejection of morality. The novel will later explore the idea of whether atheism is compatible with morality in greater depth. Stepan's assertion that he's a pagan makes it clear that he is also willing to eschew the norms of Christianity, which he was brought up to believe in.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 1

There's one person that Varvara cares about as much as she cares about Stepan. It's her only son, Nikolay. When Nikolay was a child, Stepan was in charge of his education. The two formed a close bond. Often, Stepan would wake the 11- or 12-year-old Nikolay in the middle of the night and cry in his arms. Stepan didn't realize how inappropriate his behavior was. But Stepan's late-night soliloquies awakened in Nikolay a kind of righteous, unquenchable anger. Nikolay and Stepan were separated when Nikolay went to study at the lyceum in Petersburg when he was 16.

For the first two years when Nikolay was at the lyceum, he came home for vacations. After those two years, he stopped coming home. At Varvara's request, he joined the military after completing his studies. Strange rumors found their way back to Skvoreshniki during that time. Some said that Nikolay trampled a man with his horse. Others said he humiliated a woman with whom he had an affair and had become a bully to others. Varvara became anxious upon hearing the rumors, and Stepan tried to comfort her. Nikolay returns home when he is 25. His appearance is striking. After hearing the rumors, Anton expected Nikolay to be unkempt and to reek of vodka. Instead, Nikolay is the perfect image of a gentleman. Women in town are smitten with him, and Varvara is rejuvenated by his presence. At the same time, there seems to be something unsettling about Nikolay.

The novel describes the connection between Nikolay and Stepan in this passage. Notably, the novel states that Stepan is responsible for awakening a kind of righteous anger and intensity in Nikolay. That connection between Stepan and Nikolay, and particularly the idea that Stepan played a pivotal role in Nikolay's formation, is something the novel will go on to explore in depth.



The rumors about Nikolay that find their way back to Varvara and the small provincial town suggest that Nikolay is willing and capable of mistreating others to the point of committing murder. As the previous passage established, Stepan played a pivotal role in Nikolay's education and formation as a person. With that in mind, the novel suggests that Nikolay's lack of morality and licentiousness is in some ways directly related to Stepan and his outlook on the world. The fact that Nikolay's appearance doesn't square with the stories told suggests that appearances can be deceiving and that there is more to Nikolay than meets the eye.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 2

Not long after Nikolay arrives, he commits two or three heinous offenses without any apparent provocation. Those offenses cause almost the entire town to despise him. First, at a club that caters to the wealthy men of the town, a man utters his catchphrase, in which he says that he won't be pulled by the nose. For no reason and with no warning, Nikolay approaches the man and pulls him two or three feet by the nose. Nikolay then lets out a maniacal laugh. The group surrounding the man is outraged. They ask Nikolay what has gotten into him. Nikolay seems unfazed. He offers the man a perfunctory apology, which only outrages the men around him more. The men petition the governor to have the authorities look into the matter, but the governor is out of town.

Nikolay shows that he does not feel beholden to norms of polite society. Instead, he wantonly flouts those norms and only offers lip service when he's pressed to account for his actions. It remains to be seen what exactly motivates Nikolay's actions. It could be that he is not in his right mind when the offense occurs, or it's possible that Nikolay willingly flaunts those norms of propriety and morality because he wants to test them, and perhaps show himself and the world that one can overcome one's internal drive to act morally.



Soon after, Liputin asks Nikolay to come to his wife's birthday party. Because Liputin is a liberal, he thinks Nikolay's treatment of the wealthy men is exactly what those men deserve. At the party, Nikolay dances with Liputin's wife. He then sits next to her before kissing her on the mouth three times. Liputin's wife faints. Nikolay stands up to leave, and Liputin follows him outside with Nikolay's coat. The next day, Liputin sends his servant to deliver a message to Nikolay. The servant tells Nikolay that Liputin sends his greetings. Nikolay says Liputin is the most intelligent man in town. The servant says Liputin knew beforehand that Nikolay would say that. He then instructed her (the servant) to respond to Nikolay by saying that Liputin knows he is the most intelligent person in town, and he wishes Nikolay the same.

Nikolay's second act of impropriety is arguably more serious than the first. At this point, Liputin's response appears cryptic. He doesn't seem to want to challenge Nikolay, suggesting perhaps that he is afraid of Nikolay, respects Nikolay, or understands Nikolay's actions in a way that others do not. His statement that he wishes Nikolay intelligence sheds light on those possibilities. It appears that Liputin believes Nikolay may not be in his right mind, which is why he wishes for Nikolay to have intelligence (meaning that he hopes for Nikolay to return to his right mind).



PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 3

When the governor returns to town, he asks Nikolay to come and see him. The governor and Nikolay are distant relatives. The governor asks Nikolay what has gotten into him. Nikolay leans in close to the governor and whispers that he'll tell him what the matter is. Nikolay then bites the governor's ear and doesn't let go for close to a minute. The governor is appalled and has Nikolay arrested. Varvara goes to see the governor, but the governor refuses to see her. Varvara is outraged.

Nikolay continues his pattern of flouting norms of morality and propriety. In this case, Nikolay bites the ear of the governor as the governor tries to get to the bottom of Nikolay's behavior. Nikolay's response of biting the governor's ear shows that Nikolay is willing to challenge authority in any form it comes in and suggests again that he doesn't consider himself subject to the same rules that govern others.



While imprisoned, Nikolay goes into an acute attack of "brain fever." That brain fever seems to clear everything up, as people in town now believe that Nikolay had acted inappropriately due to delirium related to alcohol consumption. Nikolay is released from prison and spends two months in bed. After those two months, he visits the man whose nose he pulled and offers a formal apology. The man is satisfied with Nikolay's apology. Nikolay then goes to visit Liputin. Liputin explains that he told his servant to wish "intelligence" for Nikolay because he (Liputin) sensed that Nikolay wasn't in his right mind. Anton isn't sure exactly why, but Liputin has a profound impact on Nikolay.

The novel explains Nikolay's impropriety and inappropriate acts by calling it "brain fever," an illness at the time thought to originate from excessive drinking or from withdrawal symptoms when someone with alcoholism abruptly stops drinking. For his part, Liputin explains that he believed that Nikolay wasn't in his right mind. The question remains, though, of whether Nikolay's actions stemmed from a deeper dissatisfaction with society's norms or whether all of his behavior can be truly explained by the diagnosis of "brain fever."



PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 4

After those events, Nikolay travels abroad for three years. He travels throughout Europe and makes a trip to Iceland. He resurfaces in Paris. Praskovya Drozdov, a childhood friend of Varvara who lives in Paris, writes Varvara to say that they have recently been seeing a lot of Nikolay, who has formed a close friendship with her daughter Liza. They plan to travel together to Switzerland. Varvara immediately decides to travel to France and then Switzerland with her close confidant Darya (Shatov's sister). After Varvara leaves for France, Stepan grows concerned. He owes money and won't be able to settle the debt without Varvara's help. Moreover, a new governor comes into power.

People say that the new governor's wife is enemies with Varvara. When Varvara returns to Skvoreshniki, she's in high spirits. She agrees to help Stepan with the debt and tells him that she heard about the intrigue regarding her and the governor's wife while abroad. She tells Stepan that there's nothing to it because the governor's wife is a striver with no real power. They shouldn't be afraid of her. But, Varvara says, she wants Stepan to act properly so that he can be welcomed by the new governor and any esteemed guests he might have with him. She also tells Stepan that she doesn't like his friends or the rumors about him that he's an atheist. She says that she left Darya in Switzerland to stay with Praskovya, and Darya will return with Nikolay to the provincial town in a couple of months.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 5

Stepan begins drinking more and seems to be acting somewhat erratically. He hates going days without visitors. It takes Anton a while to determine what is happening, but one day Stepan looks in the mirror. He then turns to Anton and says that he (Stepan) has let himself go. Anton surmises that Stepan is struggling with his changing looks as he grows older. Until now, Stepan has nursed the conviction that Varvara finds him physically attractive in addition to being intrigued by his status as a scholar in exile. Now, Stepan worries that his looks are leaving him.

Varvara decides to immediately go see Nikolay after he resurfaces following three years of minimal communication, showing the devotion that Varvara has for her son while revealing that Nikolay seems content to cut ties with his family when it suits him. Stepan's concern about Varvara's departure, and the difficult financial position it puts him in, shows that Stepan completely relies on Varvara financially. This suggests that Stepan's financial dependence on Varvara may impact the nature of their friendship.



Varvara's comments to Stepan show that in exchange for financial support, Varvara expects to have a say over, if not outright dictate, Stepan's decisions. Varvara's comments about Stepan's atheism show that one's beliefs are connected to socioeconomic status in the novel. In Varvara's case, she wants to be accepted by, and to entertain, people of the highest socioeconomic status, including the governor, his wife, and their guests. Varvara seems to worry that Stepan's atheism would be seen as an affront by those kinds of people.



Stepan further reveals his vanity. Previously, that vanity has mostly been related to Stepan's intellectual accomplishments (or lack thereof). Here, though, it's clear that he is vain about his looks as well. Notably, Stepan only becomes insecure about those looks when he considers how his aging appearance will impact Varvara's view of him, reinforcing the idea that Stepan, perhaps more than anything, wants a romantic relationship with Varvara.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 6

Praskovya arrives in the provincial town with her daughter, Liza, and with Darya, but Nikolay is not with them. Praskovya goes to see Varvara. She angrily tells Varvara that Nikolay and Liza had a falling out. She explains the situation and says that Nikolay couldn't take Liza's sarcasm. When tension mounted, Liza took up with another man, who happened to be Stepan's son, Pyotr, to try and make Nikolay jealous. Nikolay didn't react jealously, though. Instead, he befriended Pyotr, which infuriated Liza. Nikolay and Liza parted ways, and Nikolay went with the family of a man named Count K. to travel to Petersburg.

Varvara wonders if there is more to the story than Praskovya is telling her or than Praskovya knows. Varvara writes a letter to Nikolay, asking him to come back home. She then talks to Darya to get her version of events. Varvara asks Darya if there's anything Darya has to tell her, and Darya says no. Varvara then asks Darya if she would be open to marrying Stepan. Varvara explains how the situation would unfold and says that she would provide both Darya and Stepan with yearly allowances. She stresses that the decision is up to Darya, and Darya says she will marry Stepan if that's what Varvara wants.

Praskovya's assertion that Liza's sarcasm drove her and Nikolay apart seems unsatisfying and hints that there may be more to the story than she is telling or perhaps than she knows. Notably, Nikolay already has a rumored history of treating paramours (and former paramours) badly. In the past, that poor treatment seems to have been tinged with disdain. It remains to be seen whether his relationship with Liza will build upon that pattern.



Varvara has doubts about Praskovya's version of events, and that leads her to question Darya. Varvara's line of questioning implies that she suspects that Liza and Nikolay may have parted ways because Nikolay and Darya shared some kind of romantic connection. Darya denies that, but Varvara follows up by asking Darya if she would marry Stepan. In Varvara's view, if Darya married Stepan, then that might help avoid any possible scandal if Darya and Nikolay had been romantically involved.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 7

Varvara goes to tell Stepan her plan. As she explains the plan in detail, Stepan is taken aback. He knows while Varvara is talking that everything she says will come to be. She is the one in control of the situation, as much as she says that she is offering Stepan and Darya a choice. Still, Stepan tries to object. He says he can't imagine marrying someone so much younger than he is. Darya is 20, and Stepan is 53. Varvara says that that's not important. What's important is that Darya will help Stepan in his life, while Stepan can help educate Darya. Finally, Stepan says what he has really been thinking. He tells Varvara that he can't believe she's marrying him off to another woman. Varvara says only young girls get married off. He's simply getting married. The next day, Stepan agrees to the marriage.

Stepan's assertion that he knows what Varvara says will come to pass shows again how power works in Varvara and Stepan's relationship. While Stepan likely considers himself independent, at the end of the day, he feels compelled to do as Varvara wants him to because he is economically dependent on her. The same is true in Varvara's relationship with Darya. One of Stepan's main objections to the marriage is that he believes he and Varvara are in love with each other, even if they've never said that outright. Varvara dismisses Stepan's attempt to have Varvara acknowledge the romantic nature of their relationship, which leaves Stepan, in his mind, with no choice other than to marry Darya.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 8

Stepan feels compelled to accept the terms of the marriage to Darya due to circumstances related to his son, Pyotr. Stepan manages a small estate in town that belonged to his late wife, which means that it now belongs to Pyotr. Stepan runs the estate in Pyotr's absence and sends Pyotr a thousand roubles every year, a sum that exceeds what Stepan makes from the land. Varvara pays the sum to Pyotr regardless of how much money Stepan makes from the land each year. Stepan has gotten into trouble with the estate because, to pay his debts, he has taken to selling timber from the estate in large allotments. Now, the land is worth next to nothing.

Pyotr has recently announced he plans to sell the land for as much as possible. Stepan has heard rumors that Pyotr has become involved in socialist causes. Stepan knows he has made a horrible mistake by gutting the land and wants to provide Pyotr with 15,000 roubles for the land to make things right between him and his son. Varvara says she'll buy the land for 7,000 roubles. The details of the proposed marriage between Stepan and Darya include 8,000 roubles for Stepan. Stepan thinks that money represents the only possible way for him to maintain a good relationship with Pyotr.

Varvara visits Stepan the day after she presents her marriage plan to him. Varvara seems put off by Stepan's readiness and willingness to marry Darya. She tells Stepan not to tell anyone about the plan and says that perhaps nothing will end up happening. Stepan asks what she means, and Varvara says she'll think about it more. She then says that everything will happen as she's said it will. After Varvara leaves, Stepan reflects on the conversation. He thinks that perhaps he won't be compelled to go through with the marriage after all and feels giddy as a result.

This passage shows the economic hole that Stepan has gotten himself into, which compels him to accept Varvara's terms for marrying Darya. The passage reinforces the novel's depiction of Stepan as someone who thinks he is a vaunted intellectual on the verge of completing a great work when in reality he seems to be a man about town who gets into debt and has no way to pay back those debts. Again, the contrast between Stepan's view of himself and reality provides an insight into Stepan's psyche and motivations.



Stepan's attempts to cover his debts and provide Pyotr with money show that he wants to have a good relationship with his son, even though he has, for the most part, been entirely absent from his son's life. That reinforces the depiction of Stepan as someone who wants to be thought of positively by others (and by himself) but is often reluctant to take the kinds of actions required to achieve his desires.



Varvara's frustration that Stepan so readily accepted her plan to marry Darya sheds light on her psychology. While she wants to save Darya from a potential scandal, on some level, she also wants Stepan to defy her and to stand up for what he believes in (in this case, the love he has for her). In other words, Varvara has become frustrated with the way that her position of power in her relationship with Stepan compels his obedience. In particular, she wishes that Stepan would object more forcefully to the marriage to Darya on the grounds that he's in love with Varvara. Maybe then, the passage implies, Varvara would consider openly reciprocating Stepan's feelings.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 1

Stepan spends the next week or so feeling acute shame. Beyond that, he can't figure out whether he is actually engaged to Darya or not. Varvara refuses to see him and won't answer his letters. He thinks that Varvara would have been angry if he didn't accept the marriage but not as angry as she is now that he's accepted. Anton is Stepan's only confidant during that week. He grows increasingly annoyed with Stepan, especially because Stepan still has not gone to see the Drozdovs (Praskovya and Liza) as custom requires. Anton is especially bothered because he has become taken with Liza from a distance and knows that Stepan is the only route he has to get a formal introduction.

Stepan's assertion that Varvara would have been angry if he didn't accept the marriage but less angry than she is now shows the bind that Stepan is in. He is stuck between trying to please Varvara, which has angered her, and going against her wishes, which he thinks, ultimately, is what she actually wants in this case. As seems usual for Stepan, though, he sees no way out of the conundrum and instead dwells on the issues without acting.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 2

Anton is walking through town one day when he runs into Karmazinov, a famous writer who is an acquaintance of the new governor. Anton, like many of his generation, has read Karmazinov since he was a child. Anton thinks Karmazinov's early work captures a spontaneous kind of poetry, while his later work fails to capture his (Anton's) attention. He's the kind of writer, Anton thinks, who will fall into obscurity after he dies or perhaps before he dies, as he's replaced by writers from a new generation.

Karmazinov is thought to be a satirical depiction of the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev. Turgenev's 1862 novel [Fathers and Sons](#) is one of the most influential novels of Russian literature. Notably, that novel is about the relationship between the liberal movement of the 1830s and 1840s (of which Stepan was a participant) and the nihilist movement that came after that liberal movement.



When Anton sees Karmazinov, Anton unintentionally acts obsequiously. Karmazinov notices and asks Anton first for directions and then to hail a taxi. Anton obliges but doesn't like behaving like a sycophant. Karmazinov drops the bag he's holding, and Anton moves to pick it up. He stops himself, but Karmazinov notices the initial gesture. He smiles to himself and picks up his bag. Anton at first feels disgraced but then feels like the whole scene was hilarious. He decides to tell Stepan about it to amuse him.

Anton's comical exchange with Karmazinov satirizes the kind of writer that Karmazinov has become. While he was once a great and momentous author, the novel argues that he is now pompous, washed up, and more concerned with confirming others' adulation of him than with producing more great works of literature.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 3

When Anton arrives at Stepan's house, he finds Stepan distracted. He has received three notes from Varvara, each one attesting to her mounting anxiety that Karmazinov has failed to pay her a visit. Stepan is frustrated that Varvara is bothering him with trifles while she still hasn't responded to his letters about the upcoming marriage. Stepan tells Anton that he's prepared to give it all up and quit his life as a tutor and as Varvara's friend. He's tired of her despotism. Anton is skeptical that anything will change. Then, Liputin arrives.

Stepan's unwillingness to take action to resolve his issues seems to be common knowledge among his friends, including Anton. Notably, Stepan blames the issue on Varvara's "despotism" (her absolute power) rather than looking at himself and determining what he has done to contribute to those issues, and how he might be able to resolve them. Again, Stepan wants to find external reasons to excuse his inaction rather than find internal motivations that might drive him to action.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 4

For some reason that Anton doesn't understand, Stepan says, "I'm done for," when he sees Liputin. Liputin brings with him a man who has lived abroad for the past four years, an engineer named Aleksey Kirillov. Aleksey says he knows Stepan's son Pyotr, Nikolay, Liza, and Praskovya. Liputin says that Aleksey is preparing a paper on high rates of suicide in Russia. Aleksey becomes annoyed and says that he's not writing a paper and that he talked with Liputin about the issue in confidence. Liputin seems to enjoy pushing Aleksey's buttons. Aleksey also says that he is living in the same house as Shatov, though Shatov lives in the attic while he lives in a shed on the property and Lebyadkin lives downstairs from Shatov. Liputin and Aleksey prepare to leave, and Anton continues to wonder why Stepan seemed afraid of Liputin when he arrived.

This passage further introduces some of the characters who will become central to the later action of the novel, including Aleksey. It also further introduces Liputin. Aleksey's rejoinder to Liputin—that he told him about his essay on rising suicide rates in confidence—suggests both that Aleksey may be looking into the question and that he is not comfortable talking about it with people he does not know well. Aleksey also reveals that he, Shatov, and Lebyadkin all live on the same property, an arrangement that will have significant implications in the novel going forward.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 5

As Liputin and Aleksey prepare to leave, Liputin says that Aleksey has been sullen today because he recently got into a fight with Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin beats his sister, Marya, who experiences seizures. When she has those seizures, Lebyadkin uses a whip to assault her. Aleksey saw it happen and ripped the whip from Lebyadkin's hands. Aleksey tells Liputin to stop talking. Liputin also says that Lebyadkin receives regular payments from a man to make up for having sex with Marya out of wedlock, thus bringing dishonor to Lebyadkin's family. Liputin tells Stepan that he came to see Stepan because he wanted to tell him that Varvara summoned him (Liputin) to ask him if he thinks Nikolay is "insane" or is in his right mind.

Aleksey's confrontation with Lebyadkin shows that he is willing to stand up for other people, even when it may cost him something. Again, Aleksey also displays a reluctance to talk in public about personal subjects, reinforcing that he is a private person. It's also worth noting that Liputin is the man whose wife Nikolay kissed when in town four years prior, and Liputin responded by wishing "intelligence" for Nikolay, or, in Liputin's words, wishing a return to sanity for Nikolay. Liputin's response to that previous offense points to why Varvara summons him to ask him about his perception of Nikolay's sanity.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 6

Liputin relays the story to Anton and Stepan about Varvara summoning him to ask about Nikolay. Liputin says that Varvara sent a servant the day before, asking him to see her. When Liputin arrived, Varvara went straight to the question. She asked whether, in Liputin's opinion, Nikolay might have experienced a shift in ideas at some point. Liputin told her that he had no doubts about Nikolay's mental capacities and supposed soundness of mind, but he couldn't say the same about Nikolay's character.

This passage reinforces a distinction in the novel between sanity and insanity. In the novel's formulation, one is not responsible for the things one does while not "of sound mind." If one is "sane," though, then one's actions show the nature of one's character. In Liputin's telling, Nikolay is responsible for his actions because he is sane, which means that any missteps or misdeeds are reflections of Nikolay's character.



Liputin tries to get Aleksey to corroborate his opinion about Nikolay because Aleksey has known Nikolay for some time, but Aleksey says he doesn't want to be involved in gossip. Liputin then implies that the man who has been sending payments to Lebyadkin for dishonoring Lebyadkin's sister could be none other than Nikolay. He says that Nikolay entrusted a lady of high standing and an orphan (meaning Liza and Darya, respectively) with 1,000 roubles to give to Lebyadkin. Along the way, 700 roubles went missing, and Lebyadkin is now accusing Darya of stealing that money. Aleksey protests and says none of this is true and that it's all a misunderstanding. He storms out of the room, and Liputin rushes to catch up to him.

