Revolutionary Self-Fulfilment?

Individual Radicalisation and Terrorism in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground, Crime and Punishment* and *The Devils*

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Abstract

This thesis analyses Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation and terrorism in three of his major novels: *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Devils*.

Whilst the issues of radical ideology and terrorism have often been independently discussed by Dostoyevsky scholars, little attention has been devoted to the study of the process of radicalisation undergone by Dostoyevsky’s protagonists, whereby the extreme fulfilment of radical ideals culminates in political violence.

This investigation traces the evolution of Dostoyevsky’s individual in the context of the radically changing socio-political environment of nineteenth-century Russia. The development of this individual will be examined throughout the novels as he initially questions, and is hostile to, radical ideology, gradually embraces its tenets and tests its validity through the use of violence and eventually engages in terrorist activity.

Dostoyevsky felt himself impotent in the face of the gradual assimilation of utilitarian, materialistic and nihilist ideals by the new generation of Russian intellectuals. In the emulation of Western revolutionary culture, he came to see a threat to Russian nationhood, to true Russian identity and to traditional Russian values such as Orthodox Christianity. In his novels he sought to examine and question the ideologies of leading theorists influenced by Western radical thought; ideologies that he believed were flawed, deceptive and contradictory.

This study focuses on the development of the themes of radicalisation and terrorism in the three chosen novels. Emphasis is laid on the devastating impact of radical ideology and terrorist activity on the individual.
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This thesis is for Caterina Ceccarelli.
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Introduction

On December the 22nd, 1849, the young aspiring Russian novelist Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky stood in the snow-covered Semenovsky square of St. Petersburg, arms and feet shackled, waiting to be executed by the firing squad of the reigning Tsar, Nicholas I. His involvement in the Petrashevsky Circle, a radical socialist group dedicated to social and political reform, was about to cost him his life. The imperial forces pointed their rifles at three of his comrades, his turn would be next. What was going through Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s head at this time? Had his commitment to Western radical ideology been worth this conviction? Was he really going to perish for having belonged to a utopian socialist group? Moments before the guards pulled the trigger on his fellows, a roll of drums signalled the arrival of an officer on horseback carrying a pardon for the prisoners. The execution had been staged by the Tsar, the real sentences were read out to the prisoners, Dostoyevsky would be condemned to four years hard labour in Siberia before spending another four years in the service of the Russian army.

The arrest and mock execution of the Petrashevsky circle members was one of the strategies used by the Tsarist regime to warn the Russian population that radical conspiracy was forbidden in Russia. Tsar Nicholas I was well aware that a revolutionary subculture was secretly taking shape in major cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. The assimilation of Western radical ideology by Russian intellectuals posed a serious threat to the stability of the autocracy. Nonetheless, he enjoyed playing the role of all-powerful yet temperate ruler.

The exiled Dostoyevsky returned to St. Petersburg ten years later a changed man. His time spent in the Siberian prison of Omsk led him to reject his earlier political radicalism and re-discover traditional Russian values such as the spirituality of the Russian Orthodox church, the respect for the established order and the unique, religiously based, communistic spirit of the Russian people. Before his imprisonment, Dostoyevsky had begun to pursue a
career in writing. At the age of twenty five he had written Poor Folk,¹ a novel which, having gained the praise of both the prominent critic Vissarion Belinsky and the young poet Nikolai Nekrasov, brought Dostoyevsky to confirm his vocation as a novelist and pursue his interest in the existential sufferings and social problems of the Russian people. In Siberia, he gained a deeper, more realistic understanding of these issues and once able to freely write again, he returned to their discussion in works such as The Insulted and Injured² and Memoirs from the House of the Dead.³ The publication of these works signalled the rise of a remarkable new author on the Russian literary scene. In the years to come, Dostoyevsky developed a stylistic genre which has been defined by scholars such as Malcom V. Jones as “fantastic realism,” a definition which embraces his immersion in German idealism and Christian beliefs, the influence on him by writers such as Gogol, Dickens and Balzac and his anticipation of Nietzsche and Freud.⁴ Twentieth century critic Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on Dostoyevsky enriches this definition as he labels the Russian author’s style as “polyphonic”⁵ and introduces another dimension through which his novels can be studied. Dostoyevsky undoubtedly stands as one of the greatest Russian writers of the nineteenth-century.

⁵ According to Mikhail Bakhtin, Dostoyevsky introduced a new novelistic genre into Russian literature: the polyphonic novel. Bakhtin’s illuminating study entitled Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics affirms that Dostoyevsky’s novels are essentially characterised by the plurality of independent voices and consciousnesses. Bakhtin argues that Dostoyevsky’s heroes differ from the traditional objectified image of heroes in previous European novels in that their voices possess an exceptional independence which often goes beyond their creator’s intentions. He states: “In the author’s creative plan, Dostoyevsky’s principle heroes are indeed not only objects of the author’s word, but subjects of their own directly significant word (neposredstvenno znachashchee slovo) as well.” This autonomy of voice gives them the capability of “standing beside their creator, of disagreeing with him, and even of rebelling against him.” For more information see Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), 3-26.
The aim of this thesis is to interpret Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation and terrorism as it unfolds throughout three of his major novels: Notes from Underground,\(^6\) Crime and Punishment,\(^7\) and The Devils.\(^8\) “Radicalisation” in this study will be observed as a process of personal progression whereby an individual develops extreme ideals in order to change the established social and political order. The term “terrorist” will then be used to refer to the radicalised individual who pursues these ideals through the use of political violence. Dostoyevsky was an attentive observer of the changing Russian socio-political environment in which he lived. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s (the decades in which he rose to the peak of his fame as a writer), he noticed that the socialist radicalism he himself had championed throughout the 1840s had been transformed by the new generation of radical intellectuals into a revolutionary creed based on Western European radical ideology. After the first attempts on the life of the Tsar in the mid-1860s, the act of political violence had gradually gained wider acceptance. Dostoyevsky profoundly disagreed with the radical concepts advocated by the new generation and argued against the ideal of reason as the ultimate principle of guidance for humanity. In response to this, he used his skills as a novelist to portray the experience of the individual in this phase of revolutionary upheaval and to comment on what he believed were destructive radical ideologies influencing the minds of young people. This study, through an examination of the primary characters of the chosen novels, will argue that Dostoyevsky believed political terrorist violence to be the disastrous outcome of individual radicalisation, an hypothesis that has received little attention from the secondary literature surrounding Dostoyevsky’s novels.

The aforementioned three novels have been chosen from Dostoyevsky’s literary output as appropriate sources which best reflect the author’s views regarding the harmful effects of radical ideals on young people and the phenomenon of terrorism as a self-destructive force. Each novel will be examined with the intention of revealing the progression of the

radicalisation of the individual in various contemporary revolutionary ideals as he initially comes into contact with radical ideology, puts its principles into practice through violent means and eventually becomes enslaved to their extreme fulfilment. More specifically, this thesis will begin with an examination of the Underground Man’s questioning of radical ideology in Notes from Underground, will reveal how Rodion Raskolnikov’s urge to find self-fulfilment in radical ideals leads him to murder in Crime and Punishment and will finish with the analysis of Peter Verkhovensky’s nihilistic terrorism in The Devils. Other characters who reflect Dostoyevsky’s socio-political outlook will also be taken into consideration. Much of the discussion will focus on Dostoyevsky’s use of the elements of tragedy, catastrophe and ill-fatedness to discredit the image of human perfection projected by the radical intellectuals of the 1860s and 1870s.

The first chapter of this dissertation will be dedicated to the historical and etymological study of the terms “radicalism” and “terrorism” in the context of nineteenth-century Russia. This chapter will introduce and explain frequently-used key terms and concepts such as “Russian nihilism,” “new men,” “utilitarianism” and “rational egoism.” The origins of modern radical thought and terrorist activity in Russia will be traced, along with the significant people and events which shaped the Russian socio-political environment throughout this century. Beginning with the initial signs of revolutionary upheaval against Tsarist autocracy in the Decembrist uprising of 1825, we will follow the history of the Russian revolutionary movement until the formation of revolutionary terrorist groups such as the Narodnaya Volya (People’s Will) in 1878.

Significant attention will be dedicated to the role played by the two generations of the Russian intelligentsia in importing and fostering radical revolutionary ideals into Russia. Firstly, early radical intellectuals such as Vissarion Belinsky, Michael Bakunin and Alexander Herzen will be observed. These men will be seen as responsible for having introduced Western European ideals of Enlightenment into Russian culture and for having initiated other intellectuals into a process of individual radicalisation. Secondly, revolutionary thinkers of the new generation, the so called “new men” of the 1860s, such as Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Dmitri Pisarev, will be subject to scrutiny, along with their
cultivation of a culture of utilitarianism, rational egoism and nihilism amongst the new generation of radical students. This latter part of the chapter will focus on the advent of revolutionary terrorism on Russian soil with a specific reference to members of the youthful intelligentsia such as Sergei Nechaev who, through illegal manuscripts, called radicals to violent action for political ends. Various acts of terrorist violence against the Tsarist autocracy will be looked at, including the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 by the People’s Will. The two parts of the chapter will come together through an explanation and discussion of Russian nihilism; the cultural and social philosophy (also known as a movement) which resulted from the new generation’s infatuation with radical ideology.

In the second chapter of this thesis, Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation will be analysed by focusing on two of the chosen novels: Notes from Underground and Crime and Punishment. The primary characters of these stories, the Underground Man and Raskolnikov, will be closely studied as they come into contact with, and explore, the radical ideals of their times. The life of the Underground Man will be the first to be subject to analysis as we become acquainted with an individual repelled by radical ideology. The Underground Man refuses to abide by various radical ideals which seem to have gained much popularity in his social environment. He is convinced that human nature cannot be defined by rationality, and for this reason, he behaves irrationally throughout the entire novel. Freedom of choice is most important to the Underground Man and, out of fear of becoming an insignificant tool of society, he isolates himself in his underground world, closed off in bitterness towards the socialist radicals. As we move on to Crime and Punishment, we will observe the complicated intellectual Raskolnikov, the individual often labelled as the “spiritual relative”9 of the Underground Man. In a similar way to the Underground Man, Raskolnikov is on a search for freedom and truth. However, he believes that radical ideology may give him the answers to his existential problems and he decides to apply utilitarian principles by murdering an old, wealthy pawnbroker, a woman he has deemed to be a useless, filthy human louse. Convinced that his murder will make society a better place, Raskolnikov hopes he will emerge from his crime as a triumphant

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“superman” immune to the law and to the reactions of his moral conscience. The reality with which he is confronted, however, throws Raskolnikov into a crisis which seems to remain unresolved even after the novel has ended. By examining what are essentially two destructive characters, the study of both these novels will emphasise Dostoyevsky’s comment regarding the damaging effects of radical ideals on the Russian individual. In addition, this chapter will begin to document the origins of the terrorist mentality which we will see unfold in the third chapter of this thesis.

The third and final chapter will deal specifically with the theme of terrorism in *The Devils*. This chapter will concentrate on the completion of Dostoyevsky’s view of the radicalisation of the individual, namely the appearance of a nihilist character who, in realising that his own existence is meaningless, envisions the future of the world through universal destruction. Two key characters will be subject to scrutiny, Peter Verkhovensky (modelled on the figure of Sergei Nechaev) and his companion Nikolai Stavrogin. In Verkhovensky we will examine Dostoyevsky’s portrayal of a fully fledged-terrorist who believes in the redemptive power of revolutionary upheaval; Russia, according to Verkhovensky, must be destroyed if it is to one day become a great nation. Dostoyevsky’s emphasis on the self-destructive element of terrorism will be discussed as Verkhovensky manipulates and deceives the members of his terrorist group only to murder one of his own, the suspected informer Shatov. Stavrogin, on the other hand, will be identified as the source of nihilism in *The Devils* in whom terrorism flourishes. The examination of Dostoyevsky’s view regarding the philosophy of nihilism will be fundamental to this chapter as we observe how Stavrogin, through his total indifference to life and inability to distinguish evil from good, influences others by bringing out their destructive capacities. This will be the case for Verkhovensky, who conceived his terrorist plans as a result of his friendship with Stavrogin, for Kirilov who, on Stavrogin’s advice, believes he can take the place of God by committing suicide, and for other characters who come into contact with Stavrogin and by the end of the novel are either murdered or commit suicide. It will thus be argued that Dostoyevsky believed terrorism to be a direct consequence of the devastating power of the philosophy of nihilism advocated by the radicals of the 1860s and 1870s.
The arguments of this thesis are indebted to the scholars who have specialised in the study of Dostoyevsky’s novels, in particular Joseph Frank, Richard Peace, L. P. Grossman, Malcom V. Jones, Mikhail Bakhtin and Derek Offord. The works of these critics, among others, will allow this study to take shape and make new assumptions regarding the themes of individual radicalisation and terrorism in the selected Dostoyevsky novels.

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10 Frank’s five-volume biography of Dostoyevsky has been fundamental to this study. Two of these volumes in particular have often been cited throughout this thesis: Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865* (London: Robson, 1987). Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-71* (London: Robson, 1995).


Chapter 1.
A Revolutionary Tradition: Historical Patterns of Individual Radicalisation and Terrorism in Nineteenth-Century Russia

A brief overview of the period in which Dostoyevsky was writing can perhaps help us position his discussion of individual radicalization and political violence in its historical context. Many of the elements used by Dostoyevsky to construct the characters of his novels were taken from the Russian socio-political environment that surrounded him; a setting in which the origins of modern radicalism and terrorism emerged through an overarching movement towards revolution. In his book entitled *The Russian Tradition*, Tibor Szamuely states that as the entry of the Russian nation into the nineteenth-century was inaugurated with the crowning of a new Tsar, Alexander I, impermanence and instability became the essential characteristics of everyday life.¹⁶ Modern Russia was indeed a nation crippled by its backward social and political institutions. The new Tsar was faced with a country plagued by poverty and economic insecurity. On top of this, peasant slavery had become a serious matter which added pressure on the autocracy to introduce new reforms; many exploited peasants were well aware that they could be emancipated with a stroke of the Tsar’s pen.¹⁷ Meanwhile, in Europe, the shattering events of the French Revolution had proved that socio-political change and the seizure of autonomous power by the people was an achievable reality. The news had rapidly made its way into Russia and resounded amongst a Russian population whose resentment towards an oppressive and untrustworthy autocratic State had reached intolerable levels. What kind of reaction did

¹⁷ One of the first attempts by a Russian radical intellectual to bring the problem of serfdom to the attention of the public was that of Alexander Radishchev. In 1790, Radishchev privately printed his *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow*, a polemical study of the problems in the Russia of Catherine the Great such as peasant slavery, the powers of the nobility and personal freedom. He was initially sentenced to death for his manuscript, a punishment which was commuted to ten years in the *katorga* prison of Eastern Siberia. For more information see Allen McConnel, *A Russian Philosophe: Alexander Radishchev 1749-1802* (The Hague: Nijhoff Publishers, 1964).
Russians have to such news delivered from the West? What sort of ideologies emerged in Russia throughout this time? And more precisely, what urged Fyodor Dostoyevsky to create fictional novels depicting radicalized young men and women with terrorist aspirations?

Previous studies on pre-revolutionary Russia have made detailed and thought-provoking observations on this particular historical period. Various scholars and literary critics have taken on the task of probing and unearthing important information regarding the Russian revolutionary tradition by focusing on those individuals, groups, documents and events which shaped the course of modern Russian history. Amongst these is the aforementioned Tibor Szamuey, whose study of Russia’s past is an insightful and balanced account beginning with the Mongol Heritage and ending with the late nineteenth-century Marxist dialectics. Alongside Szamuey stands Franco Venturi with his book entitled *Roots of Revolution*, a remarkable portrait of populist and socialist movements in Russia indispensable to anyone interested in the study of Russia’s revolutionary history. Thirdly, James Billington’s emphasis on the concept of revolution in *Fire in the Minds of Men* provides a brilliant narration of the history of the revolutionary faith throughout Europe and Russia. Billington’s chronological account begins with the birth of the ideal of revolution in the late eighteenth century and follows the development of this phenomenon until the Russian Revolution of 1917. These works are but a few amongst a vast range of literary and cultural studies delving into the depths of Russia’s revolutionary past. They have been chosen and used, along with numerous other works, as foundation stones for this chapter on which the setting for an examination of Dostoyevsky’s novels has been created.

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I. Radicalisation in the Context of Nineteenth-Century Russia

A fundamental concept central to the history of the Russian revolutionary movement is that of radicalism, or more precisely, radicalisation. Radicalism, in the context of political and social philosophy, means going to the root of a problem through intellectual analysis or practical policy. Ideals that are labelled “radical” (from the Latin word *radix*, meaning root) seek the root of social ills and often include a plan of action for social change as well as a critique of society. Radicalisation is therefore the process of making or becoming radical, especially in political outlook. In the context of the nineteenth-century Russian socio-political situation, being or becoming radical involved an adherence to certain ideals imported into Russia, from Western Europe, by the Russian intelligentsia. The word “Intelligentsia” from the Latin *intelligentia* (intelligence) refers to the educated class of society regarded as possessing culture and political initiative. The term was introduced into the Russian language in 1861 in an article describing southern Russian students in the Hapsburg Empire. It soon acquired popularity amongst the Russian student population and was also seized by moderate liberals, romantics and Westernisers. Members of the Russian intelligentsia rejected the Tsarist autocracy and nurtured the idea of the imperative downfall of that system. The main principles of Western radical thought which interested Russian radical intellectuals can be summarised as follows: firstly, radicals adhered to the belief that man does not possess a spiritual dimension which is qualitatively different from his physical being. Secondly, that man is solely governed by self-interest. Thirdly, that man is a rational creature and may therefore be made to see where his best interest lies and act accordingly. Fourthly, that since man is willing to be rationally persuaded, he has the capability of building a perfect society and lastly, that “the good is that which is useful.”