Nikolay is further implicated in actions that go against prevailing views of morality and propriety. As Aleksey points out, though, at this point, Nikolay's involvement with Marya and Lebyadkin is nothing more than a rumor. Notably, other rumors implicate Darya in misdeeds as well, including stealing money from Lebyadkin. Presenting those two rumors side by side reinforces the idea that the reader, at this point, doesn't know what to believe and cannot know which, if either, of those rumors may be true.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 7

After Liputin and Aleksey leave, Stepan gathers his hat and cane and prepares to go see Varvara. On the way, he tells Anton that he won't be married because of "another man's sins." Anton realizes that Stepan has thought, all along, that Varvara's plan to marry Darya and Stepan is related to Nikolay's missteps. On the way, Stepan and Anton run into Liza, who is out riding on horseback. She is accompanied by a man named Mavriky. Liza used to be Stepan's pupil, and the two haven't seen each other for more than 10 years. Liza is overjoyed to see Stepan.

What Stepan has just heard from Liputin about Nikolay's involvement with another woman seems to reinforce Stepan's desire to go see Varvara. When Stepan says that he is set to be married to Darya to pay for "another man's sins," he implies that he, like Varvara, suspects that Nikolay and Darya may have had some kind of romantic involvement. In Stepan's case, though, he does not want to let Varvara use him to avoid a potential scandal.



Liza and Mavriky accompany Anton and Stepan back to Stepan's house. At the house, Liza asks Stepan if he is doing okay, as he seems troubled. Stepan tries to brush off the question, but Liza says she knows that Varvara is hiding something and that the town has been gossiping about Stepan's possible marriage to Darya. Stepan is surprised that the news has gotten out. Liza then asks about Shatov. She says that she is looking for someone who speaks English to be an assistant to her and help her handle some literary matters. Stepan vouches for Shatov, and Anton says that he will go speak to him personally. Liza asks Anton to tell Shatov to come see her at noon the next day.

Rumors play a significant role in the novel, as evidenced here. In some cases, rumors in the novel turn out to be true (including the rumor that Stepan will possibly marry Darya) and in other cases they are false. The novel uses the prevalence of rumors, and their varying degrees of truth, to comment on phenomena like herd mentality. In particular, the novel aims to show that if enough people believe something is true, then that can be enough to spur collective action, regardless of whether a rumor is actually true.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 8

Anton goes to find Shatov, but Shatov isn't home. He tries again two more times, but both times, Shatov still isn't back. The third time Anton looks for Shatov, he finds Aleksey instead. Anton explains that he's looking for Shatov, and Aleksey offers to help. Aleksey invites Anton into the small shed near the larger house where he lives. Aleksey moved to that shed from the main house to avoid being party to Lebyadkin's beatings of his sister. In the shed, Anton asks if it's true that Aleksey is writing about suicide.

Anton shows how infatuated he is with Liza by going repeatedly to Shatov's house to try and get closer to Liza. Aleksey's decision to leave the house to avoid being around Lebyadkin's beatings of Marya points to the helpless role that Marya finds herself in, as Aleksey seemingly cannot stop the beatings, and it's unclear who else there is to turn to to get Lebyadkin to stop.



Aleksey says it's true. He says that his writing is about why so few people commit suicide. He says that if one were truly free, that person would show no preference between life or death. If everyone were truly free, he reasons, then no one would want to live. Aleksey says that at this point, two prejudices keep people from committing suicide: pain and the afterlife. He explains that if someone stood under a rock the size of a house or mountain, they would rationally know they would feel no pain if it fell, but even the most rational person would still be afraid of that pain.

Aleksey explains that that fear is a kind of pain in and of itself. God, Aleksey then says, is "the pain of the fear of death." The person who overcomes pain and fear will then become God. No one has conquered that fear in themselves. If someone were able to, it would fundamentally reshape history. History would then be divided into two parts: from primates to the "annihilation of God" and from the "annihilation of God" to some kind of fundamental future change. Anton asks why Aleksey is being so open with him, and Aleksey says that Anton reminds him of his late brother. Anton turns to leave. He thinks that Aleksey is deranged.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 9

As Anton is leaving, he runs into Liputin, who is with Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin, who seems drunk, loudly recites poetry and grabs hold of Anton. Anton wrenches himself free. When he does, Liputin follows him. He tells Anton that Lebyadkin has fallen in love with Liza. Anton looks over, and Liputin asks Anton if he's afraid that he'll have a rival for Liza's affection. Anton tries to change the subject, and Liputin adds that Lebyadkin has just become a landowner in the province, too, after buying an estate that belonged to Nikolay.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 10

Anton returns to Stepan's house. Stepan has just come back from visiting Liza and Praskovya. Stepan tells Anton that he's as fond of Liza as ever, but he's convinced that she and her mother were trying to pry some gossip from him the whole time he was there. A note then arrives from Varvara. She asks Stepan to come to her house tomorrow. She says that she'll invite Shatov, Darya's brother, and she hopes that might give Stepan the formality he's wanted. Stepan becomes exasperated. He thinks that Varvara is making light of the situation by mocking Stepan's desire for "formality."

According to Aleksey, he wants to take his own life not because he is unhappy but because he wants to prove humans' capacity for radical freedom. To prove that, Aleksey believes he must overcome humans' fear of death. The novel draws parallels between Aleksey's ideas regarding suicide and Nikolay's ideas regarding morality. Both want to overcome what they view as longstanding prejudices—toward life in Aleksey's case and toward morality in Nikolay's.



Aleksey notably says that his philosophy, if proven true, will represent the "annihilation of God." While Aleksey puts that in positive terms and views that potential annihilation as desirable, the novel is skeptical of Aleksey's position, as reflected in the view of Anton (who is the narrator of the novel) that Aleksey is "deranged." The novel asks two implicit questions at this point: is it possible to, as Aleksey says, annihilate God? And if so, what would that mean for the world?



Rumors have previously asserted that Nikolay is in some way involved with Lebyadkin and has perhaps been sending money to Lebyadkin to compensate for a scandal involving Lebyadkin's sister, Marya. Liputin's information here doesn't prove those rumors true, but if Nikolay did in fact sell land to Lebyadkin, that would bolster the previous suggestions that Nikolay and Lebyadkin are involved in schemes in one way or another.



Stepan has been trying to get ahold of Varvara to determine whether his marriage to Darya will actually occur. Stepan's interpretation that Varvara is mocking him points again to the antagonistic relationship between the two. While at some points Stepan and Varvara seem to be in love with one another, they also seem unable to stop arguing for long enough to admit their true feelings. This is, in part, how the two have arrived at the détente in which Stepan is planning to marry Darya even though neither he nor Varvara (nor Darya) wants that to happen.



Stepan tells Anton that he recently wrote letters to both Nikolay and Darya. In the letters, he asked both of them if his marriage to Darya would interfere with anything that might have happened, or might have begun to happen, during their time together in Switzerland. Anton grows angry and asks Stepan why he wrote letters that would add fuel to the gossip that has been ignited in town. Stepan says he probably shouldn't have written the letters, as he plans to go through with the marriage regardless, but he can't change the past. He then cries out to Anton and asks why Varvara is doing all of this. He says that surely she must know that he has loved her and only her for 20 years. Anton is taken aback. He's never heard Stepan say that before, and he fights back an urge to laugh.

Stepan's letters to Nikolay and Darya again imply that he believes that something romantic may have happened between the two of them. Stepan believes that that's the case and is convinced that Varvara proposed the marriage between him and Darya to avoid the scandal that would occur if news of a romantic relationship between Darya and Nikolay came to light. Stepan also provides his most forthright statement that he is in love with Varvara and has been for 20 years, making it even more clear why he does not want to go through with the marriage to Darya that Varvara has planned.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 1

The next day, Shatov arrives at Liza's at noon, and Anton arrives with him. Liza, Praskovya, and Mavriky are waiting inside. Praskovya asks who the professor is, and Liza clarifies that Shatov is a former student, not a professor. Liza and her mother begin to quibble over the difference. Liza apologizes to Shatov and Anton and says that Praskovya becomes argumentative when she is feeling sick. Liza then goes to speak with Shatov and leaves Anton to speak with Mavriky.

The novel is in many ways a satire of social norms. This passage in particular presents a comedy of manners in which Liza and Praskovya quibble over the differences between professors and former students while Shatov, the former student in question, watches on without saying a word. Future sections of the novel will repeat similarly farcical moments, often in situations with much higher stakes.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 2

Liza talks to Shatov and explains her idea to him. She wants to make a kind of compendium or anthology of all of these news items from various newspapers published in Russia in a given year. Items will be presented by subject and theme, and Liza hopes that the books will become references for people to consult when a year is over so they don't have to inefficiently comb through several newspapers to find what they're looking for. She thinks the books will document the moral spirit of the Russian people. Liza asks Shatov to be her collaborator. She asks him to devise themes and begin compiling news items. Shatov says he doesn't think he would be well-suited for the work. Liza becomes annoyed. She then asks Mavriky to fetch a letter she just received.

The novel frequently explores national identity in Russia. In particular, the novel is concerned about whether there is a Russian form of morality or a distinctly Russian form of Christianity. In Liza's case, she hopes that her compendium of newspaper articles will also serve a sort of anthropological function by documenting the moral spirit of the Russian people. Shatov's reasons for rejecting the work seem cryptic at this point, though those reasons will gradually become clear as the novel progresses.



Liza tells Anton to read the letter aloud. It's a poem and letter from Lebyadkin in which he professes his love for her. Liza says she knew the man was an idiot as soon as she got the letter. She didn't want to trouble her mother with it, so she now wants to ask Shatov, since he lives in the same house as Lebyadkin, what she should expect from Lebyadkin going forward. Shatov, somewhat reluctantly, says that Lebyadkin is a scoundrel. Liza again asks Shatov to help her with the anthology project. She says that Pyotr said that Shatov could run a print shop, too. Shatov storms out of the room. He returns and tells Liza he won't collaborate with her. Liza asks why, and Shatov refuses to answer. Liza is stunned.

Shatov's refusal to take part in the project becomes even more pointed and, perhaps, more cryptic. Notably, Shatov storms out of the room when Liza mentions the idea of a print shop, suggesting that his agitation may have something to do with the idea of printing materials. Shatov's reluctance to denounce Lebyadkin also suggests that he, like Aleksey, would prefer to avoid gossip if possible. The novel then suggests that Shatov's reluctant assessment of Lebyadkin as a "scoundrel" may hold more weight than if he had unhesitatingly contributed to the rumor mill.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 3

After Shatov leaves, Anton feels like it's time for him to leave as well. He doesn't understand exactly what happened but thinks something must be going on behind the scenes that he's not aware of. He tells Liza he's going, and she offhandedly says goodbye. Moments later, as Anton is leaving, a servant stops him and tells him that Liza wants to see him. When Anton returns, he finds Liza alone. She seems to be so distraught she's on the verge of despair. She says she wants to see that woman. Anton asks who she means, and Liza says Lebyadkin's sister, Marya. Anton feels like being entrusted with a secret by Liza is sacred. He says that it might not make sense for Liza to see Marya unprompted but that he will try to meet her himself and then report back to Liza.

At this point, the reader knows that Liza and Nikolay were once romantically involved, and rumors have spread that Nikolay may have once been romantically involved with Marya. With that in mind, Liza's desire to see Marya suggests that Liza is interested in Marya due to her role as a potential rival for Nikolay's affection. Amid those entanglements, Anton has also become infatuated with Liza, as can be seen in his feeling that her secrets are sacred and his desire to do whatever he can to help her.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 4

Anton goes to see Shatov in the hopes that Shatov will help him see Marya. When Anton arrives, Shatov is with Aleksey and a man named Shigalyov. Aleksey and Shigalyov leave. Shatov and Anton discuss liberal ideas. Shatov then tells Anton about the months that he (Shatov) and Aleksey spent in the United States. They went to see what it was like to work in the most inhospitable labor conditions. They were exploited by their boss and repeatedly beaten. Anton then asks Shatov if he can help him see Marya. Shatov says that they should go to see her now when she's alone.

Shatov notably identifies the United States, a country with a capitalist economic system, as the country with the most inhospitable labor conditions. That observation occurs in the context of rising support for socialism within Russia. With that in mind, the novel implies that part of the reason for the increased support for socialism in Russia comes from a desire to avoid the inhumane labor conditions of places like the U.S.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 5

Anton and Shatov go to see Lebyadkin's sister, Marya. Marya sits alone in one of the two dark, dingy rooms where she lives with her brother. There's only a single candle to provide light, and she sits with a piece of bread beside her. Shatov says that her brother never feeds her. Occasionally, the landlord's assistant will bring her some bread, but that's all the food she gets. Marya seems happy to see Shatov. She begins to speak and describes a dream with Praskovya and Liza. She then talks cryptically about a child and says she misses her child. She remembers dressing the child and bringing them into the woods. Marya also says she can't remember who her husband was. Shatov nudges Anton and says they better leave before Lebyadkin returns. As they're going, they hear the gate creak as Lebyadkin comes home.

Marya is living in squalid conditions. She doesn't seem to have anywhere to turn for help. Her brother beats her and doesn't feed her, while the person she is married to leaves her at Lebyadkin's mercy. The fact that Marya can't remember who her husband is suggests that she is not altogether lucid. Marya's descriptions also make it clear that she knows Praskovya and Liza, which was not clear before. That provides further circumstantial evidence that doesn't necessarily prove that Nikolay was romantically involved with Marya but at least makes it eminently plausible that Nikolay and Marya know each other.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 6

Anton and Shatov slip upstairs to Shatov's apartment. Not long after, Lebyadkin climbs the stairs and loudly knocks on the door. Shatov doesn't open the door, and he and Lebyadkin have a conversation through the closed door. Shatov tells Lebyadkin that he sold his sister. Lebyadkin says it's a lie, and he can clear up the matter with a single explanation. He asks Shatov if he knows what kind of woman Marya is. Shatov says that Lebyadkin wouldn't dare say. Lebyadkin seems on the verge of saying more but then calls Shatov a scoundrel and leaves. Shatov opens the door. He says he can't hear Lebyadkin, which means he probably went to sleep right away. Anton prepares to leave. Before he goes, Anton asks Shatov what he (Anton) is supposed to make of everything he saw and heard. Shatov says he can make of it what he will.

Anton tries to decipher the events of this passage just as the reader does. In that way, Anton functions here (and throughout much of the novel) as the reader surrogate, meaning that he is someone who asks questions and wonders about things that the reader may also reasonably be curious or unclear about. In this case, Shatov contends that Lebyadkin has used his sister for his own financial gain. Lebyadkin in turn suggests that he has a piece of information that could dispel all confusion, but, for some reason, he is unable to share that information, adding further intrigue regarding what's going on with Lebyadkin and Marya.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 7

Anton accompanies Stepan to Varvara's house on Sunday. Stepan is supposed to meet with Shatov, and they will determine whether the marriage between Stepan and Darya will go forward. Stepan and Anton are waiting when Shatov enters. Shatov doesn't seem to want to speak to Stepan. Shatov asks a servant if Varvara and Darya will be coming soon. The servant says that Varvara has gone to the cathedral for services while Darya stayed behind in her room because she was feeling sick. Just then, they hear footsteps, and they're surprised to see Liza enter arm in arm with Marya.

The novel presents a minor shock—that Liza and Marya have met and are apparently happy to be together—before explaining (in the following sections) how that situation came about. That is an example of a narrative technique that builds suspense by presenting information outside of a strictly chronological order, a technique that Dostoevsky repeatedly uses throughout the novel.



To explain how that has happened, Anton details Varvara's trip to the cathedral earlier in the day. It was the first trip of Yuliya (the governor's wife) to the cathedral, and the event drew a crowd. After the services were finished, Varvara moved to kiss the cross. Yuliya moved to let Varvara kiss the cross before her, and the courtesy in itself seemed like a subtle slight. As Varvara left and walked down the stairs, a woman with a paper flower in her hair threw herself at Varvara's feet. Varvara looked around and asked if anyone knew the woman. No one responded.

The woman said she wanted to take Varvara's hand. Varvara gave the woman ten roubles and then offered her her hand. The woman kissed Varvara's hand rapturously. A man then spoke up and said that the woman was from the Lebyadkin family. It was Marya. Marya said she wasn't a Lebyadkin, but her brother was. Liza then approached Marya and Varvara. Marya had come to the cathedral with Yuliya, and she asked Yuliya if she could accompany Marya and Varvara back to Varvara's house. Yuliya said yes. Marya got up, and Varvara turned white when she realized Marya had trouble walking. Everyone noticed Varvara's reaction, though no one knew why she reacted like that. Varvara, Marya, and Liza then got into the carriage together. Marya laughed hysterically the whole way to Varvara's house while Varvara seemed lost in a dream.

Varvara and Yuliya are at odds with each other. Notably, the novel is frequently concerned with etiquette and manners. In this case, Dostoevsky points out how Yuliya treating Varvara with what seems to be good manners can also be interpreted as an intentional slight. The novel establishes the nuances of interactions like these to establish the social, political, and moral norms that will play a pivotal role as the novel continues.



Notably, Marya doesn't ask Varvara for money but instead says that she wants to have Varvara's hand, ostensibly so she can kiss it. Marya's reaction to Varvara, and Marya's joy when she travels to Varvara's house, suggests that Marya at the very least knows who Varvara is and wants to be sure that she shows Varvara respect. Marya also says that she isn't a Lebyadkin, but her brother is (Lebyadkin is a surname). That response suggests one of two things. Either Marya isn't Lebyadkin's sister or Marya is legally married and has taken her husband's surname, so she is therefore no longer a Lebyadkin on paper.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 1

Varvara, Marya, and Liza return from the cathedral and arrive at Varvara's house where Anton, Stepan, and Shatov are waiting. Varvara still seems perplexed. When it becomes clear that Shatov knows Marya, Varvara asks him to tell her everything about Marya. Shatov asks what there is to tell. Varvara becomes increasingly frustrated. She knows that there's something about Marya that no one wants to talk about. She sends a servant to bring Darya from her room. Just then, Praskovya arrives out of breath, accompanied by Mavriky. Praskovya says she's come to fetch Liza.

Rumors have circulated that Nikolay has been romantically involved with Marya, but those rumors have not apparently made their way to Varvara. That seems to be what Varvara is noticing when she says that everyone seems to know something about Marya, but no one is telling her what it is. She then sends for Darya, apparently with the hope that Darya might be able to clear things up.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 2

Varvara and Praskovya have been feuding for the past few days. The conflict has gotten so bad that it's almost led to a complete rupture between the families. Varvara doesn't know exactly what has happened. They last saw each other five days ago when Varvara visited Praskovya. Varvara is accustomed to having the upper hand over Praskovya, but recently, Praskovya seems to have adopted a haughty attitude toward Varvara. When Praskovya arrives at the house, Stepan tries to catch Anton's eye. Everyone becomes distracted to the point that they momentarily forget about Marya.

The feud between Varvara and Praskovya again points to the jostling for status that occurs in the social class that Varvara—and, by extension, Stepan—occupies. The novel pointedly establishes the norms that preoccupy and determine delineations of status in that socioeconomic echelon to clarify what stands to be disrupted if other influences are introduced to that milieu.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 3

Varvara and Praskovya bicker about their boarding school days. Praskovya then reprimands Varvara for bringing Liza into her (Varvara's) scandal. Varvara doesn't know what Praskovya means and asks Praskovya to tell her what she's talking about. Praskovya says she has been receiving anonymous letters about Marya. Varvara almost faints. Darya then enters the room. Marya says that Darya seems much more refined than the image her brother, Lebyadkin, painted of her. Varvara asks Darya if she knows what Marya means, and Darya explains that Nikolay gave her 300 roubles to give to Lebyadkin. She delivered the 300 roubles but Lebyadkin then claimed that Darya had stolen 700 roubles. Darya says that it's a lie and she simply delivered the money Nikolay gave her.

Varvara says that she believes Darya and intends to protect her from any malicious rumors. A servant enters and says that Lebyadkin is waiting downstairs and would like to be introduced. Mavriky says that Lebyadkin has no place in polite society. Varvara then explains that she received an anonymous letter six days ago claiming that Nikolay had lost his mind. The letter warned of a woman fitting Marya's description and said that that woman would play an "extraordinary role" in Varvara's life. Varvara apologizes for involving everyone in this business and says that Liza can go. Liza says that she intends to stay because she wants to help Marya in any way she can. Varvara tells the servant to bring in Lebyadkin. A moment later, Lebyadkin arrives.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 4

Varvara offers Lebyadkin a seat. He sits down and thanks Varvara for looking after his sister, Marya. He doesn't seem drunk but like someone who has just woken up after days spent drinking. He fumbles and tries to count money, which he offers first to Varvara's servants and then to Varvara herself for helping Marya. Varvara says that it would be inappropriate for her to take the money. Lebyadkin says that Varvara gave Marya 10 roubles, but Marya only took it because it came from Varvara. Varvara asks why Marya wouldn't have taken the money if it came from someone else, and Lebyadkin offers a confused and cryptic response.

Again, the novel delves into satire and comedy. As Varvara and Praskovya are trying to get to the bottom of who Marya is and why she is in Varvara's house, they can't help but bicker about their girlhood days. Darya's comments clarify the rumors that Lebyadkin has been spreading that Darya stole from him (Darya categorically denies the accusations) while also making it clear that Nikolay has in fact been sending money to Lebyadkin. Previously, Liputin suggested Nikolay was sending money to Lebyadkin due to a scandal involving Nikolay and Marya.



Mavriky's assertion that Lebyadkin has no place in polite society again points to the rigidly established socioeconomic hierarchy that defines the world of the novel. In this case, Lebyadkin is considered so much lower in socioeconomic status than the other people present that they momentarily consider excluding him altogether. This passage also points again to the role that rumors play. In this case, the assertion that Darya stole money seems to be nothing more than a rumor. Notably, though, Darya seems to be able to move past that rumor by defending the wealthy and powerful Varvara.



Lebyadkin has presumably come to try and clear things up about Marya and to settle whatever issues might be at hand. He is characterized, though, as someone who seems only to confuse matters more and drive them further into chaos. Lebyadkin's assertion that Marya only took money from Varvara because Varvara was the one who gave it to her again suggests some kind of intimate connection between Marya and Varvara. Varvara, though, is completely unaware of what that connection might be.