By the middle of the nineteenth-century, hundreds of young Russian men and women had adopted these utilitarian, rationally egoistic ideals and had praised the philosophy of socialism as a viable means of combating an oppressive and stagnant autocracy. The more one frequented the world of radical ideology, the more radicalised one became; the final

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stage of this process of radicalisation would see the individual adopt violence as an extreme means of protest. Just as the young radical is at the centre of most of Dostoyevsky’s literature, so will this chapter, to a large extent, revolve around an investigation into the young revolutionaries who attempted to transform the social and political environment of the Russia in which they lived.

Behind the violent acts of the French Revolution lay a great desire to tear down those established principles of European society which many saw as outdated and in need of revision. Europe had just lived the age of the Enlightenment, a period spanning almost two centuries in which reason was declared the pivotal concept upon which society could be founded. The Enlightenment introduced scientific reasoning, technological innovation and Lutheran religious reformation into the European context. These new principles were to be the key to European development and to its continued rise as one of the leading powers of the world. The advent of the French Revolution at the end of this period, set a new standard in Europe by proving to all the efficacy of violent rebellion as a method of change, a way of forcefully imposing one’s political and social perspective on the ruling authorities. Maximilien Robespierre’s Régime de la Terreur (reign of terror), from 1793 to 1794, made clear the degree of extremism a revolutionary could reach in his armed struggle against the State. The beheading of King Louis XVI marked a point in European modern history in which the rebel subject triumphed over the monarch, a moment which simultaneously frightened and inspired European society.23

Thus the nineteenth-century begins with initial signs of social upheaval and with, as Dostoyevsky would later state in one of his novels, “fires lit in the minds of men.”24 The revolutionary spirit sparked by the events of the French Revolution would soon spread throughout Europe and would also have an impact on the new philosophical movements emerging in this time. Not only did the option of a physical revolution become more plausible in Europe, but ideological revolutions such as the rise of Romanticism also became common. These were fostered by writers and musicians such as Johann Goethe,

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William Blake, Richard Wagner and Alexander Pushkin. These men did not trust a society solely founded on human reason and fought against the belief in rationality by creating works that reflected the ambiguity of the human soul in a captivating and creative way.\textsuperscript{25} It is at this point of European history, in the late 1840s to early 1850s, when Romanticism was emerging in the social and artistic scene of many countries, that this discussion shifts into a more relevant and specific context: the Russian revolutionary tradition.

As previously mentioned, Russia entered into the nineteenth-century with the crowning of a new emperor, Alexander I, a ruler who tried desperately to amend the faults of the previous Tsar, Paul I, a half-mad despot who reintroduced punishments such as flogging and branding.\textsuperscript{26} The times of Catherine II (empress from 1762-1796, also known as Catherine the Great), when Russia was heading towards a more prosperous future, had been lost. To a large extent Russia would remain unchanged for most of the nineteenth-century. The terrible decisions of Tsar Paul I, and the freedom with which he was able to carry them out, demonstrated the unlimited power of the autocratic State over its people. This brings to the surface one of Russia’s major obstacles in achieving social, political and economic progress, the presence of an authoritarian and autocratic Tsarist government.

Whilst in Europe ancient emperors were disappearing and social and political boundaries were being shattered, the Russian political and social environment remained under the complete control and surveillance of an omnipotent State. Some examples of the oppressive nature of the State were the denial of virtues like freedom of speech, whilst rigorous censorship ensured that no critical or seemingly radical pieces of work were accessible to the public. The news delivered from Europe concerning new rights being granted to people began to stir a dissatisfied and impatient Russian population that believed the entire nation could not progress under a powerful and unchallenged despotism. In an effort to placate the brewing discontent of the people, a program of far-
reaching reforms had been prepared by Tsar Alexander I and statesman M.M. Speransky.\footnote{Michael Speransky was a man of low origin, a gifted, incorruptible and experienced administrator. He was Alexander’s closest and most trusted collaborator. He has also been labelled Russia’s most brilliant statesman of the nineteenth-century. For more information on this name see Marc Raeff, \textit{Michael Speransky, Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772-1839}, 2nd rev. ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969).} Amongst the objectives was the emancipation of the peasants from serfdom, a move which had been feared and ignored by preceding Emperors and Empresses. Nonetheless the Russian people soon became very sceptical of the Emperor and their high expectations soon turned to a disheartened feeling of distrust. The peasant problem quickly became a central issue as the pressing need for emancipation was felt throughout the nation with growing clarity.

Fearing rebellious upheaval or even revolution, the State assumed the position of watchdog and extinguisher of the growing revolutionary spirit within threatening minorities such as the intelligentsia. The successor of Alexander I, Nicholas I, who reigned until 1855, created what can be labelled a police State whereby authoritarian control extended to every corner of Russian daily life. However, in spite of this ferocious despotism, prohibited books signed by radical thinkers such as Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier were secretly being introduced in Russia.\footnote{Sergei Stepiak Kravchinski, \textit{Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life} (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1973), 13.} The humiliating defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856) together with the death of Nicholas I, contributed to the increasing social unrest. Despite the arrival of Tsar, Alexander II (crowned in 1855), who promised to fulfil old reforms and introduce new ones, the iron grip of the autocracy on the people showed no sign of easing. The moral state of the Russian people in this first half of the nineteenth-century remained dispirited and disillusioned.

The origins of this repressive nature of the Russian autocracy can be found in fundamental events of the Russian revolutionary tradition such as the Pugachev Rebellion (1773) and the Decembrist Revolt (1825). The aggression with which these revolts lashed out at the State awakened the Tsarist autocracy to the revolutionary capability of the Russian people. Faced with the signs of new political and social agitation, the nineteenth-century Tsars remembered the Pugachev rebellion whereby a man named Emelyan Pugachev, who
claimed to be the Tsar Peter III, fought for the freedom of serfs from their lords and for serf land ownership. In a bloody and violent conflict which almost turned into civil war, Pugachev rallied peasants and Cossacks against the forces of the Russian monarchy; the event was deemed the greatest of peasant rebellions in Russian history. This revolt was the culmination of a peasant revolutionary tradition that had been active since 1769 and throughout the reign of Catherine the Great; a tradition which the autocracy knew could reignite at any time within the new century. Events such as these also shed light on the often contradictory attitude of the peasants towards their Russian Emperor. These dark masses of peasants had a seemingly paternal love-hate relationship with the autocracy. They held on to a deep rooted faith in the Emperor and Empress, who to them had played a vital role in the shaping of the national character, yet they despised them for their lack of interest in issues such as the degradation of the serfs. Because of this, the Tsarist government, after Catherine the Great, remained in as much a state of alert in the countryside as it did within the major urban centres.

On December 14, 1825, organised insurrection shifted from the countryside and arrived in Senate Square of St. Petersburg. The Decembrist uprising was led by aristocratic revolutionaries, Russian army officers and soldiers. These men had fought the Napoleonic Wars and had been exposed to a Europe shaped by the events of the French Revolution. What they had witnessed in their time abroad had roused in them a feeling of necessity for the transformation of the Russian State. They are often considered by scholars such as Szamuel and Billington to be the initiators of the Russian revolutionary movement; the men who “took the first step on the road to the 1917 Revolution.” For the Tsars of the late nineteenth-century however, they were the most recent reminder of the devastating peasant rebellions. In a violent clash which ended in the temporary seizure of the Senate Square, the Decembrists refused to swear allegiance to the new Tsar Nicholas I and announced their loyalty to the idea of a Russian constitution. In essence however, theirs was an attempt to destroy autocratic, slave-holding Russia in the hope of establishing a just

The importance of this event lies in the sense of practicality it gave to the ideal of revolution within Russia. It was a unique moment in Russian history in which a collective of educated people physically confronted the Tsarist autocracy. The Tsar was mindful of this; a sentence from a letter to his brother reveals both his awareness of the approaching revolution and confirmation that it would be his job to assure that this happened as late as possible: "Revolution stands at the gates of Russia, but it will never penetrate into her so long as I live." Although the revolt was suppressed within hours, it left a small yet significant feeling of triumph in the radical gentry and revolutionary intellectuals that would be carefully cultivated throughout the nineteenth-century and used for further attacks against the autocracy.

Meanwhile, in the Russian cultural sphere, the assimilation of Western culture by modern intellectuals had instilled a love and a passion for science, art, literature, philosophy and social theory within the great thinkers of Russian society. Leading intellectuals and critics of the 1840s such as Vissarion Belinsky, Michael Bakunin and Alexander Herzen and of the 1860s such as Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Nikolai Dobrolyubov, Dimitri Pisarev, Peter Lavrov, and Nikolai Mikhailovsky became the ideologists and the natural leaders of the Russian intelligentsia, committing themselves to values regarding life, existence and human progress. Their works sought to reproduce the reality of the social and political environment, capturing and documenting both the constructive and damaging aspects of a society in need of creativity and art. However, the contact of these men with not only Western philosophical theories but with liberal and socialist ideological currents soon developed into a full-blown infatuation with the West and its libertarian struggles. Dissatisfaction with the immovable Russian social, political and economic order transformed into the commitment to Western-inspired ideologies as possible remedies to national problems. A significant division between autocracy and intelligentsia was thus created. With the rejection of the Tsar also came the rejection of many of the predominant

33 Szamuely, The Russian Tradition, 147.
national values such as class, church, family and State. By the 1840s, the writer, or more importantly, the literary critic, acquired a position of importance that has no parallel in any other country or age.\(^{35}\)

A figure of the Russian intelligentsia who occupies a key position in the history of the origins of the Russian revolutionary movement is Alexander Herzen. Herzen can be identified as the intellectual responsible for the birth of nineteenth-century Russian radicalism and is often labelled the father of Russian socialism. Driven to hatred of serfdom at a young age due to the ill-treatment of the peasant slaves in his household, Herzen developed a lifelong commitment to the concepts of liberty and freedom.\(^{36}\) Inspired by the men who had fought in the Decembrist revolt, Herzen became more critical of the Tsarist autocracy until he left Russia for Western Europe in 1847, never to return. Abroad, Herzen conceived many of the ideals that formed the core of the Russian revolutionary tradition. Europe in his eyes represented freedom, dignity and human rights; values which his own nation was in desperate need of adopting. He studied the theory and practice of European revolutionary movements and deemed these applicable to the precarious Russian situation. He is renowned for having significantly contributed to what would later emerge as the Russian philosophy of populism: the ideology which would support a crucial stage of the revolutionary movement.\(^{37}\) Having said this, Herzen was not a supporter of violence and was in fact rejected by the upcoming generation of radical intellectuals such as Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who dismissed his “soft” approach to the idea of revolution. Nonetheless, he stands as one of the early revolutionaries who adapted the European concept of socialism to Russia. Due to the impact that his works had on Russian social thought he became the leading figure of nineteenth-century Russian radicalism.\(^{38}\)

Along with Belinsky, Herzen stands as a symbol of the early Westerniser in Russia: a member of the Russian intelligentsia who, in contrast to the Slavophil, wished to bring the

\(^{38}\) Szamuely, *The Russian Tradition*, 197.
culture of Western Europe and a European way of life to Russia. The terms “Westerniser” and “Slavophil” refer to two groups of intellectuals who throughout the nineteenth-century differed in their ideas concerning Russia’s destiny. Whilst the Westernisers saw the assimilation of European ideology and culture in Russia as the key to progress, the Slavophils stood in opposition to the Europeanisation of Russia, deeming this a betrayal of true Russian nationhood. Slavophils despised legal forms and advocated Slav institutions; they alternatively envisioned a free Russia based on the village commune and the old form of parliament. Yes, Russia was in need of change, they were united with the Westernisers on this point, yet they believed that reform should come from above, not from below; that is, from the government and not through a revolution of the people. The Slavophils firmly believed in the power of Orthodox Christianity as a regenerative element of Russian culture from which a new and creative cultural consciousness would grow. It was however the culture of the Westernisers which inspired Dostoyevsky to create fictional novels based on the effects of radical ideals on the young people of Russia. It is thus essential to further examine the radical camp of Western thinkers and focus on the impact their theories had on Russian society.

II. Fathers and Sons: The Two Generations of the Russian Intelligentsia

The study of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia inevitably leads us into an analysis of the origins and nature of Russia’s modern revolutionary tradition. This opens a discussion of how and why this nation moved from the conservatism of Tsar Alexander I (in power from 1801-1825) to the revolutionary terrorist upheaval that came about and eventually took the life of Tsar Alexander II (in power from 1855-1881). As Szamuely clearly points out, Russia’s revolutionary movement was:

staffed, supported and trained by the intelligentsia, it received its ideas, its ethos, its system of values, its world outlook and its way of thinking from the intelligentsia. The Russian intelligentsia was an instrument of destruction…the consummation of its sole object automatically entailed its own self-destruction.

41 Szamuely, The Russian Tradition, 143.
It did not take long for the Russian intellectual, influenced by Western principles and ideals, to concentrate on methods which would amend the major social, political and economic problems Russia was facing in this new century. Having identified the Tsar as the source of all of Russia’s misfortunes, the Russian intelligentsia dissociated itself from the State and assumed the position of advocate of Western radical ideals. As the decades of the new century advanced and public upheaval slowly intensified, socialist thought acquired popularity amongst a body of utopian idealists eager to bring about some form of change within Russia.\textsuperscript{42}

In a regime where any form of rebellious conspiracy or secretly organized association was regarded as highly suspicious, the only way that the Russian intelligentsia could legally communicate with its own citizens was through literature and literary criticism. Driven by the certitude that it was a chosen elite which needed to fight for justice and liberty within Russia, the intelligentsia began publishing works in the form of essays, pamphlets, novels, (some of this done illegally) hoping to awaken the revolutionary spirit amongst its contemporaries and the growing body of educated young people in universities. However, their messages reached a very small proportion of the Russian population, namely the people living in major Russian urban centres such as St. Petersburg and Moscow. Meanwhile, in the remote Russian countryside, masses of illiterate peasants were oblivious to the growing conflict between the educated class and the autocracy.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of what would become a long-lasting battle between radical thinkers and Tsarist State, it is necessary to observe the social structure and dynamics of the intelligentsia throughout the nineteenth-century. The Russian intelligentsia can essentially be separated into two generations, that of the so called “men of the forties” (1840s) and that of the “men of the sixties” (1860s). These two generations differed in many of their principles and often came into conflict because of their ideological disagreements. What united them, however, was the shared belief that stood as a central component to many of their works: opposition to the status quo. The first

generation, which after the publication of Ivan Turgenev’s novel *Fathers and Sons* in 1862 also became known as “the generation of fathers,” predominantly consisted of noble romantics and high-minded individuals influenced by the idealistic philosophy of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Humanity, beauty and reason were the concepts to which they were most devoted. Although they held different political views, these intellectuals were at one in their hostility toward the State, in particular in their hatred of serfdom. Herzen and Turgenev were part of this generation, as were authors and critics such as the aforementioned Belinsky (also known as the father of the Russian intelligentsia) and other more moderate and conservative writers such as Ivan Goncharov. The efforts of this generation to arouse in Russia an intellectual criticism similar to that of Europe were seen by the upcoming generation of young people as feeble and ineffectual.

It was during the dawn of the new times, the 1860s, amongst the raised expectations of Alexander II’s reforms, that the Russian revolutionary tradition acquired its distinctive shape. What emerged out of this growing dissatisfaction and disillusionment towards the autocratic State was a very different kind of intellectual, fruit of a shift in the student population of the universities, one of the symptoms of the speed at which Russian society was changing in this second half of the nineteenth-century. From being made up of sons and daughters of aristocratic families, tertiary institutions came to be populated by the so-called *raznochinsty* (men of different ranks) i.e. the intelligentsia of non-gentry social background, sons and daughters of peasants, army officers, artisans and tradesmen. The *raznochinsty* rose to become a clearly defined social group, bringing to the universities their bitterness towards the State and its system of government. These were the men of the sixties, the “new men”; young revolutionaries who ridiculed their superfluous fathers, dismissed romantic ideals and values and ardently pursued radical ideals. The primary character of Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*, Bazarov, had been a caricature of these men, and Dostoyevsky was to give life to another satirical representation of these individuals by modelling the young Peter Verkhovensky on the revolutionary Sergei Nechaev in *The Devils*.

44 Szamuely, *The Russian Tradition*, 215, 149.
Representing this new generation of the Russian intelligentsia was an intellectual who significantly influenced the young Russian revolutionaries of his time: Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky. Chernyshevsky bluntly dismissed Alexander Herzen’s leadership, with its hopes of realizing a constitutional monarchy through reform from above and introduced new radical theories which sought a clean break from the government. From this point on, the new ideals and philosophies adopted from the West and disseminated within the Russian intellectual student environment were to be nihilism, utilitarianism, radicalism, anarchism and eventually, terrorism.\(^{45}\)

Nikolai Chernyshevsky, together with another renowned radical spokesman of the 1860s, Nikolai Dobroliubov, created the voice of literary criticism in Russia through articles and book reviews that conveyed revolutionary messages to the public. For instance, with his most popular book, *What Is to Be Done?*\(^{46}\) Chernyshevsky succeeded in popularizing materialist, positivist, and rational utilitarian ideals among the intelligentsia, thus persuading many of its younger members to believe that radical action was a just as well as necessary cause. In creating the mysterious figure of Rakhmetov (the main character of the book), Chernyshevsky exalted the professional revolutionary as “the salt of the earth.”\(^{47}\) His main ideas can be summed up as the necessity for radical action, belief in Russia’s readiness for a revolution, and the justification of means by ends.\(^{48}\) As Szamuely points out, *What is to be Done?* inspired many young men and women to dedicate their lives to the cause of revolution:

> It became the Bible of the radical intelligentsia, of the *raznochinsty*, of Russian youth in every succeeding generation. Everyone in the revolutionary movement, whether propagandist or terrorist, was influenced by it. It became the banner of the Russian youth.\(^{49}\)

\(^{45}\) Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, 389.  
It did not take long for hundreds of these self-proclaimed “new men” of Russia to fully absorb Chernyshevsky’s messages and begin a process of individual radicalization. The book gave guidance and orientation to the growing student revolutionary movement, advocating the fanatical belief that science was the key to progress. Within a few years the characters Chernyshevsky had created in his novel became real-life individuals who endeavoured to establish secret societies, distribute revolutionary leaflets and even get their hands on the new revolutionary weapon: the bomb.

III. Nihilism

In his study of Russian intellectual history entitled Russian Social Thought, Andrei Walicki asserts that the new men advocated materialism and common-sense rationalism, combined with a firm belief in an essentially unchangeable and rational human nature. However, it was the Russian revolutionary Sergei Stepniak Kravchinsky who in his work Underground Russia (published in 1883), delved into these moral attitudes, labelling them, as Walicki does later in his work, as belonging to a philosophy popular amongst the radical students of the 1860s and 1870s: Russian nihilism. Russian nihilism was born in part out of Russia’s humiliating defeat in the Crimean War and in part out of a strong resentment towards the old-fashioned and oppressive Tsarist autocracy. Kravchinsky wrote that the fundamental principle of Russian nihilism (from the Latin word nihil meaning “nothing”) was absolute individualism. It was expressed through the total negation of the existing tradition, namely all the obligations imposed upon the individual by society, family and religion. Stephen Lovell’s more recent explanation of “Russian nihilism” in the Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy can perhaps further clarify this concept for us:

The Nihilists were the generation of young, radical, non-gentry intellectuals who espoused a thoroughgoing materialism, positivism and scientism…Russian nihilism negated not the normative significance of the world or the general meaning of human existence, but rather a particular social, political and aesthetic order.

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51 Kravchinsky, Underground Russia, 3.
Although Kravchinsky’s and Lovell’s definitions may seem sufficient for the reader to gain a proper understanding of Russian nihilism, Roger Scruton’s explanation of the more general term “nihilism” captures the essential elements of this philosophy and further clarifies its meaning for us. In his *Dictionary of Political Thought*, nihilism is defined as:

> The belief in nothing as opposed to the absence of belief. Nihilists are guided by the notion that since society is founded on lies, and all moral, religious and humanitarian beliefs are just instruments of concealment, all beliefs and values must be torn down, and the disposition of hope and worship be eliminated, so that the world may be seen as it really is.\(^{53}\)

The clarity of this modern definition of nihilism introduces us to the main principles of this complex phenomenon and prepares us to look into the origins of the term in a Russian literary context. The word “nihilism” was coined by Ivan Turgenev in the aforementioned novel *Fathers and Sons*.\(^ {54}\) The ideas expressed by the main character of the book, Yevgeny Bazarov, were those that Turgenev had noticed being rapidly adopted by the youthful student population. Bazarov is a haughty young Russian doctor who claims that no objective ground for moral principles exists. He is the perfect fictional character representing the new men of the 1860s.\(^ {55}\) When questioned by two adult aristocrats (from the generation of the fathers) about his absence of moral values, Bazarov responds: “We [he and his friend Arkady] have decided to deny everything!” He is interrogated again: “What? Both poetry and art? I find it hard to express it?....You say that you deny everything – rather that you would consign everything to destruction. But also you ought to construct.” Bazarov’s answer is simple and to the point: “That is not our business, first the site must be cleared.”\(^ {56}\) Turgenev had understood the intentions of the revolutionary young men and women of the 1860s and, through Bazarov, seemed to have unveiled this philosophy of nihilism which lay at the core of their radical and violent behaviour. So accurate had Turgenev’s representation been, that Bazarov was hailed by the nihilist spokesman who succeeded Chernyshevsky, Dmitri Pisarev, and paradoxically became a hero-like figure amongst the radicalised youth. The label “nihilist” was proudly adopted by members of the new generation who, as Kline summarises for us, urged the “annihilation

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\(^{56}\) Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, 68.
of the past and present, of realised social and cultural values and of such values in process of realisation, in the name of the future, i.e., for the sake of social and cultural values yet to be realised.”

Works such as Fathers and Sons and What is to be Done? reflected the social upheaval created by the Russian student population. Both Chernyshevsky and Turgenev, in spite of their completely different social and political perspectives, were able to pinpoint the ideals that were driving Russian educated young people towards political revolt. Their works identified concepts of materialism, rational egoism, ascetic belief in science, nihilism and utilitarian reasoning as the engines driving a new generation towards individual freedom. According to Kravchinsky, the primary aim of the young radicals was to prove that the individual was free from not only political despotism but from a moral despotism that weighs upon the private and inner life of the individual. The now swollen student population (in St. Petersburg, the university population had more than doubled during 1855-1860) had begun to organise itself into a revolutionary sub-culture forming underground groups, also known as revolutionary student circles. Students developed a communal life based around libraries, mutual aid funds and even student courts. Within their gatherings arose discussions regarding the need to free Russia from the oppressive autocracy and rebuild the nation in their own image. The unforgiving wrath of the State, however, soon reached these emerging realities, and the first arrests were initiated. Chernyshevsky was amongst those arrested in 1862. His long imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress and final exile to Siberia in 1864 reveals Tsar Alexander’s absolute intolerance towards political conspirators.

Another concept which acquired fame amongst the young radicals of the 1860s after the publication of Fathers and Sons was that art and morality should be discussed in terms of British utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is best understood as a theory which maintains that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the guiding principle of conduct. As Tim Chappel and Roger Crisp explain: “Utilitarianism has usually focused on actions.

58 Kravchinski, Underground Russia, 4.
59 Billington, Fire in the Minds of Men, 391-93.
most common form is act-utilitarianism, according to which what makes an action right is its maximising total or average utility.”\textsuperscript{60} Bazarov is fascinated by both science and utility and deems most pre-determined ideologies, especially the liberal Romanticism of “men of the forties” such as his hosts, as utterly useless and disposable. This way of perceiving the world was very similar to the nihilist doctrine of Dmitri Ivanovich Pisarev, one of the radical intellectuals and critics who hailed the main character of \textit{Fathers and Sons}: “he engaged all my sympathy, and he continues to be my favourite.”\textsuperscript{61} Pisarev’s most significant contribution to the Russian revolutionary tradition was in fact a nihilist doctrine within which utilitarianism was the dominating theoretical principle. As Frank argues, Pisarev established that identification of radicalism with the philosophy of nihilism, and hence with the ambition of creating a \textit{tabula rasa}\textsuperscript{62} by total destruction.\textsuperscript{63} According to Pisarev the only criteria that could be used to judge the value of any action or product of the human mind was its contribution to the well-being of society. Although he lived a very short life (he died at the age of 27), much of which was spent in prison, Pisarev created the basis for a new code of morality which fitted perfectly with, and encouraged the continuation of, the \textit{raznochinsty’s} struggles against Tsarist rule.\textsuperscript{64} A sentence from one of his insurrectionary essays has been identified by Yarmolinsky as a potential motto of the radical nihilists: “Here is the ultimatum of our camp: what can be smashed should be smashed; what will stand the blow is good; what will fly into smithereens is rubbish; at any rate, hit out right and left, there will, and can be, no harm from it.”\textsuperscript{65} Pisarev’s intellectual nihilism became a philosophy of denial for all those who, following his example, dedicated themselves to the revolutionary cause.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy}. S.v. “Utilitarianism.”


\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Tabula Rasa}, from the Latin, meaning “scraped tablet.” A tablet from which the writing has been erased, and which is therefore ready to be written upon again; a blank tablet. For this thesis the term will be used in a figurative way, referring to the complete destruction of Russia envisioned by some of Dostoyevsky’s nihilist revolutionary characters.

\textsuperscript{63} Frank, \textit{Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years}, 71.

\textsuperscript{64} Szamuely, \textit{The Russian Tradition}, 240.

In order to clarify any misconceptions regarding the combined use of the notions of nihilism and utilitarianism it is important to point out the element of contradiction which at times ran through the theories of the early Russian revolutionaries. Indeed, when mixed with utilitarianism, nihilism can be contradictory, and vice versa. Yet this unveils an aspect, or one may say, a flaw, in the notions advocated by late nineteenth-century nihilists which perhaps exposes the main reason why their endeavours were unsuccessful and, as Dostoyevsky tried to emphasise in his novels, self-destructive. In expressing utilitarian ideals which had as their primary aim the socio-political development of Russia and the well-being of its people, the radical revolutionaries wilfully projected a humanitarian image of themselves. It was, after all, in the name of humanity that they were moving the revolutionary movement forward. Yet their struggles were founded on a nihilist doctrine which rejected all social and political institutions and trusted the power of reason (popularised by Chernyshevsky and Pisarev) as the only solution to the numerous problems affecting Russia. Such thought led to an unprecedented egoism and to the belief that Russian institutions, laws, doctrines and government needed to be destroyed in order for progress to be instigated. This resulted in the suppression of such humanitarian feelings and fostered an egocentric extremism which brought many nihilists to continue their radical struggle against the State at any cost. Many would eventually acknowledge the failure of their ideals, often in the prisons of the Tsarist police, whilst others would dedicate their lives to the political struggle and often live as fugitives. Elucidating this contradictory nature of the ideals of the nihilists is once again Lovell in his definition of Russian nihilism:

> Despite their name, the Russian Nihilists did hold beliefs – most notably in themselves and in the power of their doctrine to effect social change. It is however, the vagueness of their positive programmes that distinguishes the Nihilists from the revolutionary socialists that followed them.66

This vagueness plagued the nihilist culture and caused many radicals to adopt terrorist violence as a final, desperate attempt to bring about social change within Russia.

Amongst the first student agitators to encourage the use of violence as a method of protest against the State was Peter G. Zaichnevsky, author of a revolutionary leaflet named Young

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Russia (1862). Young Russia advocated revolution calling for “direct action and rejection of the possibility of a compromise between the ruling class and the rest of society.” According to Zaichnevsky, the revolution had to be carried out by the majority, using force if necessary, in order to transform Russia’s political, economic and social system along socialist lines. The leaflet demanded revolution, a bloody and pitiless revolution that had to uproot the present dysfunctional society. The term “terrorist” was used by Zaichnevsky to show his readers how the revolution was to be sparked: “we will go further, not only than the poor revolutionaries of 1848, but also than the great terrorists of the 1790s.” As Billington asserts, Zaichnevsky’s was an almost sacramental exaltation of violence. Proclamations such as these demonstrated the tempestuous character of the Russian political and social climate throughout the 1860s. The act of violence thus began to be advocated as the ultimate weapon to be used against the autocracy. Zaichnevsky stood with Chernyshevsky and Pisarev as another model for many young raznochinsty to emulate. The concepts of violence, terror, conspiracy and justice for the people which echoed amongst the raznochinsty throughout this decade all stemmed from the ideals present in the publications of these men.

The flames which devoured entire suburbs of St. Petersburg in spring of 1862 signalled the high point of what Frank labels an “era of proclamations.” The fires raged for two weeks, devastating whole wooden-built areas and leaving thousands homeless and in need of shelter. This occurred not long after Zaichnevsky’s Young Russia had been published, a sign that the revolutionary message was being welcomed by the raznochinsty and that their

67 P. G. Zaichnevsky, Young Russia. Cited in Franco Venturi, Roots of Revolution, 293. The European revolutions of 1848 were acts of hope and despair. The 1840s had been a decade of political excitement arousing great expectations of change and reform. An agricultural disaster in 1845 however, sparked an economic crisis (the worst of the entire century) which eventually affected a large proportion of the population, bringing many to frightening levels of poverty. As the situation worsened and levels of unemployment increased, the liberal ideals of many groups and individuals from all classes exploded into a series of revolts manifested through violence, looting and the setting ablaze of edifices. Although the revolutions were quickly put down, the long term reverberations of the events had long lasting effects. They helped in bringing about the elimination of feudalism in Austria and Prussia in 1850, the emancipation of serfs in Russia in 1861 and the unification of both Italy and Germany in 1871. It is likely that “the terrorists of the 1790s” Zaichnevsky is referring to were the revolutionaries of the Reign of Terror such as Robespierre. For more information see Michael Rapport, Nineteenth-Century Europe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 92-133.

68 Billington, Fire in the Minds of Men, 394.

69 Frank, Dostoyevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 148-49.
insurrectionary spirit had finally been stimulated. The first real act of political violence, however, did not take place until the fourth of April, 1866, when a twenty-five-year-old law student named Dmitri Karakozov attempted to assassinate Tsar Alexander II. Karakozov was a member of a clandestine organisation named “Hell” (the inner core of a greater circle named The Organisation), headed by his cousin and fellow political conspirator Nikolai Ishutin. Ishutin’s group was devoted to socialist principles. It was unscrupulous in its use of deception and violence and prepared youths like Karakozov to perform acts of political violence. Like many of the nihilist revolutionaries of this time, Ishutin believed that a revolution in Russia was imminent and indispensable for the prevention of the development of capitalism and constitutionalism. Karakozov fired a shot at the Tsar as the latter was taking his daily walk in a park. However, a bystander who had witnessed what was happening knocked Krakozov’s elbow just before the bullet was fired and the shot missed. The young revolutionary was immediately arrested. The news of this attempt soon spread throughout St. Petersburg and Moscow and was welcomed by radicals and revolutionaries throughout Russia. Hell had put into practice a new method of struggle against autocracy: terrorism. Despite these events, however, Russia’s new generation of radical young men and women looked back on the 1860s with dissatisfaction. Their efforts to bring about change in Russia had been met with little response from the public (especially from the peasantry who had expressed concern for the Tsar upon hearing of the assassination attempt) and heavy punishments from the State which increased supervision of suspected revolutionaries and radical students. It was through a mixture of old and new revolutionary theorists such as Michael Bakunin, Sergei Nechaev, Peter Tkachev and Peter Lavrov that the revolutionary movement was carried into the 1870s and 1880s. On the principles launched by these intellectuals, a new current of thought emerged, that of populism, or in Billington’s words, the “quest for the masses.”

IV. Russian Populism

In order to gain a clearer understanding of what lay behind the hopes and desires of the Russian revolutionary terrorists who crippled the Tsarist autocracy in the late 1800s, it is

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70 Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, 404.
necessary to examine the phase which immediately preceded the explosion of terrorism in
Russia: Russian populism. The succession of events which surround the phase of Russian
populism is indeed a story of ebbs and flows. Conspiracies, uprisings and rebellions were
often preceded or succeeded by a struggle for peaceful development and anti-violent
campaigns; this was characteristic of the volatile nature of the Russian revolutionary
movement in this period. Populism in nineteenth-century Russian thought was a rather
loose term with no precise definition. As affirmed by Isaiah Berlin in his introduction to
Franco Venturi’s *Roots of Revolution*, Russian populism was a radical movement which
had as its primary target social justice and social equality. Russian populists, despite being
divided in many of their principles, believed that the essence of a just and equal society
could be found through an assimilation with the older agrarian-based human relationships.
Driven by the fear that Russia was heading towards total Europeanization, and thus
towards capitalism, the populist leaders of the 1870s believed that the Russian peasants’
traditional self-governing system of cooperation offered the possibility of a free and
democratic social system in Russia. How then was this decade lived by the radical
student body? As previously mentioned, it is at the dawn of the new decade that the student
sub-culture found itself not only dissatisfied and aimless, but also very isolated. There
subsequently grew amongst the youthful radical intelligentsia, persuaded by the theorist
Peter Lavrov’s legally published *Historical Letters* (released in 1870), a strong desire to
bring the revolutionary message, through means of propaganda, to the Russian people.
Lavrov affirmed that a coup d’état would be easy in Russia, but the creation of a socialist
society would need to involve the Russian masses. Like Herzen, Lavrov was an advocate
of peaceful methods, his views sternly rejected the nihilism, utilitarianism and conspiracy
of the sixties, and pointed to ethical socialism as the key to Russia’s progress. Those
endorsing the values of socialism however needed to acquire moral and intellectual values
and distance themselves from useless heroic activism and fanatical martyrdom. To a
youthful intelligentsia, which had become weary of the abstract nature of the preceding
ideologies, Lavrov’s theories seemed providential. Thus the students went to search for a
deeply-needed link with the Russian people, and considering that more than four fifths of

71 Isaiah Berlin, "Introduction," in *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in
the population lived in the countryside, the peasant became the aim of this “quest.” For a brief period the possibility of a non-violent social revolution seemed to shine in Russia. Throughout this decade of the seventies, a wave of students left the universities and set out to live in the country. In the summer of 1874 alone, more than 2000 students left the main Russian cities to experience life amongst the peasants, creating what came to be known as the “going to the people” movement.73

Another leading revolutionary thinker who exercised a strong influence upon the ideology of populism was the so called father of anarchism, Michael Bakunin. According to Walicki, the populist movement was significantly inspired by Bakunin’s belief that the peasant revolutionary instinct needed to be awakened. In fact, many of those who believed in the possibility of a revolutionary upheaval of the masses called themselves Bakuninists.74 The populists of the 1870s looked to Bakunin for answers concerning non-capitalist ways of economic and social development.75 Although never a populist himself, Bakunin profoundly influenced nineteenth-century Russian thought by emphasizing the need to reach out to the masses and discover in them a traditional Russian way of life that could be adopted to counter the emergence of capitalism.