Lebyadkin then begins to recite a fable he wrote about the plight of a cockroach. Varvara grows angry. She asks Lebyadkin why he has been lying and saying that Darya took his money. Lebyadkin says it's not a lie. Varvara asks him to explain the situation, and Lebyadkin says that family honor requires that he say no more. Just then, a servant enters and says that Nikolay has arrived. Everyone is surprised, as Nikolay isn't expected in town for another month. A man then enters the room, but it isn't Nikolay. Instead, it's someone who nobody recognizes.

Again, Lebyadkin shows that he has a tendency not to clear matters up or resolve issues but to add to the chaos of a given situation. He does that in particular by delivering a fable he wrote. Previously, he sent poems to Liza, declaring his love for her. That puts Lebyadkin as a character in conversation with people like Stepan and Karmazinov, the other two characters who are writers.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 5

The man who enters seems to be about 27 years old and speaks rapidly. He says that he's surprised that Nikolay hasn't arrived and that his luggage should have come hours ago. No one knows what the man is talking about, but then Stepan says, "Pyotr." The man is Stepan's son. Stepan says he didn't recognize him initially and warmly embraces him. Pyotr tries to extricate himself from the embrace and says that he knows his father loves him, but that Stepan is causing the others in the room to become embarrassed.

Pyotr and Stepan's first interaction in the novel is telling. Stepan attempts to embrace Pyotr. It's not clear, though, whether that embrace is intended to convince Pyotr that Stepan loves him, to persuade himself that he is a loving father, or to convince the group that he and Pyotr have a warm relationship. For Pyotr's part, he quickly extricates himself from Stepan, suggesting that he may have little interest in his father's love and gestures.



Nikolay then enters the room. He is just as sophisticated and intimidating as he was when he was last in town four years before. Varvara is happy to see him, but she remains confused by the broader situation. Before Varvara says anything else to Nikolay, she asks him if it is true that Marya is his wife. A gasp spreads through the room. Marya then moves to greet Nikolay. She seems ecstatic. Nikolay walks to her and says that she shouldn't be here. He reminds her that he is not her father, husband, or fiancé. He offers to take her home. Liza stares at Nikolay and Marya as they leave. As soon as they are gone, everyone in the room begins talking.

Varvara asks the question point blank of whether Nikolay is married to Marya. Nikolay notably doesn't respond to his mother directly. Instead, he addresses Marya and tells her that he is not related to her in any way. Nikolay's unwillingness to directly address his mother suggests that, while he appears to be speaking frankly to Marya, there may still be more to the story than Varvara or others in the room are fully aware of at this point.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 6

Everyone in the room discusses what just occurred. Pyotr breaks in and says that he can explain the whole situation and really there's nothing much to it. Varvara asks Pyotr if he thinks it would be okay to tell the story without Nikolay present, and Pyotr says Nikolay would want it that way. Anton finds it strange that someone would be so comfortable telling other people's stories without the other person present. Pyotr then begins to explain how Nikolay became involved with Lebyadkin and Marya.

Pyotr displays his social adeptness. While Lebyadkin entered the room ostensibly with full knowledge of what was happening, he only contributed to the chaos. Pyotr, on the other hand, immediately rises to the occasion and offers without any hesitation to clear matters up once and for all. Anton's thoughts about Pyotr are telling in the sense that he believes that Pyotr may be up to something. Those thoughts are also ironic, considering that Anton is the narrator of the novel and is, at least in theory, telling the story of all of these people without any of the people being present.



Nikolay first met Marya and Lebyadkin five years ago in Petersburg. At that point, Nikolay was dejected and found little purpose in life. Lebyadkin roved the city drinking and looking to stay in other people's lodgings. Marya worked as a charwoman and earned barely enough to get by. People began to bully and mistreat Marya due to her physical handicap and her eccentric disposition. Once, a store clerk was berating Marya, and Nikolay intervened. After that, Nikolay began to treat Marya with kindness and respect.

Aleksey, who was in Petersburg at the time and was friends with Nikolay, told Nikolay that he shouldn't play games with Marya. Nikolay told Aleksey that he in fact respected Marya greatly and thought she was better than the lot of them combined. Still, Nikolay barely said more than two words to Marya. Despite that, Marya got it into her head that Nikolay was her fiancé, and that the only reason they didn't elope was because of obstacles resulting from Nikolay's family and his enemies. The situation ended when Nikolay left for home. When he left, he made arrangements to provide Marya with a 300-rouble annual allowance. Lebyadkin has now used that allowance, Pyotr says, to make up rumors about Nikolay.

Varvara is relieved after hearing Pyotr's account of the events in Petersburg. She thinks that Nikolay's treatment of Marya is evidence of his lofty soul. Pyotr then says that when Nikolay left Petersburg four years ago, Marya was living in a convent. After Nikolay left, Lebyadkin tracked her down and took her out of the convent. Now, Lebyadkin doesn't feed Marya and beats her mercilessly. He also takes the money Nikolay sends and uses it to buy alcohol for himself.

Lebyadkin also treats the money Nikolay gives as a gift to Marya as something that is owed to him (Lebyadkin). Lebyadkin objects to Pyotr's statements, and Pyotr asks him if what he said is untrue. Lebyadkin says Pyotr knows why he (Lebyadkin) can't respond and mentions "family honor." Pyotr says he has no idea what Lebyadkin is talking about and asks again if what he (Pyotr) has said is untrue. Lebyadkin says it's not and that all of it is true. He then asks to leave. As he leaves, Nikolay returns from taking Marya home.

Pyotr seamlessly begins to explain Nikolay's involvement with Marya, which shows that, in some ways, he is the opposite of someone like Lebyadkin. While Lebyadkin, in theory, knew all of this information about Nikolay and Marya, he only contributed to the chaos of the situation. Pyotr, on the other hand, seems to have a way with people that Lebyadkin lacks.



It's worth noting that in Pyotr's account of past events, Nikolay is depicted as a kind of hero. He sees that people treat Marya poorly and intervenes to try and help her. In Pyotr's telling, all of the confusion about Nikolay's relationship with Marya stems from Nikolay's good intentions. It's also notable that this version of Nikolay—the chivalrous person who comes to the defense of others—differs starkly from the version of Nikolay who seemed to consciously test the boundaries of propriety and morality when he was last in town.



Pyotr's story includes not just a clear hero in Nikolay but also a clear villain in Lebyadkin. In Pyotr's account, all of the blame for the rumors and ill-treatment of Marya can be placed on Lebyadkin, while Nikolay is simply a victim of his own good intentions. Varvara's relief on hearing the story is a reminder that, before Pyotr's arrival, she had been wondering if Nikolay was in his right mind and if his misdeeds stemmed from his possible insanity.



Pyotr seems to have given an account that satisfies all of the people listening except for Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin's statement that he cannot shed light on the truth due to "family honor" doesn't do much to help Lebyadkin's case, though it's worth noting that he has repeatedly mentioned matters of family honor before when discussing Nikolay and Marya's relationship.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 7

When Nikolay returns, he seems calm and happy. Varvara apologizes to him for doubting him before. Nikolay says he takes it that everyone has heard the full story about him and Marya by now. He says that when he left, it occurred to him that he should have told the story before going, but when he remembered Pyotr was there, he felt at ease. He says that Pyotr is as trustworthy a person as there is. Nikolay then begins to make the rounds to say hello to everyone. Liza, though, has begun laughing uncontrollably. No one knows exactly what is wrong, though someone goes to fetch water for her.

Nikolay then approaches Darya and congratulates her on her upcoming marriage. Pyotr turns to Stepan and asks if Stepan is getting married, too. Pyotr then loudly says that he received a letter from Stepan saying that Pyotr should come to town at once to “save” him from his impending marriage and that he was only getting married because of the sins that another person committed in Switzerland. Pyotr says he couldn’t make heads or tails of what Stepan said. Anton knows that Pyotr is playing some kind of a part, though he isn’t sure what his goal is. Varvara is appalled. She asks if it’s true that Stepan wrote that to Pyotr. Stepan doesn’t deny it. Varvara then turns to Stepan and tells him to leave at once and never step foot in her house again. Stepan speaks briefly to Darya, who tries to console him.

Nikolay’s statements about Pyotr—including that Pyotr is eminently trustworthy—coupled with Pyotr’s intimate knowledge of Nikolay’s life and affairs, reinforces the idea that Pyotr and Nikolay are close friends. With that in mind, if Pyotr turned out to be untrustworthy, that could also say something about Nikolay’s character. Liza’s uncontrollable laughter is a reminder that she has been especially concerned about Marya and Nikolay’s relationship. At this point, it doesn’t seem that Pyotr’s story has assuaged her concerns.



The letter Stepan wrote to Pyotr mentioned Stepan’s theory that Varvara wanted Stepan to marry Darya to avoid any scandal that could arise from a possible romantic relationship between Darya and Nikolay. Pyotr then brings that up in front of Varvara. That could signal that Pyotr is generally obtuse and unaware of the delicacy of the situation. Notably, though, Anton says he knows that Pyotr is playing a part. That suggests that Pyotr is fully aware of what he’s doing and is intentionally trying to manipulate the situation, and Varvara’s feelings, for his own aims. That points to the idea that far from being trustworthy, Pyotr may actually be manipulative.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 8

As Stepan prepares to leave, Shatov, who has been nearly forgotten by all in the room, rises from the corner where he sits. He crosses the room to Nikolay and, with a closed fist, punches Nikolay in the face. Nikolay reels, and blood trickles from his mouth. Anton thinks that Nikolay is the kind of person who would kill someone who struck him with no hesitation. Instead, Nikolay regains his balance and grabs Shatov by the shoulders. Nikolay then turns very pale, and it seems like he is enduring great pain. Shatov leaves the room and the house. After he leaves, Liza lets out a scream and faints.

Dostoevsky leaves the motivation behind Shatov’s decision to strike Nikolay intentionally ambiguous at this point. Based on the previous conversations, it’s reasonable to suspect that the reason stems from Nikolay’s relationship with Marya and the history of that relationship. Moreover, as Anton observes, Nikolay is the kind of person who wouldn’t hesitate to strike someone else. With that in mind, his decision to refrain from striking Shatov could suggest that Nikolay knows the reason Shatov has hit him and, perhaps, he thinks that Shatov may have a point.



PART 2, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 1

Over the next eight days, Anton and Stepan hole themselves up in Stepan's home. Neither can figure out how the story of everything that occurred at Varvara's house has become known throughout town as rapidly as it has. Eventually, they conclude that Pyotr must have told people. Liza's fainting spell is of particular interest to people in town. Rumors abound about what brought it on. Some people speculate that Nikolay and Liza had an affair in Switzerland and that Nikolay "dishonored" Liza. Lebyadkin and Marya leave town the day after the events at Varvara's house. Anton and Stepan are also surprised by how quickly Pyotr becomes well-known in town. By the end of the eight days, he has become a frequent guest of Yuliya's at the governor's house.

Anton and Stepan conclude that Pyotr has been spreading stories about what happened at Varvara's throughout town. In that way, Pyotr is portrayed as someone who contributes to the rumor mill. Given that Pyotr may manipulate others for his own aims, it's worth asking what Pyotr stands to gain from spreading those rumors. This section also shows that Pyotr has inserted himself into the lives of powerful people like the governor's wife Yuliya.



PART 2, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 2

In those eight days after the events at Varvara's house, Varvara quietly takes care of the business of Pyotr's land that he had wanted to sell. Pyotr also comes to visit Stepan twice. After the second visit, Stepan says that he will "crush them," though he doesn't clarify what he means. He says that "they" made their plan too obvious to those who it pertained to. Anton isn't sure exactly how to interpret those comments. Pyotr leaves town at the end of the week and doesn't return until the start of the next week. Anton goes to see Liputin, who tells him that Lebyadkin and Marya are across the river in the suburb of Gorshechnaya. Liputin also says that Liza has become engaged to Mavriky.

Stepan cryptically says "them" and refers to a plan that "they" have. He seems to be referring to Pyotr's attempt to create a rift between Stepan and Varvara, which Pyotr successfully did when he brought up Stepan's private thoughts about his prospective marriage to Darya in front of Varvara. While Stepan says "their" plan is obvious, it's still not entirely clear to the reader at this point what plan he's referring to, or what that plan might entail. Liza's engagement to Mavriky, though, suggests that what she heard at Varvara's house was enough to make her give up on Nikolay as a potential romantic partner.



PART 2, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 3

After eight days have passed following the events at Varvara's house, Pyotr visits Nikolay. Pyotr tells Nikolay that he has planted seeds around town suggesting that Shatov hit Nikolay because Nikolay had an affair with Shatov's wife in Paris at some point. Nikolay seems annoyed by Pyotr's voluble nature. Pyotr also tells Nikolay that he has arranged a place for Lebyadkin and Marya to stay and gives the address to Nikolay. Pyotr says that "our people" are waiting for orders. He corrects himself and says that they are simply people, not "our people."

This passage makes it clearer that Pyotr is in fact using rumors to manipulate public opinion, ostensibly for his own benefit. In this case, Pyotr uses an affair between Nikolay and Shatov's wife to explain Shatov hitting Nikolay, but the novel implies that that is still not the real reason Shatov hit Nikolay. Pyotr also corrects himself when he says "our people" to Nikolay, suggesting that Nikolay is not a member of the group he's referring to.



Nikolay asks if Pyotr has represented him (Nikolay) as a kind of leader. Pyotr changes the subject. Nikolay says that he told Varvara that he would propose to Liza in five days. Pyotr asks if Nikolay said that to appease Varvara, and Nikolay asks Pyotr what he would think if he (Nikolay) had been serious. Pyotr says that Shatov told him that if they wanted to start a rebellion in Russia, then they would have to start with atheism. He also says that an old acquaintance of his, Fedka the Convict, is in town and could be of use. He'll do anything they want him to for a price. Pyotr also says that Shatov had no right to risk his life by striking Nikolay. Pyotr then leaves.

This interaction between Pyotr and Nikolay shows that both of them make liberal use of lies and untruths to try and manipulate others to get what they want. In Nikolay's case, he has told Varvara he plans to propose to Liza, but it's unclear whether that's true or not. In Pyotr's case, he plants rumors and has also perhaps told "our people" that Nikolay plans to be a leader, which seems untrue. It also becomes clear that Pyotr has ambitions to start a revolution in Russia, which suggests that "our people" may refer to people sympathetic to those revolutionary goals.



PART 2, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 4

After Pyotr leaves, Varvara goes to check on Nikolay but finds that he is asleep. When Nikolay wakes up, he takes a letter he received several days ago and gets dressed to leave the house. It's raining heavily outside. Varvara's butler, who has known Nikolay since he was a child, wishes Nikolay good luck but only insofar as he is doing good deeds. Nikolay has never heard the butler address him like that. Nikolay makes his way through the streets. He arrives at the house where Lebyadkin and Marya once lived. Shatov opens a window in the attic and asks who's there. Nikolay says it's him, and Shatov comes down to open the gate. Without saying another word, Nikolay goes into Aleksey's quarters.

The butler's statement to Nikolay makes it clear that while Varvara may have been fooled by Pyotr's story about Nikolay's benevolence, the butler still thinks that something is amiss with Nikolay. The fact that Nikolay and Shatov don't speak when Nikolay arrives at his house further suggests that Nikolay may believe that Shatov had a point when he struck Nikolay, considering that if Nikolay believed Shatov had been in the wrong, it's hard to imagine Nikolay not saying anything the first time the two saw each other in afterward.



PART 2, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 5

In Aleksey's apartment, Nikolay shows Aleksey the letter he took from Varvara's house. He explains that the letter is from a man named Gaganov, who is the son of the man whose nose Nikolay pulled years ago. Gaganov hasn't forgotten the incident and is enraged, even though Nikolay apologized, and the man accepted Nikolay's apology. But Gaganov has been hurling insults at Nikolay and writing menacing letters to him. Nikolay wants the matter settled. He asks Aleksey if he'll go to see Gaganov to try and find a solution. Nikolay says he'll agree to apologize again if Gaganov agrees to stop harassing Nikolay. Aleksey says Gaganov won't go along with those terms. Nikolay says he doesn't expect Gaganov to.

This interaction between Nikolay and Aleksey suggests that maybe Nikolay has, in some ways, changed since the last time he was in town. That last time, Nikolay wantonly pulled the man in question's nose and also bit the ear of the governor at the time. Now, Nikolay has apologized for his past actions and is prepared to apologize again if it would help. In other words, Nikolay doesn't seem to be defensive about the past. Instead, he seems to be willing to acknowledge past mistakes and hopes to move on from there.



If Gaganov doesn't accept those terms, Nikolay tells Aleksey, then he plans to challenge Gaganov to a duel. He asks Aleksey to be his second, and Aleksey says he will. Nikolay then asks Aleksey if he still plans to commit suicide. Aleksey says he does, but he doesn't know when he will do it. Nikolay and Aleksey then discuss their perspectives on life. Nikolay asks Aleksey if he loves life, and Aleksey says he does. Nikolay doesn't understand why someone who loves life would commit suicide, and Aleksey says the two have nothing to do with one another. He then says that everything in the world is good, and people only do wrong because they do not know they are good. Nikolay refers to that line of thinking as "old philosophical commonplaces." Before Nikolay leaves, he reminds Aleksey to go see Gaganov the next morning.

Nikolay's statement that Aleksey's view that everything in the world is good is an example of "old philosophical commonplaces" is an assertion that Aleksey's worldview stems from Christianity and that such sentiments are outdated. That is, Nikolay takes the idea that everything in the world is good as similar to the Christian idea that the world is ruled by an omnipotent and all-benevolent God, and that "sinners" do wrong because they do not know about God. In Nikolay's view, though, those ideas have lost their relevance, which suggests that he is looking for a new view of the world that will supplant what he sees as those "old philosophical commonplaces."



PART 2, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 6

After Nikolay leaves Aleksey's apartment, he goes to see Shatov. In Shatov's attic room, Nikolay sees a revolver. Shatov explains that he bought the gun after striking Nikolay because he was afraid Nikolay would come to kill him. He never bought bullets or gunpowder, though, and eventually realized that he wasn't in his right mind. Nikolay then discusses why Shatov struck him. He says he knows Shatov didn't hit him because of Nikolay's relations with his wife or because of the rumors of Nikolay's involvement with Darya. Shatov says it had nothing to do with his wife and that Darya told him the rumors about her and Nikolay weren't true. Nikolay then asks Shatov if he hit him because of Marya, and Shatov says yes. Nikolay says that Shatov knows, then, that he (Nikolay) is lawfully wedded to Marya. Shatov says that he suspected as much.

This passage makes the extent of Nikolay and Pyotr's lies clear. At Varvara's, Pyotr told a convincing story about how Marya had come to incorrectly believe that she and Nikolay were married. Now, though, it becomes clear that Marya and Nikolay actually are married, which also makes it clear how readily Pyotr lies to try and get what he wants. Notably, Nikolay went along with that lie and also said that Pyotr was eminently trustworthy to bolster the credibility of that lie, which shows that Nikolay, like Pyotr, will also readily lie in order to try and get what he wants.



Nikolay says that he and Marya were married in Petersburg four years ago and that he plans to announce the marriage to the town shortly. Shatov says that he hit Nikolay because of Nikolay's "lie" and his "degradation" and because Nikolay has meant so much to him in his life. Nikolay tells Shatov that he came to speak with him about a different matter. He warns Shatov that someone from "the society" may be coming to try and kill him. Shatov explains that he had once been involved in that Society, and they had asked him to run a printing press and then hand it over to another member of the Society. Shatov had agreed, under the condition that he would leave the Society once he handed over the printing press because he no longer believed in the Society's principles.

Shatov's assertion that he struck Nikolay because of Nikolay's "lie" and "degradation" suggests that Shatov once thought highly of Nikolay, and he has been utterly disappointed by what he sees as Nikolay's fall from grace. In Shatov's view, that fall seems to consist in part of Nikolay's willingness to lie. Shatov also seems to believe that Nikolay's marriage to Marya is part of that fall as well, not because of who Marya is, but because of how Nikolay has treated Marya by marrying and keeping it a secret, perhaps for reasons that are, in Shatov's eyes, less than noble.



Nikolay says that one can't leave the Society that easily, and they have no intention of parting with Shatov. He explains that Pyotr is the mastermind of the Society and perhaps its only true member. He also says that the Society is convinced that Shatov has either informed on them to the authorities or that he will soon. Nikolay says that he is not technically a member of the Society. He helped them reorganize according to "the new plan." After that, the Society decided it would be dangerous to release Nikolay from membership, so now he, like Shatov, is condemned to be connected to the Society. Shatov then discusses a long letter he wrote to Nikolay while he (Shatov) was in the U.S. Nikolay says he has to ask Shatov for a favor concerning Marya.

This passage clarifies some of the aspects of the revolutionary faction that seems to be operating in town. First, Pyotr is the leader and, as Nikolay says, perhaps the faction's only true member. Second, the faction compels allegiance through threats of violence. It's also notable that Shatov once sympathized with the revolutionary faction's views but has since left the faction (at least ideologically) and become a Christian. The novel then pits those two ideas against each other: the theism of Shatov versus the atheistic socialism of Pyotr and the revolutionary faction.



PART 2, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 7

Shatov and Nikolay continue talking. They discuss God, Christianity, and the Russian people. Shatov says that he wrote a letter to Nikolay while in the U.S. about religion. At the same time, Shatov says, Nikolay was leading Aleksey down the path toward suicide. Shatov says that the Russian people are the only "God-bearing" people in the world and that religion gives people a sense of good and evil. Nikolay accuses Shatov of reducing God to an aspect of nationality, but Shatov says that instead he is raising people to become God, and the people are the "body of God." He asks Nikolay if he is an atheist, and Nikolay says he is. Shatov then recalls when Nikolay once told him that socialism must be tied to atheism because socialism is, by definition, organized around reason and science. And reason alone cannot tell you what is good and what is evil.

Shatov lays out his philosophy about how religion is related to national identity. In Shatov's view, religion is the basis of morality. Having a religion in common then gives people an agreed-upon moral framework, which provides the foundation for a functioning society. Further, Shatov believes that reason and science are antithetical to religion, and reason alone cannot deliver a comprehensive framework of good and evil. Because of that, socialism and theism, and Christianity in particular, are incompatible. With that in mind, Shatov comes to represent a Christian worldview, while Pyotr and his revolutionary faction represent the impact of atheistic socialism on Russia.



Shatov asks Nikolay if it's true, as he heard, that in Petersburg Nikolay belonged to a group that practiced "bestial carnality" and "debauched children." And he asks Nikolay if it's true that Nikolay finds equal beauty in carnality and heroic deeds. Nikolay says he spoke those words but that he never harmed children. Shatov accuses Nikolay of marrying Marya out of a desire to inflict pain on others. Shatov says that despite himself, he still cares deeply about what Nikolay thinks. Nikolay asks Shatov to continue to look out for Marya, and Shatov says he will. Shatov then tells Nikolay to go speak to a former bishop named Tikhon, who is retired due to poor health and lives close to a nearby monastery.

This passage clarifies Nikolay's nihilism and lack of morality. While he denies harming children, he doesn't deny seeing an equal amount of beauty in "bestial carnality" and heroic deeds. In that sense, it becomes clear that Nikolay sees himself as beyond good and evil. In his mind, good and evil are relics of an outmoded religious conception of the world, and he no longer has to be bound by the strictures of morality. Shatov also clarifies that he thinks that Nikolay's decision to marry Marya is evidence of Nikolay's fall from grace, as it shows that Nikolay is intent on treating other people poorly.



PART 2, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 1

Nikolay leaves Shatov's and walks along the road. It's raining out, and a man approaches him to ask if he can share his umbrella. The man also asks Nikolay if he can spare three roubles. He says his name is Fyodr, and Nikolay puts the pieces together to determine that the man is Fedka the Convict, who Pyotr told him about. Nikolay asks what he wants, and Fedka says that he is there to be of service to Nikolay and help him out if he ever gets in a tough spot and mentions Lebyadkin. He says that Pyotr sent him and promised him a passport that would enable him to freely travel throughout Russia. Nikolay says he doesn't want Fedka's help and never will. He says if Fedka doesn't leave him alone, then he'll tie him up and take him to the police.

When Fedka talks with Nikolay, Fedka hints at several things that he doesn't say outright. For example, he says that Pyotr has promised him a passport and says that he's there for Nikolay if he gets into a tight spot. He doesn't spell out exactly what he has in mind, but Nikolay's anger at Fedka makes it clear that Nikolay has his suspicions, and he doesn't want any part of it. It's also worth noting that Nikolay previously said that he no longer wants to be part of Pyotr's revolutionary faction, but Pyotr won't let him leave.



PART 2, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 2

Nikolay continues to walk alone in the rain. Eventually, he arrives at the house where Lebyadkin is staying. Lebyadkin invites him inside and says he's been waiting for him. He also says that Marya is awake in the next room. Nikolay sits with Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin hasn't had a drink in eight days. He says that Pyotr is treating him badly. Lebyadkin continues to speak, accustomed to his former role as a kind of jester to Nikolay. He talks about poems he wrote for Liza and then recites those poems. Eventually, Nikolay confronts him about lying about Darya stealing money, squandering the money Nikolay has sent, and removing Marya from the convent. He also asks Lebyadkin why he keeps talking about a "disgrace to the family," and Lebyadkin says that it's wrong that Nikolay has kept his marriage to Marya a secret.

Lebyadkin's reaction to Nikolay's arrival suggests that the two have a history together. Lebyadkin's comments also clarify what he meant previously when he cryptically mentioned family honor and a disgrace to his family. In his view, Nikolay has mistreated Marya and Marya's family by refusing to acknowledge his marriage to Marya. Lebyadkin seemed unwilling to disclose that marriage himself, though, apparently out of fear that it would anger Nikolay and because he may have feared that it would cause Nikolay to stop sending money.



Nikolay says that he plans to make his marriage to Marya public in the coming days. At that point, it will no longer be necessary to send a subsidy to Lebyadkin. Lebyadkin can't believe it. He says that his sister is a "half-wit" and asks if Nikolay plans to bring her into his mother's house. Nikolay says he very well may bring her into his mother's house. He also says that he married Marya during a drunken dinner on a bet. Since it amused him then, why wouldn't it amuse him now?

Lebyadkin makes it clear that, more than anything, he is concerned about the money Nikolay sends him and about his own well-being rather than his sister. Nikolay's comments also shed light on Nikolay's decision to marry Marya, showing that he married her to entertain himself and his friends while drunk, reinforcing the idea Nikolay tends to not take the norms of morality and propriety at all seriously.



Nikolay then asks Lebyadkin if he has informed “about anything.” Lebyadkin confesses that he told Liputin privileged information. Lebyadkin then recalls how he would pass out revolutionary tracts in Petersburg. Now, he wants to be done with all of that business, but Pyotr is threatening him to force him to do his (Pyotr’s) bidding. Nikolay guesses that Lebyadkin has wanted to travel to Petersburg to inform on Pyotr and others. Lebyadkin feels like he is ruined because he can no longer rely on Nikolay’s payments. Nikolay then says that he needs to go speak to Marya.

Notably, much of the discussion of violence stems from the idea that Lebyadkin might denounce the revolutionary faction to authorities. With that in mind, this passage shows again how Pyotr compels allegiance and loyalty through violence and threats of violence. In that way, Pyotr seems to believe that his revolutionary goals are more important than human life, something that the novel identifies as a dangerously extremist approach.



PART 2, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 3

Marya is asleep when Nikolay goes into her room. When she wakes up, she is in the throes of terror. Nikolay asks her what’s wrong, but she continues to be terrified. Nikolay tries to soothe her. Eventually, she settles down. Nikolay tells her that he plans to announce their marriage. Marya says she is worried that she won’t be fit for the type of high society that Nikolay lives in. Nikolay asks Marya if she wants to return to the convent, and she says she doesn’t.

Marya’s fear about not fitting in with the high society that Nikolay is a part of reinforces the strict divisions between people of different socioeconomic classes in the novel. In Marya and Nikolay’s case, that division leads to marital anxiety, though the novel also suggests that it can contribute to the kind of political unrest that Pyotr represents.



Nikolay then proposes a plan where he and Marya would go live in the mountains of Switzerland together. Marya says that the plan is ridiculous. She asks Nikolay what he has done with her “prince” and “hawk.” She accuses Nikolay of being an impostor who now seems more like a “shopkeeper” and an “owl.” Nikolay grows frustrated and doesn’t know what Marya is talking about. Marya says that she saw the knife in Nikolay’s pocket as soon as he came into the room. Nikolay says that Marya is being controlled by her dreams. He gets up to leave, and Marya shouts after him as he goes.

Marya’s comments cast Nikolay in a certain light. In Marya’s view, Nikolay was once unimpeachably strong-willed, but he has now lapsed into a sappy imitation of the person she once knew. Notably, that assessment seems to come when Nikolay proposes a plan to take her away from his world, implying perhaps that Marya hoped that Nikolay would, as he has done previously, defend her by showing how little he cares about what other people think.



PART 2, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 4

Nikolay leaves the house and walks in the rain with his umbrella. He keeps thinking about what Marya said about a knife. When Nikolay reaches the bridge, he finds Fedka waiting for him. In a rage, Nikolay grabs Fedka and slams him against the bridge. He takes off his scarf, intending to use it to tie Fedka’s hands, but then he stops and lets Fedka go. Fedka takes out a knife. Nikolay tells him to put it away, and Fedka does.

After seeing Marya, when Nikolay sees Fedka again, his initial reaction is to resort to the same anger he felt when he and Fedka parted. However, something stops Nikolay from acting on that anger, suggesting that his recent unsettling interaction with Marya has changed his views in some way.



Nikolay asks Fedka if it's true that he recently robbed a church. Fedka says he did, and he's dismayed that he barely got any money from the robbery. Nikolay asks Fedka if he killed the church watchman, too. Fedka says that the watchman had been his accomplice in the robbery. Afterward, they started fighting, and Fedka killed him. Fedka says that he once saw money spilling from Lebyadkin's pockets when he was drunk. He learned that the money came from Nikolay, and now he thinks that Nikolay might be his financial meal ticket. He asks Nikolay again to spare three roubles. Nikolay takes a stack of 50 roubles from his pocket. He lets rouble after rouble float away in the wind and land in the mud and puddles. Fedka gets on his hands and knees and searches for bills as Nikolay walks away.

This passage makes it clear that Fedka is willing to commit murder, and that he doesn't need much of a reason to do so. In this case, he killed a man who had, until soon before, been his accomplice. After hearing that story, instead of denying Fedka money, Nikolay empties his wallet at Fedka's feet. That is, instead of being further repelled by Fedka after he hears him confess to murdering another man, Nikolay seems willing to entertain the cryptic plot that Fedka had previously hinted at.



PART 2, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 1

The next day, Aleksey goes to see Gaganov, the son of the man whose nose Nikolay once pulled. Gaganov has been trying to provoke Nikolay for the past month and is intent on fighting. It's agreed that there will be a duel. Gaganov arranges for his childhood friend, Mavriky, to be his second. Gaganov insists on one further stipulation. If no one falls after the first shots are fired, they'll retake their paces and shoot again. If the second shots fail to determine an outcome, they'll repeat the process again. Aleksey tries to argue against that stipulation but ultimately agrees under the condition that they'll stop after the third time. At 2 p.m., Aleksey and Nikolay arrive on horseback for the duel.

Gaganov's insistence that the duel continues if no one dies in the first round makes it clear how much rage he feels toward Nikolay. Nikolay seems to reluctantly agree to both the duel and its terms. It's clear that Nikolay has no desire to engage with Gaganov or go through with the duel, which makes it even more striking that Nikolay accepts Gaganov's draconian terms. That suggests that Nikolay may be confident in his ability to win the duel, may suspect that Gaganov is overconfident, or perhaps that Nikolay is indifferent about the possibility of his own death.



PART 2, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 2

Before the duel begins, Aleksey asks once more if there might be a peaceful way to resolve the issue. Mavriky chimes in and asks Gaganov if he might be willing to reconcile with Nikolay peacefully. Nikolay says that he would be more than happy to apologize again. Gaganov grows angry and curses all of them. Nikolay and Gaganov take their positions for the duel, and Aleksey counts them down. When Aleksey reaches one, Gaganov fires. He appears to miss. Nikolay then fires and aims well above Gaganov's head. On closer inspection, it's clear that Gaganov didn't miss entirely. Instead, he took off a small part of one of Nikolay's fingers.

Again, everyone involved in the duel except for Gaganov is intent on resolving matters peacefully and without conflict. Nikolay's decision to aim over Gaganov's head, even after he (Nikolay) is shot, gives an insight into Nikolay's character. While he frequently does things that are immoral or inappropriate, at this point, he doesn't seem to be driven by emotions like revenge or anger. Instead, he confronts his own possible death with calmness and, in the process, makes it clear that he has no interest in killing Gaganov.



Gaganov cries out that Nikolay missed on purpose, which, Gaganov says, is against the rules. Nikolay says that he can shoot wherever he wants, and Mavriky and Aleksey agree with Nikolay. Gaganov says he doesn't want Nikolay's mercy. The two take their positions for the second shot. After Aleksey counts them down, Gaganov fires and misses. Nikolay aims closer to Gaganov's head but again seems to intentionally miss. Gaganov is furious. For the third round, Gaganov walks up to the middle barrier. His hands are shaking too much for him to shoot accurately. He fires, and the bullet knocks Nikolay's hat off. Nikolay turns and fires a bullet into the dirt, clearly upset. He then rides away without saying more.

Nikolay continues to show that he has no interest in killing Gaganov. He also stands stock still as Gaganov approaches him and aims his weapon. That calmness in the face of possible death suggests that perhaps Nikolay does in fact feel indifferent about life and death. In a sense, he seems to embody the person Aleksey wants to become—that is, a person who has no fear of death. In Aleksey's telling, if a person can do that, they will become God. That idea is especially noteworthy with regard to Nikolay's view of himself as being beyond good and evil, or, in his view, beyond the need for God, religion, and morality.



PART 2, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 3

Nikolay and Aleksey ride away from the duel together. Nikolay then tells Aleksey that he had no intention of insulting Gaganov but seems to have done so again. Aleksey says that he has clearly insulted him. Nikolay asks Aleksey what he should have done, and Aleksey says he should have killed Gaganov. Nikolay says he is done killing and that he only challenged Gaganov to a duel because he wanted Gaganov to leave him alone. If they hadn't had the duel, Nikolay says, then perhaps Gaganov would have killed him or beat him up. At the very least, he would have continued to insult Nikolay.

Nikolay says that he is done killing, suggesting that previous rumors about Nikolay killing a man were in fact true. The fact that Nikolay is done killing suggests that he is either a changed person or perhaps that he has reached an inflection point in his life. Perhaps, Nikolay's comments suggest, his previous approach to life proved to be unsatisfying, so now he is trying to find a different approach, one that is not as violent and ruthless.



PART 2, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 4

Nikolay returns home. Varvara is out. Nikolay tells her butler, Aleksey Yegorych, to stop her if she tries to come and see him. Nikolay then goes to his room. Moments later, Darya enters. She says she has been thinking that she and Nikolay should break off their relationship because Varvara is growing increasingly suspicious. She says that she'll still come to him when "the end comes." She then asks if Nikolay will announce his marriage to Marya today. Nikolay says he won't announce it today, tomorrow, and maybe not the day after either. Darya says that she knows she'll be the one to end up with Nikolay, and she's waiting for that day. She says if it never comes, perhaps she'll become a nurse with the Sisters of Mercy.

Darya's interaction with Nikolay seems to show that she does in fact have some kind of romantic involvement with him. That involvement seems to have begun when Nikolay was traveling with Liza's family in Switzerland, which seems to prove that Stepan and Varvara's suspicions were correct. Notably, the novel seems to identify Nikolay's affairs and infidelities as evidence of his impropriety and a manifestation of his beliefs that the rules and norms that govern others don't apply to him.



Nikolay says that yesterday, Fedka approached him and offered to kill Lebyadkin and Marya and leave no trace. He asked for a three rouble advance but made it clear that it would cost 1,500 roubles total. Darya says that "they" are using Fedka to ensnare Nikolay in their web. He says, "Let them!" He tells Darya that he gave Fedka all the money in his wallet, and now Fedka may be convinced that that was an advance to pay for the murder of Marya and Lebyadkin. Nikolay asks Darya if she would still come to him if he did get involved in Fedka's scheme. Darya doesn't answer and leaves. Nikolay then tells himself that she would still come to him if he gets involved with Fedka.

Nikolay sheds light on the conversations that he and Fedka previously had. While Fedka cryptically hinted at a plot that Pyotr put him up to in exchange for money and a passport, Nikolay makes it clear that that plot would entail a murder-for-hire scheme in which Fedka would kill Lebyadkin and Marya. As Darya notes, Pyotr seems to have instigated that plot in an attempt to get evidence of Nikolay committing a crime that he could later use to blackmail and manipulate Nikolay.



PART 2, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 1

The outcome of Nikolay's duel with Gaganov changes public opinion about Nikolay. Those who were previously skeptical and suspicious of Nikolay loudly speak up in his defense. That change in public opinion is solidified at a party when a respected general who is known for making authoritative public pronouncements speaks up in support of Nikolay. Yuliya, who is at the party, then speaks up in support of Nikolay as well. After that party, Varvara visits Yuliya and even thanks her for her support of Nikolay. The two put away their differences and begin to become friends.

Yuliya invites Varvara to a literary gala. She tells Varvara to invite Stepan as well. When Varvara returns home, Pyotr and Nikolay are there. Varvara is taken with Yuliya and tells Pyotr and Nikolay that she doesn't understand why anyone ever said anything bad about her. Pyotr then talks to Nikolay. Pyotr is upset because of Nikolay's duel with Gaganov, which he didn't hear about until five days after it happened. Pyotr asks Nikolay what right he had to duel and says he can't believe that Nikolay wants to make his marriage to Marya public. Nikolay scowls at Pyotr and walks away.

Before the duel with Gaganov, Nikolay was remembered in town as the person who bit the governor's ear and kissed Liputin's wife. Now, he's viewed as an almost heroic figure and a member of the town who took mercy on Gaganov despite being in a position to kill him. The passage also provides a commentary on herd mentality, as when one influential person speaks up on Nikolay's behalf, several other people follow suit.



The rift between Pyotr and Nikolay points toward Pyotr's attempts to control Nikolay. As the leader of the revolutionary faction in town, Pyotr wants to compel allegiance and discourage defection, often through violent means. He also wants, it seems, for Nikolay to be some kind of leader in that movement. The fact that Nikolay put himself in harm's way and is making large, potentially life-altering decisions then makes Pyotr afraid that he may be losing whatever control over Nikolay he once believed he had.



PART 2, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 2

Pyotr then goes to see Stepan. At Stepan's house, Pyotr invites Stepan to the literary gala Yuliya is holding. But, Pyotr says, Yuliya is only inviting Stepan to try and appease Varvara. Pyotr says that Stepan should submit his piece to him a few days before so Pyotr can make sure it won't be too boring. Pyotr then says that Varvara has finally caught on to Stepan's scheme. Now she knows that Stepan is a leech who flirted with her for 20 years to extract as much money from her as possible. Pyotr says that Varvara showed him all of Stepan's letters, which made it clear how pitiful Stepan is.

Pyotr says that Varvara probably would have married Stepan at one point, but Stepan foolishly let the opportunity slip away. Pyotr also showed Varvara the letter Stepan wrote about marrying for "someone else's sins." Pyotr says he recommended that Varvara send Stepan to an almshouse. Pyotr insults his own mother's character, and Stepan says if Pyotr says another word, he'll slap him in the face. He tells Pyotr to leave and says that he curses him and wants nothing to do with him going forward. Pyotr says he won't visit again and then reminds Stepan to submit whatever he plans to read at Yuliya's party to him beforehand.

Pyotr continues to create discord between Stepan and Varvara. Pyotr also seems intent on humiliating his father. As has been previously established, Stepan is a symbol of the liberal movements of the 1840s in Russia. Pyotr, on the other hand, is the leader of a revolutionary faction in the 1870s. With that in mind, Pyotr's attempts to scorn and humiliate his father can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the attempt of socialists in the 1870s to distance themselves and repudiate their ostensible progenitors.



Pyotr continues to denigrate his father, which shows again the response of the 1870s socialist movement toward the liberals of the 1840s who, in the novel's telling, gave rise to the socialists. The novel underlines that point by making Stepan Pyotr's biological father, arguing that there is a direct lineage from the liberal policies advocated by someone like Stepan to the revolutionary practices put in place by someone like Pyotr.



PART 2, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 3

Pyotr is intent on demeaning and manipulating Stepan, and he treats the province's governor, Andrey, similarly. Growing up, Andrey was something of a class clown, and he developed a passion for writing and literature. He eventually shifted his attention to civil service, but he never lost his passion for writing. After graduating from school, Andrey rose through the ranks and eventually met Yuliya. Yuliya was over 40 years old at the time and was well-connected and wealthy. The two married, and, ultimately, Andrey was sent to the province to govern.

Now that he is the province's governor, Andrey is having difficulty with Pyotr. Pyotr treats Andrey disrespectfully in front of other people, and Andrey can't find a way to get Pyotr under control. One of Andrey's initial mistakes was confiding in Pyotr that he was writing a novel. Andrey assumed that Pyotr was a passionate young man with poetry in his blood, but Pyotr treated Andrey's novel as if it were an embarrassment. Now, Pyotr never seems to miss an opportunity to ridicule Andrey.

Andrey appeals to his wife, Yuliya, to see if she can get Pyotr to stop disrespecting him, considering that Pyotr is Yuliya's "favorite." Yuliya blames Andrey for sharing his novel with Pyotr. She says she only allowed Andrey to work on the novel under the condition that he would do so in secret. Andrey has heard rumblings about manifestoes and revolutionary groups and is worried that Pyotr might pose a threat. He asks Yuliya to try and bring Pyotr under control. Yuliya says that Pyotr is devoted to her and will do whatever she tells him to.

The idea that Pyotr treats Andrey similarly to Stepan highlights the scorn that Pyotr feels toward the established order and to people and ideas that came before him. That scorn is further reflected in Pyotr's revolutionary politics. By embracing revolution, Pyotr effectively wants to overthrow all that came before and replace it with something new.



This passage makes it clear that one of the ways that Pyotr gains influence is by depriving people of respect and authority. If the previous markers of status, including being the governor, no longer gives a person authority, then that seems to put Pyotr a small step closer to achieving his revolutionary aim of overthrowing the government.



This passage makes it clear again that the novel is, in many ways, a satire. While Andrey is experiencing a serious threat to his power and authority, much of that threat stems from Andrey's status as a failed novelist. Yuliya's assertion that she has complete control over Pyotr raises the question of whether she is correct in thinking that or whether she, like so many others, may be vulnerable to Pyotr's manipulations.



PART 2, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 1

In the weeks leading up to the literary gala thrown by Yuliya, she is almost constantly accompanied by Pyotr, Liputin, and a clerk named Lyamshin, who runs errands for her. The public atmosphere in the town is abuzz with a strange energy. During those weeks, there have been several pranks and other events that have put people into a kind of fervor. Many of those pranks are related to the social circle that has been regularly gathering in Yuliya's drawing room. At those gatherings, Lyamshin often performs music and does impressions, including an unflattering impression of Stepan that brings down the house.

This passage directly links the "strange energy" in town to the abundance of recent pranks and to the literary gala that Yuliya is planning, foreshadowing later events in the novel. The fact that those pranks originate in the social circle that frequents Yuliya's drawing room also suggests that the pranks may, in some way or another, be related to Pyotr and the revolutionary faction of which he is the leader.



One of the recent pranks in town involves Lyamshin. One night, an **icon** of the Virgin Mary behind a protective grate goes missing, and someone replaces the icon with a live mouse, which is taken as a disturbing kind of sacrilege. Everyone blames Fedka for the theft, but people say that Lyamshin is also involved. The next day, a couple of the pranksters go to town when a monk is collecting alms. The pranksters approach the monk, laughing and talking loudly. One of the men takes a low-value coin from his wallet full of bills and tosses it to the monk before walking away. Liza witnesses the event. After the men leave, she goes up to the monk and gives him her diamond earrings.