The dreams of the populists were, however, short-lived. The young men and women who poured into the villages throughout the mid 1870s were met by a hostile peasant population: “socialism bounced off people like peas from a wall” wrote Kravchinsky in 1876.76 As Venturi points out, the very nature of their agitation made these young people aware that it would be impossible to support the peasants against administrators and landlords without a bare minimum of legal guarantees and political freedom.77 Moreover, Tsarist repression proved yet again to be an insurmountable obstacle in front of which

74 Walicki, *Russian Social Thought*, 25.
75 Walicki, *Russian Social Thought*, 25.
many students were forced to surrender. By the end of the decade, the quest for the masses was officially deemed a failure.

Whilst the State concentrated on hindering the actions of revolutionary propagandists in the countryside, back in the major cultural centres of Russia a new kind of anti-Tsarist radicalism was fermenting amongst groups of revolutionary thinkers. The criticism of the autocracy had acquired a more vehement character; it had raised itself to a greater level of aggression and it began to root itself in the new nihilist philosophy. The names of revolutionaries such as Sergei Nechaev, Peter Tkachev, Nikolai Morozov and Sergei Stepniak Kravchinsky had acquired fame within the revolutionary minority as did their vehement theories calling upon the use of violence as the ultimate weapon against the oppressive State. Disheartened by the failure of their missions among the peasants, many looked to the these revolutionary thinkers for guidance regarding the role they should play in the revolutionary movement. The zeal fuelling their efforts to foster a revolutionary spirit amongst peasants in the countryside now extinguished, numerous radicals identified political violence as an effective and definitive method of putting an end to the source of all of Russia’s problems: the autocracy. The focus of the revolutionary spirit thus shifted from a social, to a political perspective.  

V. Terrorism

The frustrating feeling of impotence experienced by many young revolutionaries before the immovable Russian people (both in the country side and in urban centres) combined with an unchanging Tsarist autocracy, led a number of these to prepare themselves for a full blown terrorist attack on the State. A wave of terrorist violence hit Russia towards the end of the 1870s. Committed revolutionaries, radicalised insurrectionists and nihilist theorists came together to create a minority of anti-Tsarist rebels fierce in character and unforgiving in its attacks. The old method of propaganda had failed, it was now time to initiate a phase

of “propaganda by the deed”\(^79\) (as it had been labelled in Europe) and de-throne the Tsar in the name of the people and of the revolution to come.

The term terrorism derives from the English word “terror” which comes from the Latin \(t\)errere\(^80\) meaning “to frighten, to cause to move, or to cause to tremble.” The word came into common usage in the political sense, as an assault on civil order, during the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution in the final decade of the eighteenth century (1793-1794). Hence the public response to the violence, the trembling that terrorism effects, is part of the meaning of the term. “Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is not so much a special principle, as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country’s most urgent needs.”\(^81\) Spoken by the dominant member of the Committee of Public Safety, Maximilien Robespierre, this quote illustrates the stern methods used by the revolutionary heads of State in the initial years of the French Revolution. There was a need to terrorise the population in order to preserve and defend the newly installed revolutionary government. The symbol of this dark period of French history was the guillotine; a machine used for a string of executions which claimed the lives of the King and Queen of France Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.\(^82\) The revolutionary tribunal condemned thousands of civilians to death, the majority of whom were innocent, amounting to a death toll of more than 30 000. Robespierre was to fall prey to his own terror; his execution and that of Louis de Saint-Just, by the very weapon they

\(^79\) The term “propaganda by the deed” was coined by a French anti-parliamentarian named Paul Brousse who published an article entitled “Propaganda by the Deed” in the August 1877 edition of the Swiss-based revolutionary journal Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne. Brousse believed that the revolutionary message conveyed through newspapers, public meetings and pamphlets was not reaching the entire public and could be manipulated and distorted by the bourgeoisie press. Action was to be the new order of the day; the working masses, many of whom were illiterate and could not participate in intellectual debates needed to be awakened to the concept of social revolution. For more information see Marie Fleming, “Propaganda by the Deed: Terrorism and Anarchist Theory in Late Nineteenth-century Europe,” in Terrorism in Europe, ed. Yonah Alexander and Kenneth A. Myers (Kent: Croom Helm, 1984), 8-25.


had used to enforce terror, the guillotine, on the 9th of Thermidor\(^{83}\) practically signalled the end of the Reign of Terror.

Conjuring a proper definition of terrorism has never been an easy task. The term is politically and morally loaded and has endorsed different meanings for different people throughout its history. An example of this can be found in the aphorism: “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” Moreover, the world has seen two main forms of terrorism in its modern era, the State (or State-sponsored) terrorism such as the one practiced by Robespierre and his revolutionary government, and the clandestine terrorism of small, underground organisations who engage in asymmetrical warfare against the opposing superior powers of government.\(^{84}\) The primary objective of every form of terrorism is to bring about some form of socio-political change within society. “Terrorism” is briefly defined in the 1996 *International Encyclopedia of Government and Politics* as: “The deliberate use of intimidation and physical force by sovereign States and sub-national groups for political ends.”\(^{85}\) From this definition, we can deduct that the latter kind of terrorism, the subnational, clandestine type, has been the one which has gained more popularity in the modern world. It is this kind of underground, political terrorism which grew amongst the members of the Russian revolutionary movement and which will be observed in the remainder of this chapter.

In his book entitled *Terrorism*, Walter Laqueur offers an understanding of the concept of terrorism by stating that:

> Any definition of political terrorism venturing beyond noting the systematic use of murder, injury and destruction or the threats of such acts towards achieving political ends is bound to lead in endless controversies.\(^{86}\)

Laqueur’s observation is an appropriate way of opening a discussion regarding revolutionary terrorism within late nineteenth-century Russia. The terrorism which swept

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\(^{83}\) Thermidor, in the French Republican Calendar, was the second month of the summer quarter (*mois d’été*). It started in July 19th and ended in August 17th. The 9th of Thermidor refers to the 27th of July 1794.


over Russia in the late 1870s and through to the 1880s was, as Laqueur affirms, political violence made effective by a system of organisation. Small secret societies often run by an executive committee began to establish themselves throughout the major cities and initiate programs of political violence. The leaders of these groups were often intellectual theoreticians who had understood that violence needed to assume an organisational quality and be coordinated effectively if it was to be used as the ultimate weapon that would forever eradicate autocracy. The most influential and effective of these underground groups was named Narodnaya Volya – the People’s Will. It will shortly be observed in the context of its most successful terrorist operation, the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. A brief observation of the intellectual origins of this kind terrorism in Russia must firstly be carried out.

VI. Sergei Nechaev, Catechism of a Revolutionary and the People’s Will

Before focusing on the dynamics of terrorist organisations such as the People’s Will, this discussion of terrorism in a late nineteenth-century Russian context must once again be linked with the Russian intelligentsia. The demand that the radical individual should dedicate body and soul to the cause of the revolution, that the revolutionary should have no feelings other than the desire to destroy society, came from a document signed by the revolutionary nihilist Sergei Nechaev entitled Catechism of a Revolutionary. Pomper sketches a morbid picture of this revolutionary in Sergei Nechaev. Nechaev was a dangerous radical insurrectionist known for his urge to violent activity and deceptive tactics. He often exploited and cheated those who cooperated with him and sought to convince others that deception, murder and blackmail were appropriate revolutionary methods. Nechaev was an extremist and he stands on the fringe of the Russian revolutionary movement as a nihilist fanatic who seemed more interested in violence and creating political upheaval than in sparking a revolution that would benefit Russia. Nonetheless, his life exemplifies the consequences of taking radical ideals to their extreme.

87 It seems that Nechaev had co-authored Catechism of a Revolutionary with Michael Bakunin, this issue remains in dispute amongst scholars.
89 Philip Pomper, Sergei Nechaev, 1.
In 1869, Nechaev wrote *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, a document that would be employed by his followers as an idealised guide on how to become a terrorist completely dedicated to the revolutionary cause. As Paul Wilkinson asserts in his book *Political Terrorism*: “the *Catechism* describes the essentials of the revolutionary terrorist organization: it was to be made up of secret cells composed of individuals ready to sacrifice themselves for the Revolution.”\(^{90}\) The opening statements of the manuscript lay out a set of principles by which the revolutionary must be guided. The first appears to summarise all the others as it spells out who the revolutionary must be and what he or she is called to do:

> The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no interests of his own, no affairs, no feelings, no attachments, no belongings, not even a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion – the revolution.\(^{91}\)

The *Catechism* is a grim description of the kind of responsibilities rebellious activists had to take in order to become revolutionary subjects. Firstly, the value of comrades was measured according to their contribution to the revolution; a significantly utilitarian way of observing the collective struggle. Secondly, all ties with society had to be broken, no mercy was to be shown towards the State and the whole of educated and privileged society in general. Thirdly, if necessary, the revolutionary had to endure torture for his cause and the only delight or consolation that could be enjoyed was the success of the revolution; the list goes on to state over twenty rules by which the revolutionary must be guided.\(^{92}\) Many of the principles listed in this document went on to constitute the doctrines of modern terrorist groups that envisioned a utopian revolution through the separation from, and eventual destruction of the State. Although the terrorist act is not so specifically described in Nechaev’s article and he himself was in fact not taken very seriously, his *Catechism* emerges as yet another instigating announcement which encouraged the new generation to violence.

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\(^{92}\) Nechaev, “Catechism of a Revolutionary,” in *The Terrorism Reader*, 68.
Nechaev claimed to have started an extensive network of revolutionary organizations in Europe and within Russia which never really existed. The only act of terror this young revolutionary nihilist ever executed was on November 21, 1869, when with the help of four members of his small private organization, Narodnaya Rasprava - the People’s Revenge (or the People’s Retribution), he murdered one of his own members, a young man named Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov. Whether Nechaev murdered Ivanov to bind his followers to the organisation through guilt, or because he believed Ivanov had intended to inform the authorities regarding the existence of his group is unknown. Many questions regarding what came to be known in the media as “The Nechaev Affair” still remain unanswered. Nechaev was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment and died in prison, in 1882, at the age of thirty five.\(^93\) Fyodor Dostoyevsky would immortalise the figure of Sergei Nechaev by basing his novel The Devils on the Nechaev affair and caricaturing the notorious revolutionary through the sinister Peter Verkhovensky.

It was in the midst of this storm of radical ideals and insurrectionary manuscripts that the first wave of terrorist attacks came crashing on the Russian soil. For the first time, a specialist terror group which aimed at executing traitors and police spies had been formed. Its name was Zemlya i Volya\(^94\) (Society of Land and Liberty), formed in 1876 by three revolutionaries named Alexander Mihailov, Mark Natanson and Aron Zundelovich. The first assassination attempt carried out by Zemlya i Volya was performed by one of the most prominent names that arises in the discussion of the origins of modern terrorism – Vera Zasulich. Zasulich was a revolutionary woman who, on January the 24\(^{th}\), 1878, privately tried to avenge the flogging of a comrade by attempting to shoot the Governor-General of St. Petersburg, General Trepov, point blank.\(^95\) Although her shot missed, its echo resounded throughout the major Russian cities as a message to all that the revolutionary movement was active. In 1879, Zemlya i Volya split. The side that favoured economic and social action joined the Social Democrats. The other side instead took the name of the aforementioned Narodnaya Volya – the People’s Will. Assuming the position of vanguard

\(^{93}\) Pomper, Sergei Nechaev, 2-3.  
\(^{94}\) The Russian clandestine organization Zemlya i Volya (Society of Land and Liberty) of the 1870s should not be confused with the 1862 Land and Liberty movement co-founded by Alexander Herzen.  
of the revolution, the People’s Will developed a strategy of terror whereby the most dangerous representatives of the autocracy, the Tsar being the number one public enemy, were to be eliminated. As Laqueur states in reference to this group: “the future belonged to mass movements but terrorism had to show the masses the way.”96 The People’s Will was composed of a small dedicated and disciplined body of regional cells. It can be framed as the classic underground resistance movement, loyal to its executive committee and composed of a tightly knit network of small groups that communicated in secret. The organization was small, originating in 1881 with perhaps as few as fifty members and growing to no more than five hundred.97 What this terrorist organisation lacked in size however, it made up in strength, determination and aggressive strategy. The People’s Will carried out seven attempts on the life of Tsar Alexander II since their formation. One of these revealed the brutality and precise organisation of this insurrectionary group and merits brief attention. Over the span of several weeks, copious amounts of dynamite had been placed beneath the private dining room of the Winter Palace by a member of the terrorist organisation disguised as a carpenter. Plans were made to detonate the dynamite on February the 7th, 1880, whilst the Imperial family dined. Fortunately for the Tsar and his family, a delayed guest meant that all the plans for dinner were changed and the bomb went off in an empty room. Nonetheless the explosion tore through the floor dividing the dining room and the basement killing eleven royal guards.

The greatest act for which the People’s Will became internationally recognized was their successful assassination of the Tsar on the first of March, 1881. A team of bomb throwers waiting for his carriage to pass by in the early afternoon hurled a home-made bomb at his convoy. Unhurt, the Tsar walked up to the bomb thrower who was being held by two men (he had behaved in the same way with Karakozov, perhaps to show his fearlessness of the terrorists) when a second bomb was thrown at his feet, mortally wounding him; he died later that afternoon.98 Because of its frequent use in terrorist attacks, it is important to briefly dwell on the significance that some revolutionary terrorists attached to the use of

96 Laqueur, Terrorism, 34.
the bomb. Although the use of pistols or other firearms may have presented itself as a cheaper and easier method of assassinating State officials or the Tsar himself, some believed that the use of the bomb would have had a greater visual and psychological impact on society. One Member of the People’s Will, Michael Frolenko, stated that shooting “would not have created such an impression. It would have been seen as an ordinary murder, and thus would not have expressed a new stage in the revolutionary movement.”

We notice the strategy of terrorist violence being used to not only eliminate the governing elite, but instil fear in those who received the news of the attack and to create the sensation amongst the radical camp that the revolution was being driven forward. The new phases of the revolutionary movement needed to be matched by new methods of rebellion and of individual attack; dynamite offered terrorists the opportunity to raise the level of their game.

The architect of the strategy of the People’s Will was Andrey Zhelyabov. Although the primary aim of this terrorist was to execute the Tsar and eliminate autocracy, he also cherished a strong desire to see the Russian people rise to power, especially the peasants. A study carried out by Zeev Ivianski on Zhelyabov reveals that he had initially been a dedicated populist who had envisioned a revolution of the people through peaceful means. After having experienced the peasant life by working in a village and having seen the blind alley to which the “going to the people” movement had led him, Zhelyabov drew the conclusion that: “history moves frighteningly slowly, one has to give it a push.” This thought was undoubtedly shared by many radical youths who had returned home from the countryside dispirited and embittered. Having later become leader of the executive committee of the People’s Will, Zhelyabov believed that terror was to be the first step in a sequence that would lead to an uprising among the urban masses, the army and eventually the peasants.

Ivianski delves into Zhelyabov’s life within the People’s Will and discusses this individual’s use of the strategy of terrorism as a temporary tool which would exile the autocracy. Political violence was to be put to an end as soon as the autocracy was

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99 Michael Frolenko, member of the executive committee of the People’s Will. Cited in Billington, 388.
101 Ivainski, Perspectives on Terrorism, 89.
eradicated and a constitutional regime erected. Zhelyabov was an intelligent man, well aware of the seductive power of terrorism and intent on never using it again if the revolution was successful. His desire to see the peasants freed from oppression and rise to power attributes to him the label, carried by other terrorists of the 1880s, of “populist terrorist.” Unsurprisingly to him and to his group, the assassination of the Tsar did not liberate Russia from the autocracy and terrorism would indeed return at the beginning of the new century through the strategies of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

The members of the People’s Will were heavily influenced by Nikolai Morozov, the leading theoretician of the secret organisation. Morozov wrote boldly that “terrorism was the result of the persecutions of the government which made propaganda extremely difficult if not impossible.”102 The notion that acts of terrorism had become something of a last resort in the struggle against Tsarist autocracy became a widespread belief amongst the numerous so-called narodniki103 of the 1870s and 1880s. Morozov had indeed acquired a certain taste for terrorism and by the late 1870s had become fascinated with the thought of pure violence as a vehicle for revolutionary action. The term terrorism gained widespread publicity through the writings of this man, the most important of these being the pamphlet entitled The Terrorist Struggle written in 1880. In this manuscript Morozov wrote:

All the terroristic struggle really needs is a small number of people and large material means…the goal of the terroristic movement should not become concentrated only on disarraying contemporary Russian despotism. The movement should make the struggle popular, historical and grandiose. It should bring the way of struggle into the lives of people in such a manner that every new appearance of tyranny in the future will be met by new groups of people from better elements of society. And these people will destroy oppression by consecutive political assassinations.104

Morozov had envisioned a network of small, organized terrorist groups scattered throughout Russia that would secretly communicate amongst themselves. He believed that

103 The exact translation of narodniki is “populists”. The term “populist”, or narodnik, in this paper refers to the those individuals who in the later half of the nineteenth-century were devoted to radical reform, not necessarily through acts of violence, but also through propaganda and publications against Tsarist autocracy. These also included members of the Intelligentsia such as Alexander Herzen, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Michael Bakunin and Peter Lavrov.
his approach would make it difficult for the police to capture those committing political murder allowing the struggle to continue for as long as was needed. He achieved his goals, to a certain extent, through his position in the executive committee of the People’s Will.