This prank directly relates to sacrilege and denigrating religious symbols. In a previous section, Shatov argued that socialism was incompatible with religion and therefore must be based on a foundation of atheism. With that in mind, the prank involving the icon can be interpreted as an attempt to destabilize the public's relationship with religion by questioning the (from the revolutionary's point of view) taken-for-granted sanctity of Christian iconography.



PART 2, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 2

Two days after Liza gives her diamond earrings to the monk, Anton is walking in town when he sees a group out on an expedition. Pyotr, Nikolay, Mavriky, Lyamshin, and Liza are among the group, which consists of several other well-to-do women. They are on their way to see the prophet Semyon, who lives on the outskirts of town. Anton joins the group. On the way, they pass a hotel and are told that the body of a suicide victim has just been discovered. The police have not yet arrived, and the group walks into the hotel room to see the body. One person remarks that everything is so boring now that there's no reason to be fastidious about what one finds amusing. Another person wonders aloud why there have been so many suicides recently and says that it's as if people have lost a sense of their roots.

The two comments about the death of the person by suicide point, in part, to Dostoevsky's assessment of the state of Russia at the time. In particular, the person's comments that everything has become boring, and one shouldn't be sanctimonious about one's interests, in the novel's view, the depreciation of propriety and of moral norms, which has led to nothing being treated or considered sacred, including rituals around death. The other person's comments that people have lost a sense of their roots bring to mind Shatov's earlier statement that religion is necessary to give people in a country a collective sense of identity rooted in a common morality.



The group then travels to see Semyon. When they reach the prophet's house, several people are waiting to see him. When Semyon speaks, he gives cryptic admonishments and advice. He gives one woman, whose children attempted to kill her, bags of sugar. A monk nearby interprets the gesture as a symbol meaning that the woman needs to sweeten her heart toward her children.

This passage seems to point to some of the issues with religion that may have helped precipitate the rise of atheism. In particular, the monk's interpretation of Semyon's gesture seems to be unfeeling to the point of possible cruelty and doesn't seem to take into consideration the real struggles of the woman asking for advice. That hints at ways that religion has failed the people it aims to support.



When another man leaves, Liza tells Mavriky to kneel in the man's place. Liza's order seems to come from a desire to humiliate Mavriky. Mavriky complies, but once he does, Liza grabs him by the shoulders and asks him why he is kneeling. When he finally gets up, Liza almost runs into Nikolay. The two haven't spoken since Liza fainted at Varvara's house. When Liza comes face to face with Nikolay at Semyon's, she raises her hand as if she intends to strike Nikolay, but he quickly moves away.

Liza's treatment of Mavriky is not altogether different from Varvara's treatment of Stepan. In both cases, Liza and Varvara seem to hold most of the power in their respective relationships, and they grow frustrated when the other person in that relationship fails to assert themselves. By putting Liza face-to-face with Nikolay just after she has attempted to humiliate Mavriky, the novel suggests that her frustration with Mavriky may stem from her thwarted relationship with Nikolay.



PART 2, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 3

At the same time that the group goes to visit Semyon, Stepan and Varvara have a meeting that Varvara has been putting off for some time. Stepan goes to Varvara's house. She is busy with preparations for a gala she plans to hold after Yuliya's to let the public decide who the better host is. When Stepan arrives, Varvara tells him that she'll continue to give him a yearly allowance and will include extra money that will account for the servants and treatment he has grown accustomed to at Varvara's house. But, she says, he can no longer live in her house.

Stepan is devastated. He cries out that he knows that perhaps he came off as a leech, and he certainly took Varvara's money, but that wasn't ever his guiding motivation. He says that he was guided by something higher: love for Varvara. He begins weeping and tells Varvara that he won't take her money. By doing that, he plans to prove to her that he actually loves her. For a moment, it seems that Varvara might begin weeping, too. Instead, she says that Stepan's threats are always hollow, and he'll surely live out the rest of his days on her dime holding his weekly gatherings with his friends. Stepan returns home, deeply unhappy.

Varvara holds a meeting to declare a final split from Stepan. Varvara has reached that point, at least in part, because Pyotr has shown her Stepan's letters and suggested to her that Stepan has been using her for her money. With that in mind, the split between Varvara and Stepan shows that Pyotr's manipulations can be effective and lead to significant and irrevocable consequences.



This passage shows that Varvara has, essentially, lost faith in Stepan's integrity. In that moment, it seems that in order to avoid losing Varvara, Stepan must confront his vanity and self-importance, which have prevented him from looking honestly at himself throughout the novel. Varvara asserts that Stepan doesn't have the capacity for that kind of honest introspection. The question of whether Stepan means what he says or whether he will fail to rise to the occasion will then provide further insight into the true nature of Stepan as a character.



PART 2, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 1

As time goes on, Yuliya becomes increasingly involved in Andrey's work as governor. She persuades the governor to pass a couple of bills that are close to being illegal and pushes him to expand the power of the governor. Yuliya is easily manipulated and is moved by several competing and often contradictory ideas. She's sympathetic to landowners and aristocrats and also to freethinkers and new institutions. She also has favorites, including Pyotr. Yuliya believes that there's a vast revolutionary conspiracy in Russia aimed against the state, and she thinks that Pyotr will help her come into contact with the conspiracy, thereby exposing it and earning herself a career in the future. At the same time, she doesn't think this will earn her Pyotr's ire. Instead, she's convinced that ultimately she'll be rewarded not just by society but by history in general.

Yuliya's increased involvement in political matters, coupled with her close relationship with Pyotr, suggests that Pyotr is also gaining political influence in the town. This passage underlines that idea by depicting Yuliya as out of touch with reality. She assumes that she is in control of Pyotr and that he will do whatever she says, but the novel suggests that, in actuality, she has farfetched and contradictory aims. With that in mind, the novel implies that Pyotr—who has recently successfully manipulated Varvara and Stepan to destroy their relationship—may actually be in control of Yuliya, rather than the other way around.



PART 2, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 2

Andrey has been feeling glum recently, and Yuliya sends Pyotr to go and see him, hoping that Pyotr might be able to use his gift for words to cheer up Andrey. Andrey has been feeling low in part because an official in a nearby district was found with a tract of revolutionary pamphlets. The official also bit his immediate superior and destroyed his landlady's **icons**. Andrey senses unrest and isn't sure what to do about it. Pyotr (sent by Yuliya) then arrives in Andrey's office. Andrey admonishes Pyotr for barging in unannounced. Pyotr says he came because he has been up day and night reading Andrey's novel. Pyotr praises the novel, and Andrey's view toward Pyotr softens. Andrey then asks Pyotr to stay and sit down.

Yuliya's decision to send Pyotr to see Andrey further underlines the idea that Yuliya may be out of touch with reality, considering that she seems to think Pyotr might cheer Andrey up while Andrey has made it clear that he views Pyotr as an enemy. When Pyotr sees Andrey, though, he flatters Andrey and praises his novel. Considering that Pyotr seems to manipulate people at every opportunity to try and get what he wants, it seems more than likely that he's lavishing false praise on Andrey to get something from the governor.



PART 2, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 3

Pyotr and Andrey begin talking about the revolutionary tracts and manifestos that have been found recently. Pyotr says that he has actually come to see Andrey to ask for an extraordinary favor. He says that he knows the person who wrote one of the poems in one of the recent manifestos and wants to ensure that that person won't face any consequences. Pyotr then explains how he has come by this information. He flatters Andrey while he does so and tells Andrey that he (Pyotr) hasn't told anyone what he's found, not even Yuliya. The man who wrote the poem, Pyotr says, is Shatov.

Pyotr continues to flatter Andrey as a way to manipulate him and try and get him to do what he wants him to. Pyotr's statement that Shatov wrote the poem sheds light on Pyotr's motives. Shatov was once involved in the revolutionary movement but has since abandoned it. By telling Andrey that Shatov wrote one of the poems in the manifestos, Pyotr seems to be trying to directly implicate Shatov in the ongoing work of the revolutionary faction.



Pyotr explains that there's nothing really behind the recent appearances of the manifestos. It's just five or 10 people who don't have anything better to do, but they're not connected to a wider conspiracy, and they don't have the power to do anything. Pyotr asks Andrey to give him six days to find out who is in the group. Then, Pyotr says, he'll give Andrey the names, and Andrey can send for Shatov. Pyotr thinks that Shatov will throw himself at Andrey's feet and beg for mercy. He says that Aleksey might be one of the members of the revolutionary group too, but he, Pyotr says, doesn't care about Aleksey. He only wants to know that Shatov will be safe.

This passage also clarifies Pyotr's broader motivations for flattering and cozying up to Andrey, and, for that matter, Yuliya. By getting Andrey and Yuliya on his side, Pyotr is able to wield political influence to try and downplay the threat the revolutionary faction poses to the town and the established government. He also buys the revolutionary faction at least six days when it can continue planning without concern that governmental authorities will interfere.



Andrey agrees to the plan. He says he'll give Pyotr six days to investigate, and he plans not to punish Shatov. Andrey then shows Pyotr an anonymous letter he received the day before. The letter says that a vast conspiracy is on the verge of being carried out and that a revolutionary group with 100 or more members in its ranks is planning to hunt down generals and take down the government. The group advocates godlessness as well. The letter is signed "The Repentant Freethinker Incognito." Andrey tells Pyotr that he thinks the letter must be a joke, and Pyotr agrees. Pyotr then asks Andrey if he can take the letter. He tells Andrey that he'll look into it and figure out where it came from and what it means. Andrey gives Pyotr the letter and thanks him for his help.

Pyotr's manipulation of Andrey proves successful, showing how Pyotr gains political influence in order to advance the goals of the revolutionary faction he leads. Pyotr also uses that influence to successfully diffuse an anonymous attempt to denounce the revolutionary faction to authorities. That shows that Pyotr has effectively infiltrated the government—he's the one who alerts Andrey about his own plot to overthrow the government. This gives him power and allows him to control the narrative.



PART 2, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 4

After Pyotr leaves, Andrey's confidant, Blum, enters the room. Blum and Andrey have known each other for years, and Andrey is Blum's benefactor. Blum tells Andrey that Pyotr is suspicious and succeeded in winning Andrey to his side by praising Andrey's novel. Andrey doesn't want to hear it. Blum warns Andrey that Pyotr poses a grave risk. Blum is convinced that if they look into Stepan, they'll find the source of the manifestos and the rise of godlessness in the town. Andrey is worried that investigating Stepan will lead to consequences because Stepan is well-known. Besides, Andrey says, Stepan and Pyotr are at odds. Blum argues that Stepan was never anything but a low-ranking college lecturer dismissed for conspiring against the government. Andrey tells Blum to leave and says, "Do as you wish," as Blum goes.

Blum correctly assesses the relationship between Pyotr and Andrey when he says that Pyotr gained Andrey's confidence by flattering him. However, Blum seems to veer off track when he accuses Stepan of being the source of the revolutionary pamphlets. Notably, Blum directly connects the revolutionary movement to a rise of "godlessness" in town, further reinforcing the idea that Pyotr's revolutionary aims are directly tied to atheism. In that sense, the success of a revolutionary movement will mean a success for atheism and a blow for theism and Christianity.



PART 2, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 5

After Pyotr leaves Andrey, he goes to see the writer Karmazinov. Karmazinov recently gave Pyotr the manuscript he plans to read at the literary gathering at Yuliya's gala and is expecting a visit from Pyotr. When Pyotr enters, Karmazinov asks if he wants lunch. Karmazinov asks as a formality, expecting Pyotr to decline, but Pyotr asks for coffee and a cutlet. Karmazinov then asks Pyotr what he thought of the manuscript. Pyotr says he doesn't know what he's talking about. Karmazinov reminds him of the manuscript he gave Pyotr, and Pyotr refers to it by a different title. He then takes the crumpled manuscript from his back pocket. Pyotr says he forgot about it and didn't read much of it. Karmazinov is taken aback. He's not sure if Pyotr is playing games with him or if Pyotr is genuinely stupid.

Pyotr again shows how he manipulates people to put them off-balance and get what he wants. In this case, he denigrates Karmazinov's work, which surprises Karmazinov, who is used to enjoying effusive flattery due to his status as a literary celebrity. Karmazinov seems to recognize the possibility that Pyotr is up to something. But recognizing Pyotr's attempts at manipulation doesn't seem to comfort or help Karmazinov, who remains off-balance during the interaction despite realizing that Pyotr may have ulterior motives.



Karmazinov and Pyotr then begin talking about the manifestos that have been appearing recently. Karmazinov says that the propaganda has already been successful because people are frightened of it. He says that well-off Russians have already begun to emigrate, just as rats are the first off a sinking ship. He says that the essence of the Russian revolutionary idea is a disavowal of honor. Karmazinov says he has a surprise for the ball, but he won't tell Pyotr what it is. In a light tone, Karmazinov asks Pyotr when everything he's plotting will happen. Pyotr feigns ignorance, and Karmazinov asks again. Pyotr pauses and then says that it will start at the beginning of May and end by October. Karmazinov voluminously thanks Pyotr. Pyotr thinks that the warning will give the rat Karmazinov time to get off the ship. He's sure that Karmazinov won't inform on them.

This passage clarifies several things about the revolutionary actions Pyotr is planning. First, he has a timeline for the proposed actions. Second, the possibility of revolution is especially frightening to the wealthiest and most well-off people in Russia, who stand to lose their status, their money, and perhaps their lives if the revolution goes into action. Karmazinov's statement that the essence of the revolutionary idea is a disavowal of honor suggests, as expressed earlier in Shatov and Nikolay's previous conversation, that many people consider the revolution as incompatible with morality.



PART 2, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 6

Pyotr goes from Karmazinov's to see Aleksey. At Aleksey's lodging, Pyotr discusses Aleksey's plan to take his own life. Pyotr says that at one point, Aleksey had promised to take his own life in a way that would help the Society. Aleksey has since left the Society, but Pyotr wants to ensure that the group will still be able to use Aleksey's suicide for their own purposes. Pyotr tells Aleksey that in his suicide note, he will need to take credit for the manifestos. Aleksey agrees to do so. Pyotr then asks Aleksey to go to Virginsky's birthday party—which will provide cover for a meeting of the Society—and pose as a government inspector who is a member of the Society. Aleksey agrees to do that as well.

Pyotr continues to show the behind-the-scenes maneuvering he is involved in to try and ensure that the revolutionary faction is able to operate undetected and, ultimately, is able to succeed in its mission of overthrowing the established political system. Pyotr's maneuvering involves gaining influence with people in power like Yuliya and Andrey but also using people like Aleksey to achieve the goals of the revolution, even though Aleksey seems otherwise uninvolved in the revolutionary faction.



Pyotr and Aleksey then discuss Fedka. Aleksey has been seeing Fedka every night. Pyotr worries that those conversations will turn Fedka into a Christian. Aleksey tells Pyotr that Fedka is already a Christian, and that won't stop him from committing the murder in the future. Neither Pyotr nor Aleksey say who will be murdered. Pyotr leaves and goes to talk to Shatov. While talking with Shatov, Pyotr discloses that he sent the poem that appeared in the manifestos to Shatov and asked Shatov to publish it, but Shatov refused to do so. Pyotr says that Shatov has come under suspicion in the Society, though Pyotr has tried to clear his name. Pyotr urges Shatov to come to the Society meeting on Virginsky's birthday or else he'll face persecution from the Society and will be hanged once the revolution is successful.

This passage hints at the extent of Pyotr's manipulations and the way he uses a web of lies to get different people to do what he wants them to. In this case, this conversation makes it clear that Shatov did not in fact write the poem in the manifestos (as Pyotr told Andrey) and instead, Shatov refused to print the poem, which Pyotr sent him. Pyotr then says he is trying to clear Shatov's name in the revolutionary faction. Pyotr says that, though, to make it possible to threaten Shatov with violence and death, which shows again the threats that Pyotr and the revolutionary faction seem to regularly use to compel allegiance and discourage defection.



PART 2, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 7

Pyotr then goes to see Nikolay. When Pyotr arrives, Nikolay is talking with Mavriky behind closed doors. Pyotr can't hear the conversation. Behind the doors, Mavriky, who is engaged to Liza, tells Nikolay that he (Nikolay) should marry Liza. Mavriky explains that Liza is in love with Nikolay. Nikolay says that he can't marry Liza because he is already married. Mavriky is taken aback. He can't believe that Nikolay has tormented Liza despite being married. He storms out of the room.

Pyotr then enters. He tells Nikolay that they should go to Virginsky's birthday party, which is a cover for a Society meeting. Nikolay asks how many members will be there, and Pyotr says there are hardly any in this circle. He then explains that socialism has spread in Russia first by establishing elaborate hierarchies, which attract people's attention, and second through sentimentality. Nikolay says that sentimentality and rank are all well and good, but what would really tie a movement together is ensuring that all of the members become complicit in the murder of someone they believe will inform on them. Pyotr thinks that Nikolay will soon see what his words mean. As they walk to Virginsky's, Nikolay asks Pyotr if he is a member of the secret police. Pyotr says he isn't.

Mavriky makes it clear how obvious it is that Liza, despite her engagement to him, is still in love with Nikolay. That clarifies why Liza has seemed so distraught for much of the novel. She seems to be hopelessly in love with Nikolay, while Nikolay doesn't give her feelings much consideration.



Pyotr's comments about how socialism has spread through the creation of hierarchies and through sentimentality make Pyotr's cynicism clear. He thinks that the increase in people advocating for socialism is based on appealing to people's desire for superiority (which seems to go against the precepts of socialism) and their most easily manipulated emotions, rather than for more noble reasons. Nikolay's question of whether Pyotr is a member of the secret police also makes clear the level of paranoia that exists in the revolutionary movement.



PART 2, CHAPTER 7, SECTION 1

About 10 to 15 people gather at Virginsky's for the secret Society meeting. Aleksey and Shatov are both there. There are also five people, called the group of five, who belong to a secret revolutionary faction. Not even the other people at the party know who they are. The group of five includes Liputin, Virginsky, Shigalyov, Lyamshin, and a man named Tolkachenko. Each of these men believes that their group of five is one among hundreds or thousands of linked "groups of five" that are scattered through Russia and working secretly but in concert to achieve a revolution throughout all of Russia.

This passage provides insight into the internal structure of the revolutionary faction that Pyotr leads. Notably, Nikolay previously said that he assisted the revolutionary faction in implementing a new internal structure, and since doing that, he has been unable to separate himself from the group. The intense secrecy surrounding the group of five points makes it clear that, to work effectively, the group essentially has to take it on faith that other groups of five actually exist, as they have no direct evidence (due to the shroud of secrecy) to support those beliefs.



PART 2, CHAPTER 7, SECTION 2

At Virginsky's house, the group begins by discussing whether God exists. From there, they discuss whether morality exists. A student attempts to bring forth the plight of students for the group to discuss, but another person interrupts and asks whether they are meeting or not. The group then descends into a series of mix-ups and hijinks as they attempt to vote about whether they are involved in a meeting or not. Eventually, they decide that they are, in fact, meeting. Someone asks Pyotr and Nikolay if they have anything to say, but both declines to speak.

This passage provides another example of satire in the novel. In this case, the revolutionary faction, engaged in a meeting that Pyotr has organized, cannot decide whether they are in fact meeting or not. Just to reach that decision requires a significant amount of back and forth between the members of the group, and agreement is by no means easy to come by. The Society's ability to effectively organize and work together then comes into question.



Shigalyov decides to speak up and put a matter forward for discussion. He says that he has been working through figures in his notebook. He started with the aim of showing how universal freedom would be possible, but, he says, he ended up arriving at the opposite conclusion. Instead, for an earthly paradise to be achieved, one must turn to almost unlimited despotism. Nine-tenths of humanity must become a form of livestock serving one-tenth of humanity. Several members of the group are appalled by Shigalyov's suggestion, but some speak up in defense of his idea. Pyotr in particular says the idea is preposterous.

Pyotr gets into an argument with a schoolteacher about the idea. Pyotr then asks the group if they would be willing to join a "group of five." Everyone is surprised that Pyotr has brought up the groups, as their existence is considered highly confidential. Pyotr then asks if everyone at the meeting would be ready to go all-in to support the cause of the revolution, even if it means "a hundred million heads" (or killing a hundred million people). Everyone responds with resounding cries that they are ready. Pyotr brings up the idea that there may be an informer among them. To ferret out a possible informer, Pyotr poses a question to each person in the group: would they inform authorities if they learned of a planned political assassination, or would they let the assassination proceed?

Pyotr asks the schoolteacher first. Reluctantly, the schoolteacher eventually says that he would not inform. Pyotr turns to another person who says that he would not inform either. Shatov then stands up and leaves the house. Several people cry out that Shatov must be an informer. Nikolay and Aleksey then stand up to leave, and people say that they may be informers, too, as they haven't answered Pyotr's question. Nikolay says that Pyotr hasn't answered his own question, so he may also be an informer. That causes an uproar in the group. Pyotr urges Nikolay to go with Aleksey to his house. At first, Nikolay refuses, but when Aleksey interjects, Nikolay agrees to go with him.

Shigalyov's ideas point to the lack of clarity the revolutionary movement has about the changes they wish to implement through the revolution. Many people in the group find Shigalyov's ideas abhorrent and consider his positions antithetical to the changes they hope to achieve, but there doesn't seem to be a consensus about what a more just and free society would look like after their proposed revolution. With that in mind, Dostoevsky uses Shigalyov's ideas to suggest vacuums of power (which could occur after the revolution) can bring with them the danger of tyranny and despotism, even if that outcome is antithetical to the principles that led to revolution.



Pyotr's statements about the "hundred million heads" serve as a kind of purity test for the revolutionary faction. In Pyotr's view, one isn't a true revolutionary unless one is willing to spill the blood of millions of people to ensure the revolution is successful. In that way, Pyotr uses the idea of killing a hundred million people to test the extent to which each person in the group believes that single-minded devotion to ideological purity is more important than human life. The novel ultimately shows that that devotion to ideological purity, and valuing ideology over human life, is the mark of extremism.