At the base of the strategies of the People’s Will stood the theories of two fathers of socialist revolutionary: Filippo Buonarroti (1761-1837) and his admirer Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881). The ideals of these two utopian socialists were imported into Russia by a dedicated revolutionary, crucial to this last phase of the Russian revolutionary movement: Peter Tkachev. Because of his ability to develop the ideals of radicals such as Zaichnevsky and Nechaev into powerful theories of revolutionary action and his wish to form what he described in letter to Friedrich Engels as a “socialist intelligentsia revolutionary party,” Tkachev has been labelled the “human bridge” between Chernyshevsky and Lenin. He was a disciple of Blanqui and through his links with Morozov and another contemporary theorist of terrorism, Gerasim Romanenko, aided the introduction of Blanquist ideals into the internal legacy of the People’s Will. Along with Nechaev, Tkachev popularised the ascetic version of the Blanquist ideal that an amoral elite must both make the revolution and rule after it. The concept of a minority leadership that was to spark and lead the revolution was at the core of Tkachev’s theory of revolution. The terrorists of The People’s Will radicalised themselves in this ideal and developed further terrorist strategies in light of the belief that these theories did not sanction violence; on the contrary, violence was exalted as the guarantor of a successful revolution. They thus took it upon themselves to be this minority leadership and created a system of terror which they hoped would cause a revolution with the least amount of blood being spilt.

The final important Russian narodnik who merits some attention is the Sergei Stepniak Kravchinski, author of Underground Russia published in 1883, a book depicting the terrorist movement of the late 1870s. Kravchinski romanticises the terrorist, claiming that

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he is noble, terrible, irresistibly fascinating, for he combines in himself the two sublimities of human grandeur: the martyr and the hero. From the day he swears in the depths of his heart to free the people and the country, he knows he is consecrated to death. He goes forth to meet it fearlessly, and can die without flinching, not like a Christian of old, but like a warrior accustomed to look death in the face.\footnote{Kravchinski, \textit{Underground Russia}, 39-40.}

This passage sheds light on the idea of giving one’s life for terrorism as something honourable and respectable. Although this custom of dying for the terrorist cause was not very common in the Russia of the 1870s, Kravchinski interestingly speaks of it in his manuscript, perhaps to suggest that self-sacrifice was a tactic to be added to the terrorist struggle. He continues to praise the terrorist almost to the point of portraying him as a saintly figure who has come to Russia to free the population from the satanic clutches of the Tsar. Kravchinsky has often been portrayed as a rather mysterious character. He assassinated the chief of the Police Corps of St. Petersburg in 1878, years before having written his novel, by stabbing him with a knife as he was walking in a city street. He never believed himself to be a true terrorist. After having committed the assassination he proceeded to put his thoughts on paper and urge his fellow radicals to consider that aside from terrorism, new methods which would attract the attention of the masses needed to be found. In the journal \textit{Zemlia i Volia} (Land and Liberty) Kravchinski wrote:

\begin{quote}
We must remember that not by this route [the terrorist method] we will attain the liberation of the working masses. Terrorism has nothing in common with the struggle against the foundations of the existing order. Only a class can rise against a class, only the people themselves can destroy the system. Therefore the great bulk of our forces must work in the midst of the people. The terrorists, they are only a defensive detachment, the purpose of which is to protect these village workers from the traitorous blows of the enemy.\footnote{Kravchinsky, \textit{Zemlia i Volia}, No. 1; reprinted in \textit{Revoliutsionnaia zhurnalistika.}, 74-75. Cited in Deborah Hardy, \textit{Land and Freedom}, 71.}
\end{quote}

Kravchinski, in a similar way to Zhelyabov, stands as the Russian revolutionary who espoused the concept of terrorism with the liberation of the peasants and was therefore also given the label of “populist terrorist.”

The government of the new Tsar Alexander III (in power from 1881-1894) was successful in hunting down and destroying the People’s Will and with it, terrorism as a strategy of violence. Although dedicated revolutionaries such as Alexander Ulyanov, Lenin’s older
brother, attempted to reanimate the terrorist struggle by erecting the New Terrorist Faction of the People’s Will, terrorism faded in Russia in the second half of the 1880s and most of the 1890s. This may have been a sigh of relief for some in Russia, but for fugitives like Vera Figner, the objective remained to keep the belief in terrorist tactics as successful revolutionary weapons alive. Revolutionaries such as this woman conveyed their knowledge of terrorism to new generations of terrorist recruits until populist terrorism re-emerged, this time reaching the peak of its popularity, under the Social Revolutionary Party in 1902. The new wave of terror invaded Russia in the form of a spectacular assassination of government officials and representatives. Fear returned, especially in the heart of large cities such as St. Petersburg, forcing the Tsar to adopt every defensive method he could conjure to maintain national control and stability. The leaders of the Social Revolutionary Party, or the SR’s, which included some members of the old People’s Will, maintained that terrorism was a necessary and unavoidable tool for creating a new Russia. A specialist terrorist section was set up within the party and given autonomy. It was named the Boevaya Organizatsia (Battle Organisation), and was responsible for a program of systematic terror which resulted in series of assassinations of government ministers. Its major achievement was the killing of the Minister of the Interior, Sipyagin, in April 1902. The following passage from the “Basic Theses” of the SR’s reveals the results that terrorism was supposed to produce in the Russian situation of the early 1900s:

Terrorism is intended not only to help disorganise the regime, but also to serve as a means of propaganda and agitation which will display itself before the eyes of the whole people, which will undermine the prestige of governmental power, which will prove that the struggle is really possible, and which will bring alive other revolutionary forces.

The last statement in this passage raises a point discussed by Grant Wardlaw and worthy of further investigation. Wardlaw asserts that the terrorism of the Social Revolutionaries “was not seen as a weapon which could replace mass struggle, but rather a tool to supplement and strengthen the revolutionary potential of the masses.” As the century turned and the terrorist struggle had now already been exemplified by the campaigns of the People’s Will, it is possible to note how terrorists switched their aim from representing and fighting for

108 Naimark, Terrorists and Social Democrats, 110.
109 From the Basic Theses of the Socialist Revolutionaries. Cited in Wilkinson, Political Terrorism, 64.
the masses to encouraging the masses to fight. Here the element of terrorism as a form of propaganda emerges and recalls the student populist campaigns of the 1860s, which sought to bring the revolutionary message to the masses. More than an act of punishment or revenge, or an attempt to uphold justice in the name of the people, terrorism in the new century began to be used as a messenger to awaken the radical consciousness of the population, especially in the countryside. In this, we see the Russian revolutionary spirit come full circle, as it attempts to once again convert the population to a culture of violence and rebellion.

Despite the numerous endeavours of different terrorists and terrorist organisations to spark revolutionary sentiments within the Russian social environment, terrorism in Russia slowly faded and was replaced by the Marxist ideologies of the Bolsheviks, who in October 1917 helped bring about the long-awaited Russian revolution.

It has been imperative to begin this study of individual radicalisation and terrorism in the novels of Fyodor Dostoyevsky with the historical background of the essential events and ideologies that constituted the Russian revolutionary tradition. The intricate, complex and at times contradictory nature of the Russian revolutionary movement sheds light on the fast-paced, ever-changing socio-political atmosphere of Russia throughout the nineteenth-century. Ensuring that this pace never slowed down was the radical intellectual revolutionary, the critical theorist, the member of the raznochinsty, the rebellious insurrectionist, the terrorist and the continuously dissatisfied individual who would not find peace unless the signs of change within society were visibly clear. It is this individual, born out of an assimilation with Western radical ideals, who has been represented and immortalized by the fictional works of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky.
Chapter 2.

Testing Radical Ideology: Individual Radicalisation in

Notes from Underground and Crime and Punishment

The revolutionary agitation taking place in Russia throughout the latter half of the nineteenth-century was a matter of interest to the novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Upon his return from the years spent in a Siberian labour camp, he devoted himself to the study of the socio-political upheaval sparked by radical intellectuals and their devout followers: the students. Throughout the 1860s, the decade in which he wrote his greatest novels, Dostoyevsky gradually come to understand that the ongoing radical transformation of a number of Russian young men and women into members of a fast-growing revolutionary movement had now become an irreversible process. In this decade, the currents of radical ideology secretly flowed through the major Russian cites of St. Petersburg and Moscow and entered into workplaces and tertiary institutions, introducing radical concepts and ideals to a very conscious and politically aware student population. Deeply affected by this infectious assimilation of Western radical ideology by the educated class, Dostoevsky used his skills as a novelist to shed light on the social reality of the contemporary situation as he regarded it. It is thus that Notes from Underground (1864) and Crime and Punishment (1866) were created to portray the damaging impact of radical ideology on young Russian individuals. These two novels were to be his initial attacks on those members who supported and comprised the Russian revolutionary movement.

This chapter will focus on the themes of individual radicalisation and terrorism in Notes from Underground and Crime and Punishment. The analysis of the two primary characters of these novels, the Underground Man and Raskolnikov respectively, will be at the centre of this discussion. Although emphasis will primarily be laid on the process of individual radicalisation experienced by the primary characters, the origins of the terrorist mentality and the theme of terrorism will be discussed as a possible advancement by an individual

111 “Young men and women,” just as with the term “people,” in this thesis refers to that part of educated society, living in major Russian cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, that had partaken, even remotely, in the development of the Russian revolutionary movement.
willing to go further in his or her pursuit of radical ideology. Both the lives of the Underground Man and Raskolnikov are shaped according to the radical ideals they come into contact with. These two intellectuals are constantly questioning their own existential realities and are willing to go to any lengths in order to break away from the feeling of boredom and indifference which plagues their everyday life and to search for freedom and truth. They are complicated individuals, crippled by the difficulties of their realities such as illness, poverty, lack of social life and isolation. Both eventually turn to the radical ideals of their times in search for an answer to their suffering. This chapter will examine their experience and unveil the message Dostoyevsky wished to convey to his readers regarding the consequences of being involved, even remotely and unconsciously, with the radical ideologies of nineteenth-century Russia.

I. Notes from Underground: Questioning Radical Ideology

In Notes from Underground, Dostoyevsky gives life to an anonymous character, who has come to be known amongst scholars simply as the Underground Man. Notes from Underground is a grim tale about one man’s inability to integrate himself within his community and the inner suffering he endures from his vacillation between the desires of his reason and those of his morality. The novel is divided into two parts; in the first the reader is confronted with an embittered forty-year-old Underground Man, a discontented and masochistic individual rooted within his criticism of the status quo. In Part II we see the same character, yet retrospectively, as a 24-year-old living in the Russia of the 1840s, once again struggling to find a place within society that does not entail conforming to foreign ideologies. As Joseph Frank asserts, the two parts of this novella satirically depict two episodes of a symbolic history of the Russian Intelligentsia: Part I refers to the advent of utopian socialism, championed by the “new men” of the 1860s whilst Part II refers to the social Romanticism of the 1840s, trademark of the “old generation.”

In Notes from Underground, Dostoyevsky gives us a significantly different point of view.

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112 “Foreign ideologies” refers to those radical principles and doctrines adopted from Western thought which came to be dominant amongst the Russian intelligentsia throughout the 1860s and were passed on to the student population.
113 Frank, Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 53.
from which to observe these two phases of the history of the Russian Intelligentsia. He places an older Underground Man in the period of the 1860s, and in Part II, a younger, twenty-four year old version living in the period of the 1840s. In both instances, the main character is portrayed as psychologically torn and disoriented, undecided between being a critic or disciple of the new doctrines and ideals of these significant periods. The Underground Man represents, for this study, the first character that will be linked to Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation and terrorism. He also stands as the forerunner of the characters of Dostoyevsky’s future fiction, such as Raskolnikov (Crime and Punishment) and Peter Verkhovensky (The Devils).

In comparison to the novels that succeed it, Notes from Underground is less about the main character’s process of radicalisation by foreign ideals than about his reactions to radical ideology. This short novel was initially conceived by Dostoyevsky as a parody and, as such, often portrays the Underground Man as a ridiculous and absurd character who reacts to the ideals of the times in which he lives in a comical manner. One of the primary aims of Dostoyevsky’s parody was to discredit the optimistic views of the socialist radicals of the 1860s such as the intellectual Nikolai Chernyshevsky. As the outstanding spokesman for the Russian radicals of this time, Chernyshevsky is specifically targeted in the book. A variety of scholars including Donald Fanger, Thomas Fiddick and Louis Breger agree that the novel is a response to Chernyshevsky’s popular belief that man was good and amenable to reason, and that if awakened to the beauty of self-interest, would dedicate himself to building a perfect society. In the midst of the socio-political turmoil of the 1860s aroused by members of the Russian radical Intelligentsia and zealous raznochinsty, this utopian vision of the “new man” had come to be seen by radicals as the key to Russia’s political, social and economic development. Dostoyevsky however, did not conform to either the theories of his liberal contemporaries, the men of the 1840s, nor to those of the 1860s, and entered the social scene by creating the Underground Man, an

unemployed and introverted loner, a weak, confused and above all, self-destructive individual. The contrast of socio-political views is evident. Thus, with his first real attack on Russian radicals and their ideology, Dostoyevsky opted to focus more on the psychological influence of these radical ideals on the contemporary Russian mind rather than the process of radicalisation undergone by the individual who endorses them. He clarifies his intentions in an introductory note to the novella:

I have tried to present to the public in a more striking form than is usual a character belonging to the very recent past, a representative figure from a generation still surviving. In the chapter entitled “The Underground” [Part I] this personage introduces himself and his outlook on life and tries, as it were, to elucidate the causes that brought about, inevitably brought about, his appearance in our midst.¹¹⁵

Dostoyevsky seems intent on preparing the reader for his story. The Underground Man is, of course, a fictional character; however, according to the author, his is an experience that reflects one often faced by Russian individuals caught in the ongoing inner debate between radical and moral conscience. As we will see, the novel opens on the main character who, at the age of forty, still has not found a purpose in life worthy of being pursued. He seems to be physically and psychologically blocked by his inability to conform to a belief, or a system of belief; an inability he despises yet paradoxically enjoys and finds life through. *Notes from Underground* begins at the end of the main character’s life, and ends at its beginning. This conforms with Dostoyevsky’s strategy of first revealing the consequences of radical thought, and subsequently showing the environment in which they originated.

The first image of the Underground Man that Dostoyevsky gives us is of a man physically sick, bitterly stubborn, and above all, tormented. It is evident that the Underground Man has not lived up to some sort of expectation in his life, or has failed in those aims he thought he would achieve. As he looks back on his youth, in particular on those times in which he worked as a civil servant, he comments: “Not only could I not make myself malevolent, I couldn’t make myself anything: neither good nor bad, neither scoundrel nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect.”¹¹⁶ This is one of many instances throughout the novel in which the Underground Man confesses to being unsure as to what his position

¹¹⁶ Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 16.
in life has been, and indeed still is. It is clear that it was Dostoyevsky’s intention to introduce the Underground Man as a psychologically torn individual, standing in the middle of what could be labelled a “no man’s land” of his selfishness and morality. As the novel progresses, the reader is invited to discover how the Underground Man reached the state of degradation in which he finds himself, this underground cellar from which he is writing. Filled with various pieces that eventually come together, Notes from Underground is about reconstructing the life of this mysterious character and explaining the enigmatic process that has brought him to utter sentences such as the one found in the opening pages: “All the same, if I don’t have treatment, it is out of spite. Is my liver out of order? – let it get worse!”

With his novel What is to be Done? the radical socialist Nikolai Chernyshevsky had identified self-interest as the most important of all human characteristics. This new concept, popular amongst the raznochinsty of the 1860s, Chernyshevsky called “rational egoism.” For the Underground Man, this ethic stands as the ideal towards which he directs all his scornful comments and mocking theories. According to him, ideals that linked egoism to reason had not taken into account a concept that he finds indispensable: the freedom to choose. It is thus possible to see the Underground Man often going against what would be labelled as “common sense” in order to assert his free will in life. In this respect, his masochistic tendencies are revealed. As Luisa De Nardis asserts in her introduction to the Italian translation of Notes from Underground, the pride which the Underground Man takes in both his humiliation and moral degradation is one of the fundamental points of the monologue. This can be seen through the way he puts his mind to scrutiny, “hating and despising himself as not even his worst enemy would.” Why the Underground Man not only mocks himself, but admits to feeling pleasure in physical pain and in being regarded as an outcast, is one of the greater questions Dostoyevsky wished to arouse amongst his readers. Hidden in the background of this absurd behaviour lies

117 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground 15.
Dostoyevsky’s attack on Chernyshevsky’s philosophy. The Underground Man, speaking of his past, claims that he felt pleasure in accepting that he had done something vile, something that could not be undone, and states: “the pleasure came precisely from being too clearly aware of your own degradation.” He even claims that he felt pleasure in a toothache, in the refusal to treat his infected liver and quite simply, he felt pleasure from receiving a slap in the face, a pleasure that he labels: “pleasure, of course, of despair.”

When linked to Dostoyevsky’s discussion of radicalisation, it is possible to understand the Underground Man’s irrational manifestations of self-hate in a clearer way. The Underground Man is seen by the critic Yarmolinsky as a neurotic and compulsive individual. Whilst these are some of his personality traits, this character can best be defined as a hyperconscious individual. This hyperconsciousness is something on which he highly depends in order to make some sense of his life; it is also however, a feature of his personality that eventually brings about his downfall. If one reads deeper into the Underground Man, it is possible to see that in order to assert his free will and to defy what Joseph Frank calls a scientific rationale that invites the individual to disregard moral-emotive feelings (that is Chernyshevsky’s rationale), this individual chooses to indulge in his despair, for it is the only way of keeping his senses alive, or at least one of his senses, his sense of degradation. He does this shamelessly, as a way of proving that he is different from others around him. He refuses to be consoled by the belief that it is in fact the laws of nature that are to blame, the very laws that have made him helpless (through the toothache or liver infection). He sceptically refuses to submit to their despotism, and prefers to have a moral-emotive response, a response which comes from his human nature, no matter how ridiculous it may be. The Underground Man thus seems to be caught in an almost obsessive quest to keep his moral-emotive senses alive. He can often be found in the text expressing a desire to accept the tenets of radical ideology yet bitterly despising them, a symptom of his ongoing struggle to give some kind of personal, subjective meaning to his life. He is purposely created by Dostoyevsky a psychologically torn individual, enslaved to his ongoing doubts and scepticisms. We thus begin to notice Dostoyevsky illustrating the

121 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 19.
122 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 19.
124 Frank, Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 320.
inner dissonance that results from the clash between wanting to conform to radical ideals and simultaneously retaining free will and freedom of choice.

II. Part I: Attack on the New Men of the 1860s

For most of the first part of *Notes from Underground*, the Underground Man continues what the reader begins to see as a dialogue rather than a monologue in the story. As he incessantly questions his social reality he is clearly speaking to someone, making remarks such as “You see, gentlemen.” He calls this audience the “man of action” or *l’homme de la nature et de la vérité* and it is evident that he is referring to the socialist radicals of the 1860s, the faithful followers of Chernyshevsky. These men, he claims:

seem to be so possessed by the desire for, say, revenge that for the time there is nothing left in their whole being but that emotion. A man like that goes straight for his goal like a mad bull charging with his horns down, and is to be stopped, if at all, only by a stone wall.

As Thomas Kavanagh asserts, for the Underground Man, the other is seen exclusively as a threat to the self. It is enough for him to be glanced at for him to fall into an anguished state of self-awareness and feels condemned. Furthermore, the Underground Man regards himself as a mouse in front of the man of action, a mouse of “heightened awareness,” yet nevertheless a mouse. He clearly despises the man of action, a man who believes in justice, a man who is always content in seeking revenge like a mad bull, and content even when faced with a stone wall. The Underground Man is annoyed at the simplicity of the man of action and takes this point further asserting that for these people “a wall is something calming, morally decisive and final,” they “calm down at once when they are faced with an impossibility. Impossibility is a stone wall. What do I mean by a stone wall? Well, of course, the laws of nature or the conclusions of the natural sciences or of mathematics.”

For the Underground Man, a sceptic, hyperconscious individual, one who refuses to submit to the despotism of the laws of nature, who will not give a final

125 Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 35.
“yes” or “no” to anything, the behaviour of the man of action is nothing but a sign of weakness and defeat. He is clearly frustrated by the way the his enemy can be so easily pleased.

Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation can be identified in this imaginary debate created by the main character of Notes from Underground. The Underground Man does not hesitate to label the man of action as stupid. His stupidity bothers him significantly, he scorns at his use of reason, a human capacity he believes to be incredibly limiting, and remains true to his role as advocate of freedom of choice, once again, no matter how ridiculous this may be (he would rather attempt to break the wall with his head than accept that it is a stone wall). One of the Underground Man’s comments in reference to the man of action however, reveals the flip side of the coin as he admits: “I am green with envy of such men.” The Underground Man is once again divided between different ideals that he yearns to abide by. Although he is very contemptuous of this “normal man,” he strongly desires to be like him and would also like to place complete trust in reason; this would surely spare him from the psychological torture he undergoes every time he tries to make sense of his life and the world he inhabits. Even so, his scepticism and distrust of man’s rational capabilities are too strong; he does not want to compromise. To have freedom of choice, even if this choice may lead to physical pain, loneliness, degradation or sadness, is regarded by the Underground Man as this “most advantageous advantage” he speaks of later in Part I. Nothing is more important to him than his freedom to choose, something “for the sake of which man is prepared if necessary to go against all laws, that is, against reason.”

Behind the internal conflict faced by the Underground Man lies Dostoyevsky’s attack on the radical ideals of the 1860s. This “reason” the Underground Man speaks of is the reason of the European Enlightenment. It has been imported into Russia through the Russian intelligentsia and has resulted in the theory of “rational egoism” advocated by Chernyshevsky and supported by his radical followers. As a response to Chernyshevsky’s use of reason for the creation of a perfect society, Dostoyevsky sought to create what Robert Louis Jackson calls an irrational

130 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 23.
131 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 20.
132 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 31.
individual whose suffering was connected to his relationship with this ideology and its principles: “It is impossible to argue with the rationalists: reason is on their side. All that remains is irrationally to negate reason.”133 The Underground Man rebels against this form of reason for he feels categorised and above all enslaved by it; Chernyshevsky’s ideologies did not leave room for protest, and therefore individual moral freedom. Driven by his fear of becoming a mindless tool at the service of society, he will go to any lengths in order to be free from the obedience to radical ideology. His odd forms of rebellion can be seen as Dostoyevsky’s way of illustrating the harmful effects that radical ideals were having on Russian individuals throughout the 1860s.

Throughout the remaining chapters of Part I, the Underground Man continues to affirm the stance he has taken against the radical thought of his time. His criticism does, however, become more intense as he shifts his aim specifically towards one of Chernyshevsky’s ideals in *What Is to Be Done?* - that of the Crystal Palace:134

> Then, a new political economy will come into existence, all complete, and also calculated with mathematical accuracy, so that all problems will vanish in the twinkling of an eye, simply because all possible answers to them will have been supplied. Then the Palace of Crystal will arise.135

Louis Breger explains how the Crystal Palace can be considered the culmination of Chernyshevsky’s utopian dream of transforming human nature and achieving a perfect society in which man could live harmoniously. Within the Crystal Palace, humans would become true supporters of the ethics of rational egoism by being unified in the belief that free will does not exist and that everything in the world is governed by scientific laws. Chernyshevsky believed that there were laws of human life that were of the same form as the laws of physical science, and that by discovering these laws, humans could govern themselves accordingly. The great assumption behind this ascetic faith in science and

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134 The idea of the Crystal Palace was modeled on French utopian socialist François Charles Fourier’s idea of community, also known as “phalanstery.” Fourier had calculated and combined all the details of life in the phalanstery with mathematical precision. He believed cooperation was the key to improvement in productivity levels and that workers would be recompensed for their labors according to their contribution. For more information see: Joseph Frank, "Nihilism and Notes from Underground," in *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Views* (New York: Chelsea House 1961), 45.
135 Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 33.
reason was that human conduct is, or could be, directed by self-interest. This self-interest, Frank points out, would eradicate the very possibility of doing evil from man’s consciousness.

Dostoyevsky’s contestation of the ideal of the Crystal Palace is clearly identifiable in Notes from Underground. From his point of view, the Crystal palace meant not the happiness of humanity but the complete degradation of the value of man. Unsurprisingly, the Underground Man strongly reacts to this ideal in an exaggerated manner by now familiar to the reader. If Chernyshevsky believed that in the Crystal Palace humans would live in a harmonious, perfect society, then the Underground Man answers by asserting that man would much prefer chaos and destruction than the comforts of this utopian ideal. There is something of immeasurable importance to him that Chernyshevsky has preferred to overlook: a person’s urge to feel free to decide his or her own fate. The imaginary dialogue between the Underground Man and his radical socialist audience continues:

Here you are wanting to wean man from his old habits and correct his will to make it conform to the demands of science and common sense. But how do you know that you not only can, but ought to remake man like that? What makes you conclude that it is absolutely necessary to correct man’s volition in that way? In short, how do you know that such a correction will be good for man? And to sum the whole thing up, why are you so certain that not flying in the face of his real, normal interests, is always really for his good and must be a law for all mankind?

These statements clearly indicate Dostoyevsky’s own views on socialist radicalism and its use by socialist revolutionaries to create a better future for the Russian individual. The Underground Man’s struggle to make any logical sense of Chernyshevsky’s doctrine has hints of warning as they are voiced in the text. A certain urgency can be detected in the questions asked, one that Dostoyevsky perhaps wanted to emphasise in an attempt to strike a chord in his readers, even if many would have quickly disregarded his novel. In this respect, the tragic story of the Underground Man was to serve as an example of a man

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136 Breger, “Notes from Underground Presents an Argument Against Radicalism,” 112.
137 Frank, “Nihilism and Notes from Underground,” 44.
138 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 39. Italics in original.
139 When first released in 1864, Notes from Underground was as unpopular amongst the youth as it was amongst critics. Many either did not understand what Dostoyevsky was trying to do or suspected that he was perversely attracted by to the diseased states of the human mind or even that he found sadistic pleasure in observing human suffering. These observations came from intellectuals such as Vissarion Belinsky and Nikolai Mikhailovsky. For more information see: Victor Terras, Reading Dostoevsky (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), ix-x.
who, in deciding to “doubt,” (a human instinct which the ideal of the Crystal Palace also overlooks), did not achieve the perfection advocated by the radicals of the 1860s.

Dostoyevsky’s criticism of revolutionary radicals in this first part of Notes from Underground can be summarised with the following statement directed by the Underground Man to his enemies: “Twice two is four is not life, gentlemen, but the beginning of death.” As Berdiaev points out, with these words, intended to ridicule the radical socialists’ use of mathematical/scientific accuracy to manipulate and perfect human nature, Dostoyevsky wished to show that man is not an arithmetical expression; his nature is complicated, mysterious and contradictory; it cannot be rationalised.141 The death that the Underground Man refers to is symbolic of both his own spiritual death, caused by his hyperconsciousness and rejection of foreign radical ideals, and the death of the man of action’s ability to express his free will. Twice two is four represents reason, science and arithmetic and the way that these have been used to understand the human individual. At the time in which this part of Notes from Underground is set, this ascetic belief in reason was manipulated by radical thinkers in search of the key to man’s perfection. Although drawn to believe that he too could become a perfect man, the heightened awareness of the Underground Man has made him choose whether or not to become radicalised within these ideals. In defence of his refusal to believe he states: 

man is monstrously ungrateful…shower him with all earthly blessings, plunge him so deep into happiness that nothing is visible but the bubbles rising to the surface of his happiness…and he, I mean man, even then, out of mere ingratitude, will commit some abomination.142

He continues in this line of argument, insisting that “a man should constantly prove to himself that he is a man and not a sprig in a barrel organ! To prove it even at the expense of his own skin.”143 The final message is clear: human nature cannot be defined solely by rationality, for the world of irrationality also contains a source of life that perhaps may not be as evident. Worthy of attention also is the notion that in choosing not to conform to the

140 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 40.
142 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 38.
143 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 38. Dostoyevsky’s musical imagery is linked to Charles Fourier’s chief disciple, Victor Considerant, who in a famous socialist treatise, mentioned in What Is to Be Done?, compared human passions to a “clavier” whose notes could be blended into harmony.
currents of thought present in his time, the Underground Man condemns himself to a life of scepticism, solitude and degradation. The dark cellar from which he writes, acts as an escape route away from a society he refuses to be part of. How he got to this desolate place is told in the second part of the novel, “A Story à propos of the Falling Sleet.”

III. Part II: Attack on the Social Romantics of the 1840s

The second part of Notes from Underground unearths some of the more significant events of the Underground Man’s past whilst shedding light on the origins of his self-destructive behaviour. Apparent in this part of the novel is Dostoyevsky’s emphasis on those matters which brought about the main character’s neurosis and hyperconsciousness. This is done once again through the theme of conflict between the value of autonomy that the Underground Man attributes to the human personality and the new foreign ideals circulating within the society he inhabits. Here Dostoyevsky shifts his argumentative target from the radical socialism of the 1860s (he returns to this in Crime and Punishment) to the social Romanticism present in the St. Petersburg of the 1840s. Frank states that in Dostoyevsky’s opinion, the idealists of the forties projected an image of themselves which did not accurately portray their true function within the socio-political environment of the time. Dostoyevsky had criticised them in his magazine, Time, for having expressed a desire to help humanity and for having longed to sacrifice themselves for the good of society, whilst in reality fostering egoistic principles and being attracted by the concept of materialism. This had resulted in a bogus romantic egoism and a feeling of superiority to ordinary Russian society which according to Dostoyevsky had poisoned the general cultural atmosphere of the 1840s. Richard Peace also emphasises the discord between Dostoyevsky and the social romantics, highlighting that, through the Underground Man, he wished to portray a disillusioned idealist from his own generation. Dostoyevsky had in fact been a member of this generation of idealists, yet as he matured, he sought to distance himself from their views on the abstract beauty of life and dedicate his talent as a novelist.

144 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 46.
145 Frank, ”Nihilism and Notes from Underground,” 52.
146 Frank, Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 334-35.
147 Peace, Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels, 5.
to the difficulties of human relations and the complexities of the human soul. What he creates in this second part of *Notes from Underground* is the story of a disillusioned young man who fails, time and again, to socially integrate himself amongst a society of high minded idealists. Once again, however, his obsessive desire to be disillusioned has the contrary effect; instead of freeing him it gradually confines him to his own secluded world in which he will remain for the remainder of his days.

Part II of *Notes from Underground* opens with the Underground Man’s narration of his life as a twenty-four-year-old youth living in St. Petersburg. Three significant episodes of his life are subsequently illustrated: an attempt to seek revenge on a police official, his unwanted participation at a friend’s dinner party, and the encounter with a prostitute named Liza. To compensate for the tragic end to all three events, Dostoyevsky significantly augments his dose of satire, making this part of the novel more readable than the first. Much like the overture to the first section of *Notes from Underground*, the opening statements of the narrative are overshadowed by the Underground Man’s rejection and dissatisfaction with himself and his reality: “I often looked at myself with frantic dislike, sometimes amounting to disgust, and therefore attributed the same attitude to everybody else. For example I hated my face, I thought it was a scoundrelly face, and I even suspected there was something servile about it.”\(^{148}\) As Mikhail Bakhtin asserts, the Underground Man hates his face because it functions as reminder of the dominion of others over him, the dominion of their assessments and opinions. The Underground Man senses in everything the will of the other person, one which examines, predefines and expresses judgments on him. He thus sees himself as “a person insulted by the world order and debased by its inevitability.”\(^{149}\) This observation is an insight into one of the most striking features of the Underground Man’s reality, his inability to maintain social relationships and resulting state of constant solitude. The Underground Man is constantly alone, he adores and simultaneously detests his alienated position in society, yet eventually always remains alone. In his solitude and loathing of the other out of fear of judgment, one can identify Dostoyevsky’s initial attack on the supposed beauty of the world as it was advocated by

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\(^{148}\) Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 47.

the social romantics of the 1840s. The Underground Man is more intent on discussing the faults of his personality and of society rather than the exaltation of their virtues, thus remaining true to his role of disillusioned idealist. We also learn that he is an assiduous reader of romantic literature: “at home I did a lot of reading…reading of course, helped me a great deal – it excited, delighted and tormented me.”\textsuperscript{150} This delight and torment comes from the clash of the “highest and best” ideals he reads about in his books with the difficult and unattractive reality he faces daily. Just as with the ideal of the Crystal Palace, the Underground Man rejects the ideals of romantic socialism and seeks to condemn all that is “highest and best,”\textsuperscript{151} including his own appearance. In this case, Dostoyevsky’s realism clearly emerges as a polarised opposite to the social Romanticism of the 1840s idealists.

Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation re-emerges through the main events of the second part of Notes from Underground. As with Part I, emphasis is laid not on the primary character’s gradual radicalisation within the tenets of radical ideology, but rather on an example of the moral emotive disorientation manifested in an individual confronted with ideals he is incapable of supporting or adhering to. In Part II, foreign ideology does not come from a “textbook of life” such as Chernyshevsky’s What is to be Done? but from the lofty ideals of social romantics influenced by the rational, utilitarian and materialistic Western European thought. Scholars such as Richard Peace and Peter Conradi offer an interpretation of the Underground Man’s often irrational, hostile behaviour worthy of further exploration; they claim that “paradox” is one of the chief weapons that he uses in his fight against reason.\textsuperscript{152} Dostoyevsky himself uses the term as he refers to his character at the very end of the novel: “this is not the end, however, of the ‘Notes’ of this paradoxical writer.”\textsuperscript{153} The notion of paradox in Notes from Underground acts as a lens through which Dostoyevsky’s intentions can be understood with more clarity. The

\textsuperscript{150} Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 51. According to Frank, since this part of the novel is set in the world of the Russian intelligentsia of the 1840s, the books the Underground Man was reading could only have been the works of French utopian socialists, social romantics and their Russian disciples. Dostoyevsky himself had been an attentive reader of these works throughout the 1840s. See Frank, Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 335.

\textsuperscript{151} Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 50.

\textsuperscript{152} Peace, Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels, 17. Peter J. Conradi, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Macmillan Modern Novelists (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 36.