In this passage, Pyotr makes his purity test of the revolutionary faction more direct by asking each member a question that is meant to determine whether they may be an informer. The way that the group immediately turns on Shatov when he refuses to answer the question is an example of herd mentality, whereby people sacrifice their individual morality to appease a group. That immediate denunciation of Shatov also shows the risk of opposing the group, as it seems clear that Shatov is now considered a likely enemy, which could put a target on his back.



PART 2, CHAPTER 8, SECTION 1

Pyotr considers returning to the party to restore order but decides that it will be pointless. Instead, he runs after Aleksey and Nikolay. The three go to Aleksey's house. At Aleksey's house, Pyotr shows Aleksey and Nikolay the anonymous letter that Andrey received. Pyotr says that Lebyadkin must have written the letter, and he asks Nikolay for money to pay off Lebyadkin so he won't bring the Society's plans to the governor. Pyotr says the money will help "take care" of Marya (implying that he would have Marya killed). Nikolay says that he has no intention of paying any money and doesn't want anything to happen to Marya.

Nikolay says that Pyotr should have Shatov killed. He already established at the party that Shatov could be an informer. If the group of five killed Shatov, Nikolay reasons, then they would be bound as accomplices in a crime. Nikolay says that Fedka approached him asking for money to kill Marya as well. He suggests that Pyotr is trying to catch Nikolay committing a crime and then use that evidence to blackmail Nikolay and keep him under his (Pyotr's) control. Aleksey reveals that Fedka is in the apartment and has been listening to the conversation the whole time.

Nikolay leaves. Pyotr follows him and begins spouting different ideas so fervently and haphazardly that Nikolay suspects he is drunk. At first, Pyotr says that he supports Shigalyov's ideas of despotism and enslavement of nine-tenths of the population. Then he says he doesn't support that idea because it's not feasible. Eventually, Pyotr says that he is not a socialist but a scoundrel. He then reveals his plan to Nikolay. He intends to use the rhetoric of socialism and the mechanism of revolution to dismantle the established political system. Once that system is destroyed, Pyotr aims to install another system of his own design. In other words, he is interested in politics for his self-interest. He says that he wants to create a mythology around a charismatic leader who will step in as a new ruler. He wants Nikolay to play the part of that ruler. Nikolay walks away without responding.

Pyotr continues to show the extent to which he tries to manipulate others to keep them under his control. In this case, he tries to elicit payment from Nikolay to hire Fedka to murder Marya. If Nikolay agreed, Pyotr would have evidence of Nikolay committing a crime, which Pyotr could use to blackmail Nikolay and exert even more control over Nikolay. In response, though, Nikolay makes it clear that he cares about Marya and doesn't want anything bad to happen to her.



While Nikolay recognizes that Pyotr is trying to entrap him by coaxing him into committing a crime, he also proposes that Pyotr do the same thing to the group of five. If that group kills Shatov, the members will all be accomplices in a crime, and Pyotr will be able to blackmail them to compel their continued allegiance to the cause. That provides an example of Nikolay's lack of morality, as he recognizes the immorality of the plan but in the end, he isn't concerned with how wrong it is—he just wants to save himself.



Pyotr reveals his true motivations for embracing and advocating for revolution. He is not devoted to socialist ideas or to helping people in need find freedom and justice. Instead, he is strictly motivated by his own desires. He wants to amass and hoard power for himself and is essentially exploiting the socialist movement in order to try and achieve those goals. Pyotr also reveals that he has been fixated on Nikolay at least in part because he views Nikolay as the charismatic leader who could step in and be the face of the movement that Pyotr envisions. Whether Nikolay will play along, however, remains to be seen.



PART 2, CHAPTER 9, SECTION 1

One day, Blum comes from the office of the governor (Andrey) and searches Stepan's house. Anton arrives at Stepan's just after the search is finished. Stepan is disconsolate. He says that Andrey must have received a telegram and that he's sure he will be arrested, denounced, flogged, or all three. Anton tries to console Stepan and says there must not be anything to implicate Stepan. Stepan says that Blum found manifestos among his things. Stepan says that he has nothing to do with the people who wrote them. The manifestos were simply dropped off at his house. Stepan destroyed eight of them but kept two, which Blum found. Anton asks Stepan if he will tell Varvara what happened, and Stepan says he can't imagine doing that. Instead, Stepan decides to go see Andrey directly so that he can determine what his fate will be. Anton goes with him.

Stepan says he can't imagine telling Varvara about the search, which shows how Stepan's rift with Varvara has also deprived him of his most powerful ally in town. That leaves Stepan relatively powerless. His assertion that he'll be arrested, denounced, and flogged points again to Stepan's histrionics. Despite his admission that he is not involved in the revolutionary movement, Stepan cannot seem to help but envision himself as the central character in a government plot to take down anyone it deems a political threat.



PART 2, CHAPTER 10, SECTION 1

As Anton and Stepan leave Stepan's house, a crowd of about 70 factory workers has gathered and is marching toward the governor's office and the town square. They are protesting the actions of the factory manager, who recently shut down the factory without paying the workers their due wages. Anton doesn't know how the rumor that the group of workers is a revolutionary mob gets started. He says that among the group, perhaps one or two—at most five—workers are revolutionaries. The police arrive, and someone goes to fetch the governor (Andrey) to make sure he comes.

The rumor that the factory workers are involved in revolutionary politics points again to the role that rumors play in the novel. Regardless of who created the rumor or why, the fact that the rumor exists points to the near-hysteria in town regarding the revolutionary faction. In that atmosphere, it's easy for people to believe that a group marching to the governor's office is part of a widespread plot to overthrow the government. It then makes it easy to dehumanize the workers, who just want the pay they're due.



At the same time, at his house, Andrey gets into an enormous fight with Yuliya. More than anything, the fight is about Pyotr. During the fight, Andrey lets it slip that he is jealous of Yuliya's relationship with Pyotr. He says that Pyotr is an atheist, and he as the governor is obligated to support faith in God. That means that Yuliya must follow suit. He also says that Pyotr is an agitator. Yuliya says that it's all talk and that no action will come from it. Andrey says he'll throw Pyotr in jail, and Yuliya becomes angry. She laughs derisively at Andrey, and Andrey lifts his fist over Yuliya. He doesn't strike her, but the gesture is appalling both to Yuliya and to him. He shuts himself in his room and sleeps.

Andrey continues to battle with Yuliya about Pyotr and Pyotr's role in the revolutionary faction. Yuliya's assertion that the revolutionaries and Pyotr are all talk and no action again shows that Yuliya is perhaps perilously out of touch with reality. In each situation, she seems to believe that she knows exactly what is going on and how to pull the levers to achieve the results she desires, when in reality she often overestimates her own capacities and seems to be woefully oblivious to Pyotr's true motives and abilities.



When Andrey wakes up, a servant tells him that Yuliya has gone with Varvara to inspect a location for the next gala. Another person then tells Andrey about the crowd of factory workers. Andrey rushes to meet the crowd. When he arrives, he shouts at the police officers to ready their birch rods (which are used for flogging). He thinks he sees Pyotr in the crowd and tells officers to seize him. Anton and Stepan are also near the crowd. Anton tries to keep Stepan out of it, but Stepan goes into the middle of the crowd. While there, one of the officers singles out Stepan and grabs him by the collar. Andrey says no, and Anton grabs Stepan and drags him out of the crowd. Anton tells Stepan that they have Andrey to thank for avoiding a beating. They then go together to try and speak to Yuliya.

This passage shows that Andrey's fervency is guided more by personal animosity toward Pyotr, and by the fallout from his fight with Yuliya, than by a sense of civic duty or governmental responsibility. In that spirit, Andrey orders police officers to beat the crowd of factory workers that has gathered, which only adds to the hysteria. That depiction shows that if the revolutionary faction's goal is to sow chaos in the town, then they have already begun to succeed in important ways.



PART 2, CHAPTER 10, SECTION 2

While Anton and Stepan are waiting to see Yuliya, Andrey storms into the building. Stepan rises to meet him. Andrey asks who he is, and Stepan elaborately introduces himself. Andrey seems confused and isn't really sure who Stepan is, but when Stepan says that he used to teach, Andrey launches into a diatribe about the harm of the manifestos that the town's young people have been circulating. Stepan says he has nothing to do with that and has instead come to bow out of participating in Yuliya's upcoming gala.

Andrey begins to lose any sense of decorum and seems to be becoming increasingly mentally unstable. Again, that plays into Pyotr and the revolutionary faction's plans to sow chaos in the town. In essence, it seems that they are already succeeding in destabilizing the government, as Andrey appears to be coming apart at the seams and doesn't know how to handle the perceived threat.



Andrey says that there will be no gala. Stepan then says that he wants to know why his house was searched and his personal papers seized earlier in the day. Andrey asks who seized Stepan's things. Just then, Blum walks in, and Stepan points him out. Andrey becomes indignant and tells Blum that he is always doing stupid things. Andrey apologizes to Stepan and assures him that it was a misunderstanding. Stepan isn't fully satisfied by that apology. Yuliya then returns.

The search on Stepan's house comes to nothing, even though Stepan previously believed that it would result in his arrest and his flogging. That reinforces the depiction of Stepan as a histrionic and over-the-top character who can't seem to help but view himself as persecuted. Instead, though, the novel shows that Stepan is, at most, the victim of an overzealous Blum rather than the center of a government surveillance apparatus.



PART 2, CHAPTER 10, SECTION 3

Yuliya enters accompanied by Karmazinov, Varvara, Liza, and others. Yuliya and Karmazinov go to Stepan and speak to him flatteringly. Yuliya then invites everyone, including Stepan, into the salon. Yuliya pointedly ignores Andrey. In the salon, Yuliya continues to shower Stepan with flattery. Karmazinov announces that the gala will represent his final contribution to literature. After the gala, he plans to retire. Karmazinov and Yuliya press Stepan to perform at the gala tomorrow. Stepan seems reluctant, but he clearly enjoys the attention.

Flattery is one of the main tools of manipulation used by characters in the novel. In this case, Yuliya and Karmazinov use flattery to try and get Stepan to read at the gala. Karmazinov, a famous writer, also says he plans to retire after the gala, which makes it seem like the gala will be a momentous event. Stepan's enjoyment of the attention also makes it clear that, perhaps more than anything, Stepan has always wanted people to pay attention and admire him.



Pyotr and Nikolay then enter. Nikolay asks Stepan if he was arrested earlier, and Stepan says he wasn't and that it was only a misunderstanding. Pyotr remarks on the search along with the policeman grabbing Stepan and says that Stepan must be enjoying the attention in the governor's salon. Andrey then enters. He loudly (and cryptically) says that people have been identified and measures have been taken. He storms out of the room and trips on the carpet as he leaves. Yuliya rushes after him.

Those who remain in the salon remark that Andrey might be "deranged," and people gossip about the personal issues between Andrey and Yuliya. Yuliya returns. She tries to save face by saying that the gala tomorrow will surely brighten Andrey's mood. As the group prepares to leave, Liza approaches Nikolay. She says that a man named Lebyadkin, who claims to be Nikolay's relation, has been pestering her with letters and claims to know secrets about Nikolay. Nikolay says that it's true that he is Lebyadkin's relation, as he married Lebyadkin's sister Marya five years ago. People in the room are shocked, including Nikolay's mother, Varvara. When Anton and Stepan return to Stepan's house, Stepan practices his reading for the gala in front of a mirror.

This passage continues to depict Andrey's descent into mental instability. The section also provides another example of the novel's satirical impulses, as Andrey trips over the carpet while he is trying to make a serious point about tracking down the revolutionaries. In that sense, the novel uses humor to depict Andrey as in over his head in his battle with the revolutionaries.



This is the first time that Nikolay has publicly revealed that he and Marya are married. He reveals that directly to Liza, who is in love with Nikolay. The people in the salon say that Andrey's mental instability is related to the issues between him and Yuliya. Those issues show another example of Pyotr breaking up a relationship to advance his own aims, similar to what he previously did to Varvara and Stepan. Amid that upheaval, Stepan returns home and reads in the mirror, providing another example of his vanity and how that vanity takes precedence over all other concerns.



PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 1

The day of the gala finally arrives. The gala is still happening, despite the events concerning the factory workers of the day before. Anton thinks the event would happen even if Andrey had died the night before. That's how devoted Yuliya is to the idea of the gala. Several people speculate that some scandal or upheaval will occur at the gala. There's also a great deal of anticipation. To increase the subscription fees, Karmazinov has agreed to read his farewell piece dressed as a governess from the province. And there are rumors that princes may appear. Everyone in town decides to go.

Anton's observation that Yuliya would have gone forward with the gala even if Andrey died the night before points to how devoted Yuliya is to the gala and also suggests that Yuliya, at this point at least, is not terribly concerned with her husband's well-being. Expectations and anticipation for the gala couldn't be higher. Those high expectations, though, also make it possible that people will be disappointed.



PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 2

The gala is divided into two sections, a literary reading with a ball to follow. Because the ticket prices are so expensive, rumors begin that a banquet lunch will be offered as well. When the gala is about to start, the crowd grows restless as it takes Yuliya and Andrey much longer than expected to arrive and begin the proceedings. After they arrive, Lebyadkin drunkenly wanders onstage, eliciting cries and mocking cheers. Liputin ushers him offstage and returns.

Despite months of planning, the gala gets off to a rocky start when Lebyadkin wanders on stage. The novel has previously established that Lebyadkin tends to add to the chaos of any situation. Considering that the revolutionary faction seems intent on destabilizing the status quo, Lebyadkin's presence may work in their favor.



Liputin tells the audience he has an introductory poem to read, and the poem is intended as a joke. He begins to read the poem, and some people shout that Lebyadkin wrote it. People in the audience laugh, but by the end of the poem, they are scandalized by its irreverence. Anton is sure that Liputin read the poem intentionally to stir up controversy and prepare the audience for an upheaval later in the gala. Immediately after Liputin leaves the stage, Karmazinov takes the stage to read his farewell poem, which minimizes the fallout from the offensive poem Liputin read.

Anton confronts Liputin backstage. Liputin says there was nothing to the poem. He had been handed it just before taking the stage and thought it would be a joke. He asks Anton what business it is of his anyway. Anton feels like something bad is about to happen, but he doesn't know who to talk to about it. Stepan is busy preparing for his reading and is not available. Anton thinks that once whatever is going to happen takes place, he'll simply take off the rosette designating him as a steward and leave the gala.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 3

Instead of reading a light fictional tale for perhaps 20 minutes, as would be fitting for the event, Karmazinov drones on for close to an hour reading a convoluted, self-aggrandizing treatise about love. Though the audience initially reacts to the presence of a literary "genius" like Karmazinov with respect, eventually they grow bored and tired. From the back, someone shouts that Karmazinov's speech is rubbish. More voices chime in to heckle Karmazinov. Karmazinov is embarrassed, and his face grows red. Eventually, he says that he will cut his reading short and only read the final six lines of what he has written. After he leaves the stage, the audience is visibly restless. Someone asks if it's true that there will be no buffet, and another person says that the gala is a sham. Stepan must then take the stage amid that unrest.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 4

Anton rushes backstage to talk to Stepan. He tells Stepan that the crowd has descended into disorder and is on the verge of chaos. He urges Stepan not to go on, but Stepan ignores Anton's advice. Anton also takes note of a visiting professor who is supposed to read after Stepan. The professor is pacing and raising his fist at irregular intervals. Anton warns the professor that it would be best not to read for more than 20 minutes. The professor tells Anton that he'll be fine.

The gala continues in a clumsy fashion. The audience's reaction to the poem Liputin reads makes it clear that the audience is on edge and, so far, is getting something other than what they signed up for. Karmazinov's presence momentarily subdues the agitation. Notably, though, Karmazinov has previously been established as a satirical character who cares more about people's adoration of him than putting other people at ease.



Anton's assertion that Liputin intentionally read an offensive poem and his premonition that something bad will happen points to the atmosphere pervading the town. Everyone feels like the revolutionary faction is at work behind the scenes, but no one can pinpoint exactly what they are doing or what their goals are.



Karmazinov again shows that he is much more concerned with himself and his self-aggrandizement than anyone else, and he once again lets his ego get the better of him. In this case, though, consequences follow from his actions. In particular, the audience grows increasingly agitated, restless, and hostile. The novel has depicted how expectations for the gala were extremely high, and now the gala is decidedly falling short of what people expected. That includes the lack of food and the middling and scandalous quality of the readings.



Anton observes that the audience has turned into a kind of powder keg and seems ready to explode at any moment. In the face of that impending chaos, Anton is devoted to maintaining order. Notably, Yuliya organized the gala, suggesting that the gala is a symbol of the established prevailing system of order. With that in mind, destabilizing that order seems to align with the goals of the revolutionary faction.



Stepan takes the stage. The crowd is murmuring and doesn't take any notice of him. Stepan then raises his voice and says that this morning, he saw one of the manifestos that has been circulating. The crowd grows silent. Stepan continues and says that the manifestos are, in essence, paeans to stupidity. Some members of the crowd tell Stepan to stop talking. Others urge him to continue. Yuliya motions to Anton to get Stepan to stop, and Anton shrugs. He thinks that Stepan has decided to risk it all, and there's nothing he (Anton) can do about that now. Stepan continues and says that he intends to find some kind of reconciliation. He adds that Shakespeare and Raphael are worth more than the emancipation of the peasants and socialism.

Some members of the audience leave their chairs and move closer to the stage. Stepan continues and says he is simply arguing that the revolutionary factions overlook the importance of beauty. He then breaks down in sobs. The crowd seems panicked. One person shouts that Fedka, who has been in town robbing people and has recently committed another murder, was first sent to the army because Stepan lost a bet. What good is Stepan's aestheticism when it causes him to create blunders that lead the whole town to contend with someone like Fedka? the man asks. A small faction of the audience wildly applauds. Other people move to leave, but there's too much commotion in the crowd for anyone to easily move. Stepan responds to the outburst by saying, "I curse you."

Stepan runs backstage. Someone shouts out that Stepan has insulted the Society. The visiting professor then takes the stage. He seems hysterical and to relish the chaos. He talks about the corruption and issues that have beset Russia in recent years and then lifts his fist. The crowd responds enthusiastically. Six officers come from backstage and try to seize the man, but he escapes. Members of the Society go to help the visiting professor. Anton takes the rosette from his shoulder that designates him as a steward and leaves. He makes his way to Stepan's house.

PART 3, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 1

Anton arrives at Stepan's house, but Stepan won't let him in. Through the door, Stepan says he is done with all people. Anton keeps knocking, but Stepan doesn't budge and eventually walks away from the door, leaving Anton alone. Stepan then writes a letter to Darya. In the letter, Stepan says that Darya wasn't there to see him stand up to the young revolutionaries and tell them exactly what they are: fools. He writes that he plans to leave town forever, and he does not want Darya to think that he doesn't appreciate her and isn't grateful to her.

In the novel, socialism is depicted as a system of government that relies on materialism in the sense that it uses reason and science as its foundation. With that in mind, Stepan is arguing against that version of socialism when he proclaims the importance of Shakespeare and Raphael. In essence, he is saying that there is something ephemeral, immaterial, and invaluable about art that can't be captured by reason and science. That is similar to Shatov's previous arguments about the shortcomings of reason and science with regard to morality and religion.



The emancipation of the peasants, mentioned in the previous section, is the emancipation reform of 1861 in which 23 million serfs in Russia gained freedom and independence. Before that, Fedka was Stepan's serf, and the person in the crowd asserts that Stepan's irresponsibility and exploitation of Fedka contributed to Fedka becoming a murderer and unleashing chaos in town now. That points to Stepan's apparent hypocrisy, as he claimed to embrace progressive policies while his actions tell a different story.



This passage shows how Pyotr's revolutionary faction (or the "Society") seems to relish and actively contribute to chaos. Notably, the chaos comes during an event put on by the governor's wife, Yuliya, signaling how the revolutionary faction attempts to undermine prevailing systems of power and authority. As the faction challenges that authority, the crowd responds with enthusiasm, signaling that there may be a wellspring of potential supporters for a movement that aims to take down the established order.



Stepan seems to have finally taken action and shown a different side of himself. While he has previously been portrayed as a vain man prone to histrionics who lives off Varvara's goodwill, he now seems determined to show honor and integrity. This passage also seems to close the storyline around Darya and Stepan's engagement and potential marriage and shows that they will not in fact be married.



PART 3, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 2

Anton then goes to see Yuliya. Pyotr is with her. Yuliya blames the upheaval that occurred at the first half of the gala on Pyotr's absence. She says that there must have been a plot to ensure things didn't go as planned and accuses Pyotr of being part of that plot. She wants to call off the second half of the gala, which is the ball. Pyotr uses various arguments to try and convince Yuliya to go forward with the ball as planned. Eventually, she relents and agrees. Pyotr also tells Yuliya to send doctors to Stepan's house and remand him to a hospital. That way, everyone in town will know that he's not to be taken seriously.

Pyotr tells Yuliya and Anton that Liza has abandoned Mavriky and run off with Nikolay. Pyotr says that the marshal's wife arranged the affair, but Anton cries out that Pyotr must have done it. After yelling at Pyotr, Anton runs from the house. He is devastated because he has feelings for Yuliya. He visits various houses to see if he can confirm his suspicions that Pyotr arranged for Liza to go with Nikolay. He makes inquiries of servants at Liza's and Pyotr's houses to try and ascertain their recent activity, and his suspicions are confirmed. Anton then goes to see Shatov and asks him if he plans to see Marya. Shatov says no, but Anton later learns that Shatov goes to see Marya and finds her in good health. Anton then goes to the ball because he wants to find out what everyone is saying about the day's events.

Yuliya begins to catch on that Pyotr may not be under her control and that he may, in fact, be in direct opposition to her. Still, despite Yuliya's burgeoning awareness of Pyotr's power, Pyotr is able to manipulate her again in order to ensure the rest of the gala continues as planned. Pyotr's insistence that the ball continues also suggests that Pyotr likely has something more planned.