\textsuperscript{153} Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 123.
Underground Man’s thoughts and actions (not only in Part II but throughout the entire novel) are indeed paradoxical. Yet it is through his very contradictory nature that, as Peace and Conradi assert, he finds the strength to fight against ideals that are considered reasonable amongst the radicals. The first instance of paradoxical behaviour appears with Underground Man’s desire to collide with a police officer on the Nevsky Prospect.\textsuperscript{154} In this episode, the Underground Man has been witnessing a brawl in a pub and is moved out of the way (he was the officer’s path) by the officer without being acknowledged or even looked at. “I could have forgiven him for striking me, but I couldn’t forgive that moving me from place to place without even seeing me.”\textsuperscript{155} What follows is a humorous description of the Underground Man’s attempts, over the span of two years, to redeem his shattered honour by seeking revenge on the officer. He even goes as far as writing a letter challenging the officer to a duel yet cannot help but ask for his friendship at the end of the message. He eventually finds his chance and collides with the officer on the Nevsky Prospect; the officer hardly takes notice of the incident and continues walking. The Underground Man is, however, overjoyed: “I had attained my object, upheld my dignity, not yielded an inch, and publicly placed myself on an equal social footing with him.”\textsuperscript{156} As Conradi asserts, this event shows the paradoxical element of the Underground Man wanting the officer’s esteem, yet wishing to fight him to secure it.\textsuperscript{157} He expresses a desire to settle the matter peacefully, yet opts for the crude and immature method of solving the issue that will give him the ephemeral satisfaction he seeks. It is not long before he falls into other situations of similar kind. Thus we notice Dostoyevsky’s use of the element of paradox to further illustrate the divided mind of the Underground Man and his inability to resolve even the simplest, most insignificant of issues.

As we dig deeper into the dysfunctional character of the Underground Man, it is possible to shed light on possibly the greatest hindrance to his ability to maintain social relationships: his vanity. Referring to his inflated self-image, Malcom Jones asserts that “the Underground Man displays a sense of not belonging, of alienation from others, of

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\textsuperscript{154} The Nevsky Prospect was, and still is, one of the main streets of St. Petersburg.
\textsuperscript{155} Dostoyevsky, \textit{Notes from Underground}, 52.
\textsuperscript{156} Dostoyevsky, \textit{Notes from Underground}, 58.
\textsuperscript{157} Conradi, \textit{Fyodor Dostoevsky}, 36.
being inadequate for their company; but at the same time a sense of being superior in intellect and sensibility.”

Another paradox emerges as this feeling of vain superiority not only keeps the Underground Man’s senses alive and gives meaning to his life, but also leads him away from others and into a state of complete solitude (in the same way his masochism and self-loathing ensure his survival yet lead him to live life in the underground in Part I). As his ideas take on a more concrete shape, the Underground Man’s expression of vanity and supremacy is manifested in a series of dreams where he seems to temporarily move away from his image of disillusioned idealist, taking on the role of romantic dreamer:

For example, I triumphed over everybody; everybody else was routed and compelled to recognise my supremacy voluntarily, and I forgave them all. I, a famous poet and a courtier, fell in love; I received countless millions, and immediately bestowed them on the whole human race, at the same time confessing all my shameful deeds to the world, deeds which of course were not simply shameful, but had in them an extremely large admixture of the ‘best and highest,’ a touch of Manfred. Everybody wept and embraced me (how unfeeling they would have shown themselves otherwise).

Here, Dostoyevsky’s attack on social Romanticism is clear as this “best and highest” that social romantics wished to achieve, yet did not want to dirty their hands in doing so, is completely ridiculed. The Underground Man escapes into dreams where he sees himself coming “into the light of day, almost riding a white horse and crowned with laurel” and experiences what seems to be an explosion of love for humanity. His love is, however, distorted by his vain desire for humanity to kneel in front of him. According to Peace, “the Underground Man finds it impossible to distinguish between fact and fiction; fact becomes fiction and fiction fact.” Jones agrees with this view, adding that fiction supplies the Underground Man with values that are missing in his own life. As we shall now see, he attempts to transform his dream into reality by manipulating the relationships with those around him in his favour.

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158 Jones, Dostoyevsky: The Novel of Discord, 57.
159 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 60. Manfred is a dramatic poem written in 1817 by the British poet and leading figure in Romanticism, Lord Byron.
160 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 59.
161 Peace, Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels, 14.
162 Jones, Dostoyevsky: The Novel of Discord, 58.
The remaining episodes of *Notes from Underground* unveil the destructive energy of the Underground Man as it reaches its apex. He is once again the protagonist of a farcical episode as he invites himself to a dinner party held by his old school friends in honour of one of their number, Zverkov, who is leaving St. Petersburg. He is, however, an unwanted guest and, feeling snubbed by his friends (who had also not told him the meeting time for the dinner had been altered) he provokes and insults Zverkov and challenges one of them, Ferfichkin to a duel. He is ridiculed and mocked, but refuses to leave the restaurant, preferring to pace up and down beside his friends’ table for three hours whilst the festivities continue. He eventually begs for their pardon, but is once again snubbed. The reality with which the Underground Man is met is crude and unforgiving. Once left alone, his thoughts of supremacy resurface as he decides that he will follow them to the brothel they are headed to: “‘I’ll go there,’ I shrieked. ‘Either they shall all kneel before me, embracing my knees and begging for my friendship, or…I’ll give Zverkov a slap in the face.’”

This event demonstrates the Underground Man’s complete incapacity to have social relations, let alone maintain a friendship. Not long before this event, he had made a confession to the reader regarding a friendship he once almost succeeded in making:

> I did once make a friend. But I was a tyrant at heart; I wanted unlimited powers over his heart and mind, I wanted to implant contempt for his surroundings in him; I required of him a haughty and final break with them. I frightened him with my passion for friendship…but when he became wholly devoted to me I immediately took a dislike to him and repulsed him – just as though I needed him only to get the upper hand of him, only for his submission.164

The Underground Man’s urge to dominate others poisons the social relationships in which he tries to enter. Once again we see him suffering because of the paradoxical state of uncertainty he finds himself in. As Jones rightly asserts, participation in life is impossible for him, yet he yearns for it.165 He dreams of being a social romantic, yet cannot conform to their unreflective values which he despises. He would like to have a friend, yet he distorts the rules of social relationship, accepting to create a bond with someone only if he is able to submit them to his despotism; and even then, he is repelled by the level of submission his victim has stepped down to. The Underground Man is so tormented by the ideology of his time that he becomes obsessed with trying to rationalise it, he takes it to the

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163 Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 80.
164 Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 69.
extreme and selfishly distorts its tenets: “As for what concerns me,” he states, referring once again to his “gentlemen,” “I have only carried to a logical conclusion in my life what you yourselves didn’t dare to take more than half way; and you supposed your cowardice was common sense and comforted yourselves with self-deception.”\textsuperscript{166} Paradoxically, this logical conclusion he is boasting of has brought about his spiritual death and life in the underground.

The Underground Man’s chance to redeem himself from the destructive behaviour he has inflicted on others and himself comes through his meeting with a prostitute named Liza. According to Frank, the function of this section was to contrast the self-indulgent, self-glorifying social Romanticism with an act of selfless love.\textsuperscript{167} The Underground Man, after being humiliated by his friends, reaches the peak of his vanity, using it to dominate individuals who are more vulnerable than himself. The farcical element vanishes as the novel turns to tragedy. Liza, a pure-hearted young prostitute, is treated in the same manner as the aforementioned friend the Underground Man had once taken advantage of. In this scene, he takes out his frustration on two people he deems inferior to himself: the cab driver who is driving him to the brothel (he thumps him on the back of the head to make the carriage go faster) and on the prostitute Liza herself. The Underground Man humiliates Liza as he begins ranting about her demise and death until she is made to feel so shameful about her reality that she breaks down in tears:

For some time I had been feeling that I must have harrowed her soul and crushed her heart, and the more convinced I grew of it, the more I wanted to attain my end as quickly and powerfully as possible. It was the game that carried me all along, the game itself, but not only the game…No, never, never had I witnessed such despair! She was laying face downwards, with her head buried in the pillow and her arms strained tightly round it. Her heart was bursting. Her whole body shook as if she had fever.\textsuperscript{168}

Following this scene the Underground Man asks for forgiveness and a brief moment of tenderness between the two ensues; he leaves her his address and departs. When she visits his apartment a few days later, she finds the Underground Man is in a bitter rage, shouting at his manservant Apollon. The Underground Man becomes increasingly agitated and fears

\textsuperscript{166} Dostoyevsky, \textit{Notes from Underground}, 123.
\textsuperscript{167} Frank, \textit{Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation}, 341.
\textsuperscript{168} Dostoyevsky, \textit{Notes from Underground}, 100.
what Liza may think of him now that she has caught him in this moment of fury. This triggers in him a deep hatred for Liza and he lashes out at her once again for having seen him in a state of vulnerability:

“Why did you come? Answer me, answer me!” I shouted, almost beside myself. “I’ll tell you why you came, my dear. You came because I spoke to you with pity and sympathy. Well, now you’ve gone soft, and you want sympathetic words again. Let me tell you that I was laughing at you. And I’m laughing even now…I had been humiliated, so I wanted to humiliate somebody else.”

As Luisa De Nardis underlines, the Underground Man cannot tolerate that someone, apart from himself, could have penetrated his soul and his intimacy. His hyperconsciousness and vanity eventually prevail over those feelings of love expressed towards Liza. He returns to the state of bitterness he seems to find himself in throughout most of the novel.

At this point in the story something quite unexpected happens. In response to the Underground Man’s rant of abuse, Liza does not retaliate, but embraces him, fulfilling what Dostoyevsky saw as the greatest act of Christian faith: love towards the enemy. Nonetheless, the tragic element of Notes from Underground escalates even further in this scene, as the Underground Man refuses Liza’s offer of selfless love, realising that she had become the heroine, and he the humiliated individual: “Without power and tyranny over somebody I can’t live.” He opens her hand to pay for her services, but she throws the notes away and flees. With this act, the Underground Man seals his fate. By refusing Liza’s love he condemns himself to the underground, the literal and metaphorical dark cellar from which he will view the world for the remainder of his days. Thus the novel comes to a close with the Underground Man, undecided as to whether he should run after Liza or not, posing his audience one last question, one the reader too well knows the answer to: “which is better, a cheap happiness or lofty suffering? Tell me then, which is better?” Certain that Liza would have given him this cheap happiness, he turns away from happiness altogether, preferring to remain in his world of cynicism and degradation.

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169 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 115.
170 Luisa De Nardis, "Introduzione," 8.
171 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 118.
172 Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground, 122.
Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground* takes us through the battle that takes place within the main character’s psyche as he accepts and lets his thoughts be carried away by ideals of perfection, egoism, self-indulgence, supremacy and vanity. What this individual finds, however, is that he cannot live without his freedom of choice, even if this means making the wrong choice. Although it is evident that the Underground Man is a person with numerous physical, psychological and social problems in his life, he refuses to seek help, and more importantly, to be helped by new, foreign ideals which promise happiness and prosperity. So vehement is the spitefulness he holds towards radical ideology and its rationality, that he prefers to behave irrationally throughout his life, gradually distancing himself from his social reality and sinking further into the underground from which his notes are composed. The Underground Man’s uncertainty as to which direction to take, whether that of radical ideology or that of his moral conscience, keeps him enslaved to a state of confusion and moral instability which often results in a destructive behaviour that makes his life unbearable both to himself and to others around him. With his first real attack on the radical Russian intelligentsia, Dostoyevsky’s intention was to create a tormented, insecure individual whose life had been ruined by his inability to conform to a set of modern revolutionary ideals.

The examination of the Underground Man has served to gain an understanding of the first character chosen for this study of Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation and terrorism. By creating this paradoxical, self-destructive individual we notice Dostoyevsky laying down the foundations for his attack on the revolutionary radical intellectuals of the 1840s and 1860s and their ideals. The Underground Man is the first of many more characters to come in Dostoyevsky’s novels who, in struggling to come to terms with radical ideology, suffer dearly and slowly sink into isolation and degradation. Through his characterisation, Dostoyevsky endeavoured to reveal the initial effects of individual radicalisation by focusing on the existential confusion which it triggered within the mind of the young Russian individual. What we shall now see in the latter half of this chapter is Dostoyevsky’s creation of another character who enters into a moral crisis due to his experiment with radical ideology: Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov. This character, however, goes a step further than the Underground Man in his individual radicalisation and
begins to resemble, in action and thought, the revolutionary terrorists that will be observed in the third chapter of this thesis.

IV. Crime and Punishment: One Step Closer to the Terrorist Mentality

It was not Dostoyevsky’s intention, upon publishing the novel Crime and Punishment in 1866, to make a statement regarding the winds of revolutionary terrorism that had begun stirring in the Russia of the late 1860s. However, in the story of Raskolnikov, certain traits of the terrorist mindset that emerged in Russian society throughout the 1860s and 1870s are introduced and alluded to. Rather than documenting the terrorist act in this novel, Dostoyevsky transforms his notion of the radicalised Russian mentality and its tendency to use violence as a means to an end into a fictional account which would become one of his greatest works as a literary artist. Crime and Punishment is a report on the origins of a destructive mentality that combines the radical theories of rational egoism, utilitarianism, nihilism, and individual supremacy into a dangerous mélange which threatens both the “other” in society and the individual self.

Although Crime and Punishment differs in many aspects from Notes from Underground, it can be said that the events lived by Raskolnikov, the main character, are almost a continuation of those experienced by the Underground Man. As McDuff states in his introduction to the novel, “the twenty-three-year-old ex-student who emerges onto the St. Petersburg street on an evening in early July is a spiritual relative of the Underground Man.”173 The resemblance between the two characters can be identified in the ongoing questioning of their social reality and their affirmation of the right to free will as absolutely indispensable. Crime and Punishment explores the pre-meditation, act and consequences of the murder, committed by Raskolnikov, of a hated and unscrupulous old pawnbroker woman deemed by her murderer to be a worthless member of society. Reason, or rationality, plays a major role throughout the novel, as it is used by the main character to justify what seem to be a series of motives for the murder, and by the police investigator Porfiry Petróvich to solve the crime. The novel branches out into various sub-plots which

bring Raskolnikov’s motives into question. Raskolnikov rationalises the killing of the old pawn broker, firstly out of a need for money, claiming that he needed funds to return to University and to aid his poverty-stricken mother and sister. Secondly, he justifies the murder according to a utilitarian ethic which envisions the greatest good for the greatest number. He concludes that the death of an old, wealthy, stingy, sick woman who drives people to a state of financial helplessness and maltreats her younger sister would not only rid mankind of an insolent pest but would benefit society; her money could be used for good causes. Thirdly, towards the end of the novel, Raskolnikov confesses to the prostitute Sonya that he murdered for purely selfish reasons, to prove to himself that he was an “extra-ordinary human,” “a Napoleon” who could step over moral law, and not a poor “ordinary man” who belonged to the masses. The true reason for the murder thus seems to be hidden behind different veils used by Raskolnikov to justify his crime. This leads our attention to the very essence of the novel: the main character’s ongoing search within his psyche for the motivations which led him to kill the old pawn broker.

Frank believes that the seemingly contradictory nature of Raskolnikov’s ideals is representative of the unholy amalgam typical of Russian radical ideology throughout the 1860s – a humanitarian, altruistic desire to help society and alleviate social injustice mixed with a supremely Bazarovian contempt for the masses. He concludes: “It is the danger of self delusion and moral-psychic tragedy lurking in this perversely contradictory nature that Dostoyevsky was trying to reveal through Raskolnikov’s fate.” This reflection reanimates the link between Dostoyevsky’s literary work and his discussion of individual radicalisation, introducing also a discussion of terrorism. When published in 1866, Crime and Punishment emerged not only as Dostoyevsky’s new novel but as a novel about “a man of the new generation” as Dostoyevsky himself had pointed out in a letter to M. N. Katkov (editor of Russkiy vestnik – Russian Messenger) in 1865. Raskolnikov was thus shaped according to Dostoyevsky’s ideal of the new man of the 1860s and reveals much

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175 Frank is here referring to Bazarov, the young self-proclaimed nihilist student discussed in Chapter 1 (see p. 22), central character of Ivan Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons.
176 Frank, Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 87.
about what Dostoyevsky’s views were regarding this generation of young radicals, whose words and deeds were acquiring significant visibility in the Russian socio-political scene of this time. As previously mentioned, Raskolnikov goes a step further than the Underground Man in his personal experience with radical ideals. The results of the analysis of *Notes from Underground* revealed that the Underground Man ultimately failed to radicalise himself in the ideals of the periods in which he lived. Although his desire to become someone (whether social romantic or radical socialist) was evident, his dreams were shattered by his inability to move beyond resentment to action. Raskolnikov, as Dostoyevsky himself explained in the same letter to Katkov, “has fallen prisoner to some of the strange ‘incomplete’ ideas which float about in the air and has decided to break out of this loathsome situation at one stroke. He has resolved to kill an old woman.”¹⁷⁸ Unlike the Underground Man, Raskolnikov lets himself be passionately taken in by the attractive ideological currents present in the 1860s; so much so that he becomes obsessed with the desire of putting them into practice. At the point when Dostoyevsky introduces the reader into his life, he is already in an advanced stage of his process of radicalisation in terms of these ideals, and is ready to test their validity. He has envisioned, through the murder of the pawn broker, a suitable way by which he can put the strength of his reason under scrutiny and bring to fulfilment his radical, utilitarian approach to life. In taking this additional step of obedience to radical ideology, Raskolnikov, more than the Underground Man, emerges as a forerunner of the late nineteenth-century terrorists that would appear in Dostoyevsky’s later work, *The Devils.*

Dostoyevsky’s attack on the radical ideology of the 1860s is stronger in *Crime and Punishment* than in any novel he had written up until this point. As an attentive observer of the evolution of radical ideals throughout the first half of the 1860s, his attack in this novel is directed specifically to the principles of popular utilitarian reasoning. In the first two of the six parts of the novel, utilitarian logic is the primary ideal in which Raskolnikov radicalises himself. As Cynthia Ozick reminds us, Raskolnikov’s utilitarian theory, the greatest good for the greatest number, with its division between what is useful and what is

disposable, was current amongst the Russian intelligentsia, especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg. To show the popularity of such ideals amongst the youth of St. Petersburg, Dostoyevsky has Raskolnikov overhear a conversation in an eating house between a student and a young officer. After having visited the old pawn broker, Alyóna Ivánovna, to pawn a ring, Raskolnikov sits down in the diner and coincidently overhears the student speaking of the very person he had just been to see:

“If one were to kill her and take her money, in order with its help to devote oneself to the service of all mankind and the common cause: what do you think – wouldn’t one petty little crime like that be atoned for by all those thousands of good deeds? Instead of one life – thousands of lives rescued from corruption and decay. One death to a hundred lives – I mean, there’s arithmetic for you!”