Anton also begins to see the extent of Pyotr's manipulations, as he confirms his suspicions that Pyotr helped arrange for Liza to leave Mavriky for Nikolay. That shows again that Pyotr is a master manipulator who is able to pull strings behind the scenes to get people to do what he wants them to. Notably, Pyotr can do that over and over again while largely avoiding detection. That is another sign of Pyotr's talent and skill as a backroom politician, as he wields a significant amount of power despite only arriving in town a few months ago.



PART 3, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 3

When Anton arrives at the ball, he's surprised to see that Pyotr is acting as a steward. Anton roves through the party, picking up on bits of gossip, particularly about Liza and Nikolay. Eventually, the "literary quadrille" begins, which is a choreographed dance that references pieces of literature. Liputin and Lyamshin take part. Anton stands behind Yuliya. At one point, Pyotr walks up to Yuliya, and Yuliya tells him to get away from her and stop deceiving her. During the dance, the audience grows restless again and begins making snide remarks. Lyamshin begins walking on his hands, which Andrey takes as a sign of disrespect. Laughter breaks through the audience. Andrey yells at Lyamshin to stop and says that everyone who is laughing should leave.

This passage shows the pattern and goals of much of the revolutionary faction's actions up to this point. While Lyamshin's decision to walk on his hands during a dance may seem innocuous enough, it also seems to make a mockery of the proceedings. That shows that the revolutionary faction isn't only intent on violent overthrow of the government. Instead, part of their plan seems to be to challenge established norms and make fun of those norms so that people begin to take those norms less seriously.



As Andrey yells, someone from the audience calls him a fool. Yuliya tries to restore order by telling the crowd that Andrey is not in his right mind. She worries that the events of the morning are repeating themselves. Someone then shouts that there is a fire across the river. Everyone rushes to look and sees that it's true. Someone else yells out that the ball has been held to provide an opportunity for the act of arson. Other people shout and blame the factory workers who protested the day before. Andrey shouts that no one can leave. He wants to conduct a search to find out who is responsible. Yuliya tries to get Andrey to calm down, and Andrey yells that Yuliya should be searched first because the ball was held so that the fire could be set. Yuliya faints. The crowd rushes to see the fire.

This passage shows that the revolutionary faction's attempts to undermine the power of people in authority, including Andrey, have already been successful, at least to some extent. In this case, when Andrey tries to restore order, someone in the crowd calls him a fool, showing that his power has already been diminished. That diminishment then holds very real consequences when part of the town goes up in flames. The revolutionary faction also seems to have been successful in creating an atmosphere of paranoia and hysteria in town, as Anton turns against Yuliya—his own wife—and accuses her of being complicit in the arson, even though she has no apparent involvement in the fire.



PART 3, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 4

The crowd, including Anton and Andrey, rush to the fire. The fire brigade is able to contain the fire and is helped by a change in the wind. Still, about a quarter of the buildings on the street across the river have gone up in flames. At one point, Andrey sees Pyotr and accuses him of starting the fire. He yells that Pyotr should be arrested, and a police officer says that Pyotr is helping put out the fire. Andrey then rushes to help a woman escape a burning house. A board falls on him and knocks him unconscious. Later, Anton adds, it becomes clear that three factory workers started the fire with help from Fedka.

Again, Pyotr shows his capacity to shape public perception of him by fighting a fire that, considering his role in the revolutionary faction, he could have had a hand in helping to start. That role seems even more likely when Anton says that Fedka helped start the fire. Pyotr has previously used Fedka to do his dirty work, including trying to get Nikolay to pay Fedka to murder Marya and Lebyadkin.



There is also a solitary house that was set on fire. Since it's far from the main group of buildings, the fire must have been started independently. The owner of the building manages to put it out before the fire spreads, thus preserving the building. Inside, Lebyadkin, Marya, and a servant are dead. Their throats have been cut, and Marya's body has been stabbed all over. If the fire had consumed the building, it would have been difficult to determine what happened to the people inside, as their bodies would have been charred. Moreover, chatter in the crowd says that Nikolay had rented the building for Marya and Lebyadkin and that Marya had been Nikolay's wife. People add that Nikolay ran off with Liza just before the fire, and they say that Marya was killed so Nikolay could marry Liza.

The fact that Fedka is involved in starting the fire and Marya and Lebyadkin are killed places suspicion on both Nikolay and Pyotr, though it's worth noting that Nikolay previously said that he didn't want anything bad to happen to Marya. Regardless, the crowd concludes that Nikolay had Marya murdered so he and Liza could be together. The crowd's conclusion provides another example of the dangerous impacts of herd mentality, as the group jumps to conclusions before having more evidence about what actually may have happened.



PART 3, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 1

While the fire is raging, Liza and Nikolay have a conversation in the great hall of Varvara's estate, Skvoreshniki. Nikolay tells Liza that he has sent someone to determine what is happening but that he's heard that the neighborhood across the river is on fire. Nikolay and Liza go back and forth, contentiously discussing whether they can stay together. Liza says that it's impossible because Nikolay is married. Pyotr then enters and says he must speak to Nikolay. Nikolay leaves the room to talk to him.

This passage provides a window into the ongoing love affair between Nikolay and Liza. It also points to the impacts of Nikolay's approach to life. Nikolay married Marya to entertain himself and his friends. His impulse to disregard norms of morality and propriety has led to serious, irreversible consequences, as Marya has been murdered, apparently as a result of becoming mixed up in Nikolay's attempts to scorn established norms.



PART 3, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 2

Pyotr tells Nikolay that Lebyadkin, Marya, and a servant have been killed. He says that because of the confluence of events, he and Nikolay won't be suspected of the murder. Instead, Lebyadkin had been waving his money around earlier in the day, which led Fedka to try and steal it when he started the fire with the three factory workers. Pyotr says that even though people in town are saying Nikolay had Marya killed so he could marry Liza, he (Nikolay) is clear from a legal perspective. He says Nikolay should be clear morally too, as he didn't want the murder to happen. Pyotr says that now that Marya is dead, Nikolay is free to marry Liza. Pyotr also says that Mavriky is outside and appears to have stood there for the entire night, waiting for Liza.

Because Pyotr has shown himself time and again to be someone who withholds the truth depending on his audience and is determined to manipulate others to get what he wants, it's reasonable to be suspicious of whether he is telling the truth, particularly regarding whether Fedka killed Lebyadkin as part of a robbery. Due to the unreliability of Pyotr's narration, it seems likely that something other than Lebyadkin's money motivated Fedka to seek out Lebyadkin and Marya and murder them before setting fire to their house.



Nikolay accuses Pyotr of killing Marya. Pyotr denies any involvement. When they return to Liza, she asks what they were discussing. Nikolay says that his wife, her brother, and a servant have been murdered. Pyotr adds that Nikolay is not at fault. Liza asks if that's true. Nikolay says that it's not and that while he didn't want the murder to occur, he knew that it would, and he didn't stop the killers. Liza is horrified. She runs out of the house. Pyotr turns to Nikolay and asks him if he intends to inform on everyone. He pulls out a revolver. Nikolay tells Pyotr to go ahead and kill him. Pyotr says it wouldn't make a difference, since Nikolay is asking for the bullet. The two then part ways.

Nikolay is also skeptical of Pyotr's explanation of Marya's murder. Nikolay's statement that he feels like he's in part at fault for Marya's murder because he didn't speak up to stop it shows the limitations of Nikolay's idea that he is beyond morality and that good and evil don't apply to him. He seems to have tested that idea by failing to speak up to ensure that Marya wasn't killed. Now that she has been killed, though, instead of feeling indifferent, Nikolay feels guilty, showing the hold Nikolay's conscience has on him despite his earlier belief that he is above having a conscience.



PART 3, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 3

Pyotr rushes to catch up with Liza. He tries to convince Liza to go with him, but Liza wants to see the bodies of the people who were murdered. Pyotr asks if Liza wants to see Mavriky, who is nearby, and Liza says she doesn't want him to see her. Pyotr asks if she is concerned about infidelity and the "virginity business" and adds that the convention is outdated. Liza says she wants to run away and breaks off in a run across a field. She trips, and Mavriky sees her and runs to catch up to her. Pyotr leaves.

Liza is shaken and devastated by the news of Nikolay's involvement in Marya's death. The novel juxtaposes Liza's distress with Pyotr's indifference. The novel presents those two reactions side by side to show that Pyotr's indifferent reaction is alarming and disturbing, while Liza's is more understandable. Through that juxtaposition, the novel criticizes the cold, unfeeling, and extremist approach of Pyotr and his revolutionary faction.



When Mavriky catches up to Liza, Liza says that she's not worthy of him. Mavriky says he's in no position to judge her. Liza tells Mavriky not to forgive her. She then says she wants to see the bodies of the people who were murdered. The two walk hand in hand. Out of the mist, a figure emerges. It's Stepan. He is dressed to travel and announces that he is saying farewell to the town. He slipped out of his house so not even his servant would notice. Liza and Mavriky leave Stepan and go to the house where Marya, Lebyadkin, and the servant were murdered.

When Liza arrives, the crowd is bustling with the information that Nikolay killed Marya to run off with Liza. Someone in the crowd points to Liza and says that she's the reason Marya was murdered. Another person exclaims that it's not enough for them to commit murder, they must come and see the bodies too. A hand rises above Liza and strikes her. Liza collapses. Mavriky tries to make his way to her side, but someone in the crowd grabs him. Liza tries to get up, but someone else strikes her again. Eventually, people carry Liza out of the crowd. She is still alive at this point but unconscious.

Up to this point, Liza has been in love with Nikolay in a way that has caused her immense emotional distress. She seems to want to see the bodies of the people who died to pay witness to them, in addition to wanting to see the evidence of Nikolay's wrongdoing. She perhaps hopes that seeing evidence of Nikolay's wrongs may be enough to free her from Nikolay's spell.



This passage shows the impact of herd mentality. Though no one in the crowd knows details of the murder or has evidence of Liza's supposed involvement in Marya's death, the crowd jumps to conclusions and acts as a mob to kill Liza. By doing that, people in the crowd sacrifice their individual morality to go along with the group, something that is especially disconcerting considering that readers know Liza was not involved in Marya's murder and seems as horrified as the crowd that Marya, Lebyadkin, and the servant were killed.



PART 3, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 1

Pyotr goes to Gaganov's house, where a group is gathered. There, Pyotr addresses the group and says that Yuliya arranged for Nikolay to run off with Liza, and to do so, she had actually deceived Pyotr, who had been in love with Liza. Pyotr also maintains that the murders of Marya, Lebyadkin, and their servant were an accident. Although some people are skeptical of Pyotr, in general, the group is in his favor and believes what he says. Someone announces that Nikolay left earlier that day on a train bound for Petersburg. Pyotr is alarmed.

Meanwhile, the "group of five" of the Society, including Liputin, Shigalyov, and Lyamshin, meets at the edge of town. Pyotr is late to the meeting, and the five discuss ousting him as a leader and forming their own group. They believe that Pyotr has been acting in his own interests rather than in the interests of the common good by contributing to the fires and the murders of Marya and Lebyadkin. When Pyotr arrives, the group of five brings its concerns to him.

Pyotr continues to show his capacity for manipulating people. He is frequently able to get people to do what he wants them to and get them to side with him. Pyotr's alarm at Nikolay's departure seems to stem from his concern that Nikolay could alert authorities about Pyotr's actions or do something else that could put the revolutionary faction's objectives in question.



The group of five within the faction of revolutionaries seems to be beginning to see through Pyotr's facade. They suspect him of acting only in his own self-interest, a suspicion that Pyotr previously confirmed when he spoke to Nikolay. The group of five also identifies Pyotr as the mastermind behind the fire and murders.



The group of five says that the fires and murders will increase police attention, which could lead authorities to discover their revolutionary faction. Pyotr says that Fedka acted alone in murdering Lebyadkin and Marya and only wanted Lebyadkin's money. He then shows the group the anonymous letter Lebyadkin wrote to Andrey, threatening to expose them. He says that, quite coincidentally, Fedka actually acted to protect them by murdering Lebyadkin. He then asks the group of five why they contributed to the arson. The group is taken aback.

Pyotr then says that someone is threatening to expose them. Liputin says it must be Nikolay, but Pyotr says that it's Shatov. Pyotr then details a plan. They will arrange to have Shatov killed. After that, they will make use of Aleksey and his plans to kill himself. Aleksey will kill himself after Shatov has been murdered, and Pyotr will ensure that Aleksey writes a suicide note in which he confesses to the murder. Some people doubt that such an elaborate plan will be successful. Ultimately, though, everyone agrees to go through with it.

PART 3, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 2

The group of five simultaneously believes that Shatov intends to inform on them and that Pyotr is manipulating them. For his part, Pyotr is alarmed that Nikolay has fled and is worried about what Nikolay might do next. Pyotr is also genuinely convinced that Shatov will inform on them. He thinks that Marya and Liza's recent deaths will impel Shatov to go to the authorities. Pyotr also personally dislikes Shatov, which might be the main motivating factor behind Pyotr's decision to advocate for his murder.

Liputin is upset. He feels strongly connected to the revolutionary cause and doesn't like being manipulated by Pyotr and can't stand Pyotr's arrogance. Pyotr and Liputin go together to see Aleksey. On the way, Pyotr stops to eat a steak, which annoys Liputin even more. The two get into an argument about the Society's next steps forward. At one point, Liputin says that he would be within his rights to form a new society. Pyotr walks away toward Aleksey's house. Liputin considers turning his back on Pyotr in that moment but ultimately follows him.

Pyotr again denies involvement in the murders of Marya, Lebyadkin, and the servant and attempts to turn the tables on the group of five by accusing them of being involved in the arson. That shows another tactic in Pyotr's efforts to manipulate others: if someone accuses you of something, accuse them of doing the same. In Pyotr's mind, that approach works because unless those making accusations have concrete evidence to back up their beliefs, the playing field is leveled, and it becomes a matter of one person's word against another's.



Previously, Nikolay suggested that Pyotr use Shatov's defection from the group—and his refusal to answer Pyotr's purity test for revolutionaries—as grounds to justify his murder. In Pyotr's plan, by murdering Shatov, the group of five would become complicit in a murder, and Pyotr could then use that information to blackmail the people in the group to make sure they stay loyal to him.



The group of five, for their part, are aware of Pyotr's attempts to manipulate them, showing that they are not members of an unruly mob acting in unthinking loyalty to an all-powerful ruler. Instead, they are still, on some level, rational actors who question the plan proposed to them by their leader. The novel will then examine if, and how, Pyotr might be able to convince those people to do what he wants them to.



This passage shows again that members of the revolutionary faction are perhaps more aware than anyone of Pyotr's tendency to manipulate others to get what he wants. The passage also shows that Liputin genuinely believes in the causes the faction supports, while Pyotr attempts to exploit those causes—and the people like Liputin who genuinely believe in them—to gain power for himself.



PART 3, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 3

Liputin and Pyotr go to Aleksey's house. There, Pyotr confirms that Aleksey will take his own life the next day and that he'll sign whatever Pyotr asks him to. Pyotr says that they have already undertaken certain actions that rely on this plan, so Aleksey can't back out of it. Aleksey says they had no right to do that, but he says he will nonetheless go through with the plan. Pyotr says that he is supposed to meet Fedka in a half hour, and Aleksey says that Fedka is already waiting for him in the kitchen. He says that Fedka thinks that Pyotr is a scoundrel and doesn't plan to wait for the money and passport Pyotr promised him.

Pyotr talks to Fedka. Fedka says that Pyotr's plan didn't work, and Pyotr fooled him. Fedka didn't get any money from Lebyadkin, and he hasn't gotten money or a passport from Pyotr either, as Pyotr promised. He says that Nikolay had nothing to do with the murders and that Pyotr pushed him to go through with it. Pyotr tells Fedka that he'll get his money if he goes to Petersburg. Fedka says he's lying, and Pyotr threatens to turn Fedka in to the police. Pyotr pulls out his revolver. Fedka leaps up and strikes Pyotr in the face before fleeing. Liputin and Aleksey rush in. Pyotr waves his revolver and tells Aleksey that if he gets cold feet regarding the plan to take his own life, then he (Pyotr) will track him down and kill him. He also says that Fedka has had his last drink of vodka.

Fedka initially brought up the passport that Pyotr promised him when he (Fedka) attempted to get Nikolay to give him money to kill Marya. Pyotr seems to have put Fedka up to that initial plan to try and catch Nikolay committing a crime, thereby gaining evidence he could use to blackmail Nikolay and keep him under his control. The fact that Fedka is still talking about, and still waiting for, the promised passport suggests that Pyotr may still be pulling the strings behind Fedka's actions.



This passage confirms that Pyotr directed Fedka to kill Lebyadkin in exchange for any money that Lebyadkin had and for a passport. That shows that Pyotr has been lying when he denied any involvement in the murders of Lebyadkin and Marya. Instead, it seems like Pyotr told Fedka to murder them in hopes that he could implicate Nikolay in the crimes and then use that to blackmail Nikolay and keep him involved in the revolutionary faction. Ultimately, Pyotr still seems to hope that Nikolay will become the movement's leader.



PART 3, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 4

After leaving Aleksey's house, Liputin returns home. He gets his passport and packs his things, intending to leave. He thinks that he is done with Pyotr and the Society. The next morning, as Liputin prepares to leave, he learns that Fedka has been found murdered. The official suspect is a factory worker who helped Fedka with the arson and with murdering Marya and Lebyadkin. The factory worker reportedly suspected Fedka of stealing money from Lebyadkin and taking it for himself. Liputin decides he can't risk running away and goes to meet the Society at the agreed-upon time. He carries his passport in his pocket, though.

Though the official story about Fedka's murder is that he was killed by an unhappy accomplice, Liputin suspects that Pyotr is behind the murder, especially considering that Pyotr just recently threatened to kill Fedka. Liputin then decides not to defect from the revolutionary faction, showing how Pyotr uses violence and the threat of violence to compel obedience. In that way, people like Liputin feel like they have no choice but to go along with what Pyotr tells them to do, or else they too will be killed.



PART 3, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 1

Shatov sits at home. After Marya was murdered, Shatov wanted to inform on everyone he suspected was involved in her death. Shatov hears someone outside. He goes to his window, and when he looks down, he sees his wife Marie, whom he married in Switzerland three years ago. The two parted ways without divorcing after only a few weeks of marriage. Shatov is overjoyed to see Marie. He rushes downstairs to help her with her things and brings her back upstairs. When she asks for tea, Shatov rushes to Aleksey's to ask if he has tea. Aleksey offers Shatov meat, tea, a samovar, and anything else Shatov could want. Shatov is struck by Aleksey's generosity.

After Shatov returns to his apartment, he hears a knock on his door. It's Erkel, who is a representative from the Society. He says that the Society wants Shatov to show them where he buried the printing press that was in his care. After that, Erkel says, Shatov will have no other obligations to the Society. Shatov asks if Pyotr will be there, and Erkel says no because Pyotr is planning to leave town tomorrow morning. Shatov thinks that Pyotr is fleeing the repercussions of the recent events. Erkel tells Shatov to meet them tomorrow night. Shatov agrees to meet them and is relieved that he will be able to finally be free of the Society.

Shatov was fond of Marya and doesn't want to see those responsible for her death go unpunished. Aleksey's generosity toward Shatov is contrasted with his devotion to killing himself. In this case, the novel suggests that Aleksey has become so devoted to his ideology of suicide that he overlooks the importance of his own life and the impact he has on others. Shatov, though, seems not to grasp the implications of Aleksey's generosity.



Shatov has been trying to get free of the revolutionary faction since he briefly helped the faction run a printing press. Since then, though, Shatov has had a spiritual awakening and religious conversion, which has brought him away from revolutionary politics. Now that Marie has re-entered his life, Shatov sees Erkel's offer as a chance to finally restart his life with a clean slate and be done with the revolutionary faction once and for all.



PART 3, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 2

Now that Marie is with him, Shatov stops thinking about the Society and their affronts and crimes. Marie has no money with her and says that she has come to town to look for work. Shatov thinks she seems ill. He offers her meat to eat, but she brushes him off. He suggests getting a doctor, but Marie says she doesn't need any help. Shatov says he doesn't understand what's happening. Marie starts crying out in pain, and Shatov asks what's wrong. Marie says that she's experiencing labor pains. Shatov had no idea she was pregnant. He says that he'll go find a midwife and sell his revolver to pay for the midwife's assistance. Marie says she doesn't need a midwife but just a peasant woman to assist with the birth. Shatov runs out of his apartment to look for help.

Marie's arrival also contributes to Shatov's sense that he will now be able to have a fresh start in life. Previously, he has been depicted as someone who is often alone and dissatisfied with life. He has felt virtually imprisoned by the revolutionary faction and has been living for months hearing that they are making threats to his life. Now, though, Shatov can envision a future with his wife Marie. When Shatov learns that Marie is pregnant, that opens up the possibility that Shatov will become a father and he and Marie will form their own family.



PART 3, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 3

Shatov goes to Aleksey's and tells him that his wife Marie is in labor. He asks Aleksey if he knows anyone who could assist with the birth. Aleksey says he's not sure who could help. Shatov decides to look for Virginsky's wife, Arina, who is a midwife. Shatov asks Aleksey to intermittently check on Marie while he is gone. Shatov then leaves. When he knocks on Arina's door, Virginsky responds first and tells Shatov to leave. Eventually, Arina comes to the door and says she will help, especially because she was fond of Marie when she first met her.

Shatov then runs to Lyamshin's house. Lyamshin is alarmed when Shatov knocks on his door because he suspects that Shatov will inform on the Society, and he (Lyamshin) is involved in the plot to kill Shatov. Shatov tells Lyamshin that his wife is in labor, and he wants to sell his revolver back to Lyamshin for 15 roubles. Lyamshin argues about the price. He ultimately gives Shatov seven roubles and tells Shatov to come back the next day for the remaining eight roubles.

PART 3, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 4

Arina is already with Marie when Shatov returns to his apartment. Arina knows nothing about the plan to murder Shatov, but Virginsky told her earlier that Shatov planned to inform on the Society. Arina agrees to help Marie and Shatov in part to see Shatov for herself and gauge whether he might be planning to betray the Society. At Shatov's apartment, Marie yells at Shatov to leave as her pain becomes worse. When Arina sends Shatov to secure some necessary supplies, Marie yells at Shatov to stay and isn't satisfied until Shatov tells her that he'll be back in an instant.

PART 3, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 5

Shatov goes to Aleksey to look for what Arina has asked him to find. Though it's the middle of the night, Shatov finds Aleksey awake. Aleksey asks Shatov if he ever experiences a sense of eternal harmony. He explains that he has sensations about once a week when he feels he has a sense of nature as a whole that feels almost heavenly. He says that five seconds is as much as a person can endure of that feeling. Shatov asks Aleksey if he has epilepsy, as Aleksey's account is similar to one that someone with epilepsy told Shatov. Aleksey says he doesn't have epilepsy. Shatov returns to his apartment.

Virginsky is a member of the revolutionary faction and therefore involved in the plot to murder Shatov. Shatov's decision to go to his house to seek a midwife shows how oblivious Shatov is to the revolutionary faction's plot to murder him. Arina's decision to help him based on her fondness for Marie also shows the novel's views about the importance of community, which the revolutionary faction seeks to destroy by killing Shatov.



Shatov initially bought the revolver after he hit Nikolay and was afraid that Nikolay might come to kill him. With that in mind, Shatov's decision to sell the gun signals that he feels like his life is no longer at risk. He feels like he can finally live without the gun, which shows again the newfound hope that Shatov has found.



Arina's plan to gauge whether she believes Shatov will inform on the revolutionary faction or not is perhaps more noteworthy than it might initially seem. Throughout the novel, several characters act without looking into matters and gathering evidence for themselves. That often results in dire consequences, as was the case, for example, in Liza's death. Arina's approach marks a stark divergence from that trend.



Dostoevsky had epilepsy throughout his life, and Shatov's descriptions of experiencing a profound sense of eternal unity mirror Dostoevsky's own descriptions of sensations he would experience before having an epileptic seizure. Aleksey's sense of that eternal harmony again raises the question of Aleksey's devotion to his suicidal ideology. With that in mind, it remains to be seen if, or how, Aleksey's experience of eternal harmony will impact his decision to take his own life.



PART 3, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 6

Marie is afraid that she might die during childbirth, but Arina soothes her and tells Shatov to leave the room. Eventually, a baby is born, and Marie is overjoyed. Shatov comes into the room and is ecstatic. He says the baby will never be sent to a foundlings' home on his account and says that he will be the baby's father. When Arina leaves, she's convinced that Shatov is dedicated to being a father and won't pose a threat to the Society and tells Virginsky as much. After Arina leaves, Marie orders Shatov around but then grabs him and kisses him on the forehead. After she does that, she exclaims that Nikolay is a scoundrel. The next night, Shatov goes to meet Erkel. Marie can't believe Shatov is leaving her, but Shatov assuages her concerns by saying this will be the last time he ever has to leave her.

Shatov again embraces the new life that seems to be unfolding before him when he exclaims his intention to be the child's father and start a family with Marie. Marie's comments that Nikolay is a scoundrel suggest that Nikolay is the baby's father. Earlier, Nikolay alluded to an affair between him and Marie before he returned to the provincial town. Arina also follows up her own investigation into Shatov's possible state of mind by telling Virginsky that he doesn't seem to be a threat to the revolutionary faction. It remains to be seen how the revolutionary faction responds to Arina's opinion.



PART 3, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 1

During the day after Marie gives birth, Virginsky makes the rounds to see the members of the group of five. He wants to tell them that now that Shatov is a father, there's no risk that he'll inform on the group. Virginsky only finds Erkel and Lyamshin at home, though. After Virginsky tells Lyamshin what he thinks, Lyamshin is evasive when Virginsky asks if he still plans to show up at the meeting when they plan to murder Shatov. After Virginsky tells Erkel, Erkel unflinchingly says he still intends to go through with the plan to murder Shatov.

Virginsky has become convinced by Arina's observations that Shatov doesn't pose a threat to the revolutionary faction. When he tries to convince other members of the revolutionary faction of that idea, though, he is met with the force of herd mentality in the sense that both Lyamshin and Erkel seem unwilling to ignore new information and instead, remain committed to the group's murderous plan.



At the appointed time, the members of the Society meet. The group includes Lyamshin, Virginsky, Liputin, Shigalyov, Tolkachenko, and Pyotr. Virginsky announces that since Shatov is now a father, there's no risk that he'll denounce them, so there's no need to murder him. Pyotr says that Shatov will still have his heart set on denouncing them. Virginsky says over and over again, "I protest!" Shigalyov then speaks up and says that he has given the matter a great deal of thought and no longer agrees with the plan so won't take part. He begins to walk away, and Pyotr cocks his revolver and aims it at Shigalyov, saying that Shigalyov will warn Shatov. Shigalyov says he won't and then leaves.

Virginsky and Shigalyov show their willingness to go against the group, testing the limits of herd mentality. However, neither Virginsky nor Shigalyov actually does anything that could hinder the revolutionary faction's plot to kill Shatov. Shigalyov leaves, showing he won't be cowed by the group's desires, but he doesn't warn Shatov, even though he considers the group's planned murder to be wrong. And Virginsky, who also views the murder as unquestionably wrong, neither leaves nor attempts to save Shatov.



Erkel approaches the group with Shatov. When Shatov gets close to the group, Liputin, Tolkachenko, and Erkel seize him. Pyotr runs up with his revolver. He aims it at Shatov's forehead and fires. Shatov dies instantly. They then tie rocks to Shatov's body to sink it in a nearby pond. Virginsky cries out that what they're doing isn't right. Lyamshin lets out a series of animal-like screams, and Virginsky then begins screaming as well. Eventually, Erkel subdues Lyamshin, and the screaming stops.

Again, while Virginsky clearly considered the murder of Shatov to be morally wrong, herd mentality, and a desire not to upset the group, prevented Virginsky from taking action to stop that murder. The same seems to be true of Lyamshin, whose cries afterward show his distress at having been involved in Shatov's murder.



After they throw Shatov's body in the pond, Pyotr announces that he will look at Lyamshin's screams as a bout of delirium and is willing to forget Virginsky's protests. Pyotr makes a speech about the importance of their cause and says that they should all feel proud of the actions they have taken to support that cause. He says that he will now go to Aleksey's to make sure that Aleksey takes his life and leaves a note (falsely) confessing to murdering Shatov. As Pyotr is leaving, Liputin catches up to him. Liputin knows that he shouldn't ask, but he wants to know if there are really "groups of five" scattered throughout Russia and Europe or if theirs is the only group. Pyotr says it doesn't matter whether there's one or 1,000 such groups. Liputin says he knew there was only one and leaves.

Liputin is again portrayed as a true believer in the cause of the revolutionary faction. His desire to know whether other factions actually exist points again to the power of herd mentality. The secrecy of the groups of five makes each member of the group of five believe they are acting in concert with a much larger network with similar aims. In that sense, Liputin's decision to go along with the murder of Shatov is predicated on his idea that he is helping a much larger network of revolutionary groups. When he learns that his group of five may be the only group, though, his decision to take part in Shatov's murder doesn't seem to have contributed to the goals he thought it would.



PART 3, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 2

Pyotr goes home and packs. He has told the Society members that he's going to go to the country until things die down, but he really intends to go to Petersburg and begin living under a different name. Three days later, a warrant will be issued for his arrest, though Anton isn't sure whether it's related to the events in town and Shatov's murder or to some other business Pyotr is involved in. Anton also doesn't know if Pyotr is only involved in the group of five in their town or if he might actually be involved in other groups throughout the country.

After the murder, Pyotr plans to abandon the group. Anton's lack of knowledge regarding Pyotr's crimes and whether there may in fact be more than one group of five point to the shadowy nature in which Pyotr has operated for the entirety of the novel. He is so adept at lying, and so readily resorts to manipulation, that it becomes almost impossible to know what is true and what is false when it comes to Pyotr.



Before Pyotr leaves and before the warrant is issued, he goes to see Aleksey. Pyotr instructs Aleksey what to write in his suicide note, but Aleksey says he won't say a word about Shatov. Pyotr then tells Aleksey that Shatov is dead, and Aleksey and Pyotr get into an argument. Both of them pull their revolvers out, and Aleksey aims his at Pyotr. He says he won't write that he killed Shatov. Aleksey tells Pyotr to leave, and Pyotr says he won't go until Aleksey is dead, either by his hand or by Aleksey's.

Pyotr again shows his ruthlessness. He has just killed Shatov and now threatens Aleksey's life. There seems to be no price that is too high for Pyotr to pay to try and achieve his aims. Notably, those aims aren't the socialist policy goals he claims to embrace. Instead, Pyotr aims only to grab power for himself. His willingness to murder to try and achieve those aims shows the extent of his hunger for power.



Pyotr becomes increasingly convinced that Aleksey won't go through with the plan. He then asks Aleksey about his philosophy of life and how that relates to his plan to commit suicide. Aleksey says again that by killing himself, he will become God. He says he wants to kill himself to prove his own independence and "terrible freedom." Eventually, Aleksey tells Pyotr to dictate whatever he wants Aleksey to say, and Aleksey will sign it. Pyotr dictates a note in which Aleksey takes credit for the manifestos and confesses to being an associate of Fedka and murdering Shatov. Aleksey then goes into the other room with his revolver.

Aleksey seems to be torn at this point about his plan to take his own life to prove his ideas about God. Initially, he readily signed off on Pyotr's plan to use his suicide to benefit the revolutionary faction, but he then pushed back against certain aspects of that plan. Now, Aleksey seems to have swung back in the other direction and says he'll write whatever Pyotr wants him to. That back and forth provides a window into the unsettled nature of Aleksey's psyche.



After about 10 minutes, Pyotr thinks that it's taking too long. He goes to the door to the next room. When he opens it, Aleksey screams and rushes at him. Pyotr shuts the door and holds it closed. Pyotr waits for a while before going back in. When he does, he sees Aleksey standing against a wall, entirely motionless. He approaches Aleksey with a candle to hold it close to Aleksey's face and perhaps burn him to see if Aleksey will react. When Pyotr gets close, Aleksey jumps on him and bites Pyotr's finger. Pyotr strikes Aleksey and runs out of the room. As he's leaving the house, he hears a gunshot. He waits again before returning to the room. When he goes in, he sees Aleksey's body on the ground and blood spattered on the wall.

Aleksey's behavior is unsettling and difficult to interpret. Due to the time that Pyotr waits and Aleksey's reaction when he sees Pyotr, it seems clear, though, that Aleksey has continued to have doubts about his plan to commit suicide. Instead, the novel suggests that perhaps Aleksey was arrogant in his assumption that he could rewire his own thoughts to support a narrow ideology. With that in mind, the novel suggests that perhaps Aleksey is like Nikolay in the sense that both considered themselves above integral parts of the human experience and then learned that they were in fact subject to the same norms that apply to everyone else.



PART 3, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 3

Pyotr goes to the train station the next morning accompanied by Erkel. Pyotr is bound for Petersburg. He is trying to remain undetected at the station without making it apparent that he's going into hiding. Erkel says that he understands that Pyotr has to leave and would even understand if Pyotr fled abroad. He says that Pyotr is everything, while he and the members of the group of five are nothing. An acquaintance of Pyotr's then greets him. When the acquaintance learns that Pyotr is traveling in second class, the man invites Pyotr to travel with him in first class. Pyotr seems reluctant to do so but eventually agrees. He quickly says goodbye to Erkel and goes. Erkel doesn't think that Pyotr is abandoning them. But he is alarmed that Pyotr left so abruptly and didn't shake his hand particularly warmly when he left.

Erkel is another true believer in the revolutionary cause (and in Pyotr in particular), which he makes clear when he tells Pyotr that he and the revolutionary faction mean nothing compared to Pyotr. Erkel's alarm at Pyotr's demeanor shows that even someone as devoted to Pyotr as Erkel may have begun to see that Pyotr is, in essence, a fraud. He is not concerned about socialism or the revolution. Instead, Pyotr is concerned only for himself, and he plans to disappear as soon as he gets on the train to avoid any consequences that might come from his actions, leaving people like Erkel behind to face those consequences.



PART 3, CHAPTER 7, SECTION 1

Stepan sets out for a journey on foot. He doesn't have a set destination in mind. While he's walking, a wagon with two peasants stops and asks if he wants a ride. He says he'll take one, and they say it will cost him 50 kopecks. Stepan gets into the wagon, and the peasants take him to a small hut in the next town. There, they give him tea, vodka, and a blini. A book peddler comes into the hut. Stepan sees the Gospels among the books and thinks about reading the Gospels. He hasn't read them in 35 years.

Stepan has been established as someone who supported liberal policies in the 1840s. The novel then suggested that people like Stepan gave rise to people like Pyotr, who is a nihilistic revolutionary in the 1870s. The novel underlined that idea by making Pyotr Stepan's son. Now, though, after renouncing his vanity and embracing integrity, Stepan is returning to the bible, suggesting that, in the novel's view, a similar turn may be waiting for people in Russia.



Another man comes in, who says his name is Anisim. He says he used to work for Gaganov and knows of Stepan. The peasants have become suspicious of Stepan because he gives vague answers to their questions and seems like he's on the run from something. Anisim clears things up by saying that Stepan is a man of learning who is working on solving life's most difficult questions. A half hour later, Stepan sets out in a covered wagon with the book peddler, Sofya. Stepan plans to go to the nearby town of Spasov.

Anisim's description of Stepan is meant to be ironic while also serving as a reminder about Stepan's original goals for his life and career. The comment is ironic because Stepan has, over his life, apparently avoided life's most difficult questions while trying to coast by on Varvara's goodwill. Now that he has turned a page on his old life, he may have the chance to re-examine those questions.



PART 3, CHAPTER 7, SECTION 2

Stepan travels with Sofya to a travelers' hut nearby. They plan to take a boat from there to reach Spasov. Stepan arranges to have a private room and asks for chicken. Sofya warns Stepan that because the travelers' hut will be crowded, the private room and the chicken will come at a steep price. Stepan tells Sofya not to worry. That night, Stepan tries to explain to Sofya what happened between him, Varvara, and Darya. His speech has become so hard to follow, though, that Sofya worries that he is ill. Stepan tells Sofya that he has told lies his entire life and has always spoken to support his own self-interest and hasn't been committed to telling the truth. He then says that he won't betray Varvara and wants to return to her.

Stepan shows that while he has altered his life, he has not become an altogether different person. Though he's cut himself off from Varvara and no longer has her money to cover his expenses, he still has a taste for the finer things in life and doesn't want to face the discomfort that comes with traveling on a limited budget. Still, Stepan also shows how turning a page on his old life has allowed him to be more honest with himself, as he realizes that he has devoted his life to falsity and also that he wants to spend the rest of his life with Varvara.



Stepan becomes more and more ill over the coming days. He is so sick that he can't board the boat bound for Spasov. Sofya stays behind to look after him. The landlord of the travelers' hut tells Sofya that she has to find somewhere else to bring Stepan. The landlord says the hut isn't a hospital, and they're worried about what might happen if Stepan dies there. Stepan asks Sofya to read the Bible to him, and he asks to hear the passage about **demons** entering swine. After Sofya reads it, Stepan says that it explains what is happening in Russia with the increase in "filth," including with the Russian people and with Pyotr. Stepan begins raving and loses consciousness.

The passage that Sofya reads is also the epigraph of the novel. In that passage, a man is exorcised of demons before throwing himself at the feet of Christ. In Stepan's telling, the demons in question are the "filth" and sickness that people like Pyotr have infected the country with. That likens Pyotr's ideologies of atheism, nihilism, and socialism to demons who have possessed Russia. In Stepan's view, Russia must expel those demons before symbolically throwing itself at the feet of Christ, thereby returning to Christianity.



PART 3, CHAPTER 7, SECTION 3

A carriage pulls up outside of the hut where Stepan lies sick. Varvara and Darya get out and go into the hut. Anisim told Varvara's servants that he saw Stepan, and the news eventually reached Varvara. Varvara initially sends Sofya away, but when she realizes how sick Stepan is and that Sofya has cared for him, Varvara tells her to return. Varvara sits by Stepan's side and sarcastically asks if he had a nice walk. Stepan struggles to respond, and Varvara finds water for him. He then tells Varvara that he has loved her for 20 years. She says that didn't stop him from wanting to marry Darya. Stepan repeats that he has loved Varvara for 20 years. Varvara says that 20 years have passed, and she's a fool as well, just as he is.

Varvara shows how much she cares about Stepan, even if she often articulates her care for him with an air of annoyance. The conversation between Stepan and Varvara is the closest the two come to acknowledging that they have both been in love with each other for the past 20 years. Varvara's comments that she has been a fool, too, suggest that she has forgiven Stepan for his missteps, is willing to embrace him again and, if he were well, would take him back to her estate.



Varvara sends for a doctor. When the doctor arrives, he says that there's no hope for Stepan and sends for a priest. When the priest arrives, he administers Stepan's last rites. After hearing those rites, Stepan declares that God is necessary because God is the only being capable of eternal love. He says that all of human existence rests on the fact that people can bow before something unfathomably great. Without that, people would die of despair. Stepan dies three days later. Varvara stays by his side the entire time. After Stepan dies, Varvara brings Sofya back to her estate. She tells Sofya to settle there and that she will pay for all of Sofya's expenses.

Stepan has a conversion experience on his deathbed. That conversion experience provides the conclusion to the novel's throughline from the liberalism of the 1840s to the nihilism of the 1870s. In Dostoevsky's telling, the fitting conclusion of that line of thought would be for people to throw off their (in his view) destructive ideologies and find a way to return to Christianity and the eternal love that, in the novel's view, is central to Christianity.



PART 3, CHAPTER 8, SECTION 1

The crimes that happen in town quickly come to light. Arina finds her husband, Virginsky, distraught. He keeps yelling, "It's not right," over and over. He then confesses to her the role he played in Shatov's murder and how Pyotr used Aleksey's suicide to try and create a false narrative about that murder. Marie then becomes troubled that her husband, Shatov, hasn't returned home. She goes to check with Aleksey to see if he knows what has happened and finds Aleksey's dead body. She doesn't find his suicide note. Marie then takes the baby and leaves, running through the streets. Though she has no evidence yet, she's convinced that Shatov has been killed. The baby catches a cold and dies. Three days later, Marie dies as well.

This passage shows some of the consequences of Shatov's murder. Not only is Shatov killed, but his wife is distraught to the point that she runs through the streets, leading to illness that kills both her and her baby. Virginsky's guilt over killing Shatov serves as a rejoinder to the nihilistic approach embraced by the revolutionary faction. While Pyotr once said that to be a true revolutionary, one must be willing to take a hundred million heads, Virginsky's reaction shows how misguided that idea is, as people cannot, and should not, commit murder so brazenly.



It becomes clear that there actually is a secret society of murderers at work in town. Pyotr's plan initially works, and the authorities believe that Aleksey killed Shatov, but they believe he must also have had accomplices. They don't know who those accomplices are, though. They find Shatov's body a day later. The authorities might have been at a loss at that point, but Lyamshin, who can't bear the guilt, ultimately confesses and tells the authorities everything. He tells them that the Society aimed to shake the foundations of the established order to demoralize the population and create chaos. Out of that chaos, the Society hoped to utilize a network of "groups of five" to advance the cause of the rebellion. When authorities ask Lyamshin if more groups of five exist, Lyamshin seems sincere when he says that there are innumerable similar groups.

This passage clarifies the underlying approach of the revolutionary faction. That faction hoped to destabilize society to the point that chaos would take over. That shows why the faction devoted itself to doing things like stealing, breaking icons, or causing an uproar at Yuliya's gala. The faction hoped that ultimately their actions, both large and small, would lead to chaos. Once they achieved that chaos, they would be able to swoop in and offer guidance to a demoralized population, thereby achieving their revolutionary aims.



Lyamshin exonerates Yuliya and Nikolay. He blames Pyotr for Shatov's murder, the arson, and the murder of Marya and Lebyadkin. Virginsky is arrested the same day that Lyamshin confesses. Virginsky also confesses to everything. Erkel is also arrested, but he stays silent when asked questions and confesses to nothing. The authorities find and arrest Liputin in Petersburg. Mavriky leaves town for good. Varvara and Darya remain at Varvara's house. One day, Darya receives a letter that is delivered to her in secret.

The letter is from Nikolay. In the letter, Nikolay asks Darya if she would still consider running away with him. He writes that he has become a citizen of Switzerland and bought a house in a small town in the mountains there. He says that he feels vile for asking Darya to come but that he still wants her to join him. He adds that he feels guilty for Marya's death. He also says that he knows that he should take his own life, but he's afraid to do it.

After Darya reads the letter, she immediately shows it to Varvara. Varvara asks Darya if she plans to go to Nikolay. When Darya says yes, Varvara says that she will go too and become a Swiss citizen as well. She promises she won't get in the way of Darya and Nikolay. Just then, Aleksey Yegorych tells Darya and Varvara that Nikolay has just arrived. Darya and Varvara run to see Nikolay, but they can't find him in the house. The doors to his quarters are open, but he's not there. Finally, they see that the door to the attic is open, though it is almost always closed. When they go into the attic, they see Nikolay's body. He has hanged himself.

Lyamshin's exoneration of Nikolay, and especially of Yuliya, also points to the previous successes of Pyotr and the revolutionary faction. While Yuliya and Nikolay weren't directly involved in the murder of Marya or the arson, that didn't stop people from speculating that both she and Nikolay might be behind the murders or the arson. With that in mind, that speculation serves as another example of the kind of chaos the revolutionary faction successfully unleashed in the provincial town.



While Nikolay previously believed that he was above right and wrong and beyond good and evil, his comment that he feels guilty for Marya's death shows that, despite his ideology and apparent embrace of nihilism, he is governed by his conscience just as much as anyone else. That makes it clear that he is not actually above good and evil.



In the letter to Darya, Nikolay showed that he was planning for the future, making it clear that, at the time of writing the letter, he had not decided to take his own life. With that in mind, it can be surmised that his guilt over his involvement in Marya's murder continued to increase and ultimately drove him to die by suicide. In that way, Nikolay's death gives the novel's final word on the question of whether he was beyond good and evil by showing that he could not transcend morality—and perhaps should not have tried to.





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