Raskolnikov remains in a state of utter excitement upon hearing the conversation; after all, what were the chances of hearing such talk “when inside his own head there had just been engendered… precisely those very same thoughts.” The notion that Ivánovna should in fact be killed and her money used for beneficial causes does not simply remain an idea in Raskolnikov’s head. Not long after this scene we see him planning the murder of the pawn broker and preparing himself to enter into her house with a concealed axe. Raskolnikov believes that his faith in radical ideology will justify the crime he is about to commit. This is visible in the thoughts he expresses just before arriving at the pawn broker’s home. As he ponders the reasons why most criminals are so easily caught after committing their crimes, he concludes that “it was the criminal himself who, in almost every case, became subject at the moment of his crime to a kind of failure of will and reason.” However, upon directing this judgment towards himself Raskolnikov is quick to make an exception:

“He decided that where he personally was concerned, in his own undertaking, there could be no such morbid upheavals, and that his reason and his will would remain inalienably with him throughout the entire enactment of what he had planned, for the sole reason that what he had planned was – “not a crime.”

In this instance, Raskolnikov attempts to test his notion of killing in the interests of public utility with a morally just cause, a cause that, he is convinced, will simply not be categorised as a crime. The extremity to which Raskolnikov has taken his utilitarian theory

180 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 80.
181 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 81. Italics in original.
182 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 87.
has blurred what Derek Offord calls the “distinctions between acts which are absolutely right and acts which are absolutely wrong, that is right or wrong, moral or immoral.”

Dostoyevsky’s attack on the principles advocated by the revolutionary radicals of the 1860s begins to emerge through the initial events of Crime and Punishment. Raskolnikov, at this moment, seems to be Dostoyevsky’s answer to the so called “arithmetic” sums of the radicals. He is the protagonist of the experiment that Dostoyevsky will carry out, to see if this arithmetic actually works, if the world will really be a better place for everyone once the old woman is killed. The reader may sense that Raskolnikov in fact desires to kill the old woman for himself, for his own gratification, yet for the moment one accepts this apparently humanitarian motive that Raskolnikov is using to justify his deed. If all goes to plan, Raskolnikov should emerge triumphant in the aftermath of Ivánovna’s murder, for justice will have been done. Dostoyevsky’s attack on the theories of the new men of the sixties becomes full blown as the validity of Raskolnikov’s ideals is put to the test.

V. The Murder of Ivánovna

The scene of the murder of Alyóna Ivánovna and her younger sister Lizaveta takes place in the old woman’s apartment and is narrated at length and in detail. The two women are brutally beaten, hacked to death with an axe by Raskolnikov and robbed. Raskolnikov had not planned to murder Lizaveta, yet he had forgotten to lock the door of the apartment and as soon as she walks in, he swings his axe on the crown of her head. Raskolnikov acts on impulse in this scene, and seems to be caught in a frenzy. After staining his hands with the blood of the two women, he steals what he can from the apartment and flees. It is from this moment on that the plot of Crime and Punishment begins to unfold. Raskolnikov is not rewarded with the sense of fulfilment he hoped would accompany him in the aftermath of the murder. On the contrary, he is overtaken by a feeling of revulsion towards his deed and plunges into a state of panic and fear. His first doubt regarding the validity of the utilitarian principles he was acting upon emerges in his conscience:

He felt that he wanted to escape this place as quickly as possible. And if at that moment he had been capable of seeing things in better proportion and of making

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decisions, if he had been able to perceive all the difficulties of his situation, in all its desperate, monstrous absurdity, and to realize just how many problems he would have to overcome and how much villainy he might have to perform in order to get out of this place and arrive back home again, he might very well have abandoned the whole undertaking and gone at once to give himself up – not out of fear for himself, but from a simple feeling of horror and revulsion at what he had done. The sense of revulsion in particular kept rising up and growing inside him with each moment that passed.184

A. D. Nuttall points out that there exists an irony whereby a crime committed in the name of freedom can turn into a kind of slavery in which the thought of not going ahead with it is extremely liberating.185 This observation accurately reflects Raskolnikov’s situation. Although he seemed very sure of himself, there were many instances in which Raskolnikov hesitated to go into the old woman’s apartment, and once he did enter, the pawn broker’s suspicious stare almost made him leave. Raskolnikov nonetheless goes ahead with the crime and is utterly repulsed by the physicality of his deed. He subsequently falls into the existential dilemma of whether or not he had done the right thing; the ideals he relied on coming straight to the surface and into scrutiny. Raskolnikov has acted upon a radical ideal which should have maximised the happiness of the population, yet he realises that his moral conscience cannot be so easily ignored. For the remainder of the novel he falls prey to an illness which has him come in and out of states of delirium. These trigger in him precipitous changes of mood and personality. Dispossessed of the faith in his rationality and utilitarian reasoning, Raskolnikov searches for the true motive of his crime; meanwhile, a game of cat and mouse begins between him and the clever judicial investigator Petróvich. In this first half of the novel we notice, once again, the creation of a psychologically tortured character struggling to understand whether or not he really trusts radical ideology. Dostoyevsky’s critique of individual radicalisation thus continues as another unfulfilled individual’s life is worsened by his engagement with radical ideology. Crime and Punishment further probes the relationship between the individual and radical ideals as other motives of Raskolnikov’s crime come to the surface. This makes way for a discussion regarding the themes of “breakthrough” and of the “superman” in the novel.

184 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 98.
As Gibian explains, the Russian word for “crime” in the title and elsewhere in the novel is *prestuplenie*, from *pre* (across, trans-) and *stuplenie* (a stepping) etymologically it is closer to the English term “transgression.” The root meaning of “stepping across a barrier” is in fact lost in the translation, since the English word “crime” does not have the same derivation. From this clarification, we see Raskolnikov’s murder as an attempt to break through the barrier of the law in order to put his utilitarian theory into practice. Raskolnikov believes that conventional laws do not apply to him; he seems convinced that he is, in some way, exempt from having to abide by the laws of society. He therefore feels compelled, just as the Underground Man had been, to not give up in front of the “stone wall” which in this case does not stand as a symbol of the laws of nature or the conclusions of the natural sciences and mathematics, but as a symbol of the laws of society. Yet unlike the Underground Man, who claimed that he preferred to hit his head against the stone wall as a sign of protest and assertion of his free will, Raskolnikov attempts to break through this obstacle by committing homicide. Here we notice Dostoyevsky exemplifying a destructive consequence of individual radicalisation as Raskolnikov murders in order to take radical ideology to a different level, to apply it in a practical manner. Raskolnikov is successful in as much as he commits the perfect murder whereby there are no witnesses at the time of his crime. He thus achieves his goal of breaking through conventional law without paying a price. The question of whether he manages to break through moral law and evade the responses of his conscience remains to be disputed.

The theme of breakthrough is also connected to the third motive given by Raskolnikov as justification for the murder. This reason omits his philanthropic urges (he never used the stolen goods or money he had stolen, but hid them under a rock) and blends his utilitarian morality with what Ronald Hingley labels a superman-motive. To gain a proper understanding of this third motive it is essential to direct our attention to Part III of *Crime and Punishment*, in which the article entitled “On Crime” (written by Raskolnikov six months before the murder) is brought to the reader’s attention by the inspector Porfiry.

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Petróvich. When Raskolnikov is questioned over the article, he recollects its contents and makes a remark reflective of the entire plot of *Crime and Punishment*: “Let’s see now, my article was about the psychological state of a criminal’s mind throughout the entire process of committing the crime, wasn’t it?”¹⁸⁸ According to Porfiry, “On Crime” declared that:

> the human race is divided into the “ordinary” and “extra-ordinary.” The ordinary must live in obedience and do not have the right to break the law, because, well, because they’re ordinary you see. The extraordinary, on the other hand, have the right to commit all sorts of crimes and break the law in all sorts of ways precisely because they’re extraordinary.

To this Raskolnikov replies:

> No, all I did was quite simply to allude to the fact that an “extraordinary” person has a right...not an official right, of course, but a private one, to allow his conscience to step across certain obstacles, and then only if the execution of his idea (which may occasionally be the salvation of mankind) requires it.”¹⁸⁹

Raskolnikov defends himself by giving examples of great extraordinary humans such as Newton, Kepler, Lycurgus, Solon, Mahomet and Napoleon whose use of violence and murder was a fundamental aspect of their revolutionary campaigns: “they were all every one of them criminals, if only by the fact that, in propounding a new law, they were thereby violating an old one that was held in sacred esteem by society...and of course they did not shrink from bloodshed.”¹⁹⁰ As Offord attests, Raskolnikov’s article resembles the nihilist views of Dmitry Pisarev who had also divided mankind into the enslaved and liberated. Like Pisarev, Raskolnikov demonstrates that he has gone further in his radicalisation within the concept of rational egoism, for he connects his own image to that of the extraordinary individual. And the murder, it now appears, was carried out not for financial reasons, but in the name of the freedom Pisarev had exalted.¹⁹¹ It is clear that Raskolnikov thinks of himself as a superman belonging to the category of supreme intellectuals, just as it is clear that he believes himself immune to the upsurge of his moral conscience in the wake of his crime. Through this third motive, Dostoyevsky sheds light on yet another consequence of Raskolnikov’s process of radicalisation: his desire to be a

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superman, a Napoleon entitled to break moral and conventional law and destroy human life as a means to an end.

Dostoyevsky’s emphasis on the devastating effects of radical ideology on human nature becomes more pronounced as Raskolnikov finally confesses, in the final sections of the novel, that he had murdered Ivánovna based on his Napoleonic theory. Listening to his declaration is the prostitute Sonya (from Saint Sofya, the Divine Wisdom), the woman through whom he eventually seeks redemption: “you see, I wanted to become a Napoleon, and that’s why I killed...what I needed to know, and know quickly, was whether I was a louse, like everyone else, or a man. Whether I could take the step across, or whether I couldn’t.” He later adds, “when I went to see the old woman that day I only intended to conduct a rehearsal...You may as well be aware of that.” According to Maurice Beebe, Raskolnikov committed the murder not to be an extraordinary man but to see if he could be one: “he knew before the murder that he would be shaken and horrified by it, that he would be unable to withstand the test.” For Beebe, Raskolnikov was more intent on putting himself to the test; he was more interested in daring to be an extraordinary individual rather than actually becoming one. This view reveals the severity of the damage that his infatuation with radical ideology has had on his psyche. In the chapter following the explanation of his article Raskolnikov asks himself: “How could I have dared, knowing the person I am, knowing what it would do to me, to take an axe and bloody my hands? I should have thought about it in advance...Ah, but I did!” The revelation that Raskolnikov already foresaw his nervous breakdown in the aftermath of the murder, demonstrates that his desire to seek the thrill of the challenge, to merely prove to himself that he could go ahead with it, was sufficient for his actual undertaking of the crime. So great was his urge to experiment with the ideals he had obsessed over for so long, that the consequences of his actions had become of minor importance.

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Just as with the Underground Man, behind Raskolnikov’s thoughts and deeds stands a psychologically torn personality struggling to find its own beliefs, values and ultimately, its own identity. The theme of dualism plays an important role in Crime and Punishment, as Raskolnikov seems to be what Hingley defines as “yet another Dostoyevskian oscillator between two contradictory positions.” Hingley is referring to the clash between Raskolnikov’s superman motive, with its inherent desire to raise himself above the masses, and his utilitarian reasoning which seeks to help humanity. Indeed, Raskolnikov’s personality seems to be split into two. His closest friend Razumikhin (from razum, meaning reason, or good sense) describes him as generous and kind, but at times “simply cold and unfeeling to the point of inhumanity, it’s really just as though there were two opposing characters alternating within him.” The root of Raskolnikov’s name is raskol which means “schism or split.” A trend is thus noticeable in Dostoyevsky’s creation of ambivalent characters whose personality often seems to be divided. One of the scenes which best reflects Raskolnikov’s bizarre change of personality appears in the first part of the novel. Raskolnikov notices a drunk young woman stumbling in a deserted street of St. Petersburg as she is followed by a suspicious looking man (labelled the “man-about-town”) who keeps spying on her. Filled with anger, Raskolnikov calls a policemen, denounces the apparent stalker and urges the officer to accompany the girl home. He even gives the girl some money for a cab. Yet as the officer begins to walk away with the girl, Raskolnikov shouts at him: “Listen, hey!...Stop it! What’s it to you? Forget about it! Let him have his bit of fun (he pointed to the man-about-town). What’s it to you.” After being looked upon by the officer as a madman he is left alone, regretful of having given the girl his money. The change within Raskolnikov in this scene is drastic and inexplicable. It is unclear why he behaves in such a manner (there are other instances in which he behaves similarly), yet we begin to observe Dostoyevsky’s use of events such as these to put emphasis on the element of contradiction in the novel. Dostoyevsky’s belief that the values upheld by the radicals of the 1860s were contradictory in nature is reflected

195 Hingley, The Undiscovered Dostoyevsky, 89.
196 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 257.
197 George Gibian, "Names of Principal Characters," 466. Gibian also explains that the Raskolniki were members of religious sects, some of which date back to the great seventeenth century Russian Orthodox schism.
198 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 61.
in a Raskolnikov who briefly experiments with radical ideals and manifests an ambiguous character. Raskolnikov initially claimed that he murdered Ivánovna in the name of altruistic humanitarian motives, yet as his article “On Crime” suggests and his confession to Sonya confirms, he murdered for purely selfish reasons. Many of the problems with both his theories and his personality result from his undeveloped endorsement of the radical ideals of his time.

At the core of the radical ideals of the 1860s with which Raskolnikov experiments, Dostoyevsky saw the philosophy of nihilism. For Dostoyevsky, Russian nihilism was perhaps the most dangerous culture into which young people could fall. From this total negation of societal and cultural values, he saw the advent of a world in which crime and the practice of violent methods of political protest such as terrorism would cease to be considered wrong. To raise the issue of terrorism at this stage is of relevance to this study, since the ideals on which the revolutionary terrorists of the late 1860s and 1870s would base their acts of political violence did not differ greatly from the ideals Raskolnikov is putting to the test. Peace reminds us that in the year 1866, just as *Crime and Punishment* was coming out, Dostoyevsky saw his worst fears regarding the damaging effects of nihilism come true, as the young student Karakozov attempted to assassinate Tsar Alexander II. This event was one among many which inaugurated the use of political violence as an effective means of protest in Russia. Driving youths like Karakozov into terrorist groups such as Hell was this philosophy of nihilism, the negation of pre-determined ideals and of the political order. Once taken to the extreme, this philosophy translated into the belief that the political order needed to be destroyed through violence. Peace labels Raskolnikov a nihilist; however, the portrayal of Raskolnikov as “an unhappy nihilist, a nihilist suffering in a deeply human way” came from a friend of Dostoyevsky named N. Strakhov. Strakhov was apparently congratulated by Dostoyevsky himself, who replied to him with these words: “You alone understood me.” It is likely

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199 See Chapter 1, pp. 26-27.
that Dostoyevsky was pleased with Strakhov’s use of the phrase “suffering in a deeply human way” for it captures, in essence, Raskolnikov’s state throughout the novel. Raskolnikov attempts to become many things in *Crime and Punishment*, yet is unsuccessful in becoming any of them. He is created by Dostoyevsky in this way to demonstrate the incongruity of the apparently perfect rational ideals of the 1860s with the imperfection and irrationality of human nature. Raskolnikov thinks of himself as a nihilist, a socialist, a terrorist, a humanitarian benefactor and an extra-ordinary being who has permission to step over moral and conventional law, yet, essentially, Dostoyevsky’s intention was to show that Raskolnikov is nothing more than a poor, ordinary individual. Despite his ascetic faith in reason, he remains in a similar state to that of his ideals, half-convinced and half-fulfilled. We recall Dostoyevsky’s letter to Katkov in which he explained that the main character of his upcoming novel had “fallen prisoner to some of the strange ‘incomplete’ ideas which float about in the air.”

**VI. Dostoyevsky in the Other Characters of *Crime and Punishment***

Orbiting around Raskolnikov throughout *Crime and Punishment* are various characters from whom much can be learnt about Dostoyevsky’s discussion of radicalisation and the use of violence for the fulfilment of radical ideals. If closely observed, these characters are all representative of one or another of Dostoyevsky’s perspectives on the variations of the human personality. They can essentially be divided into two groups: those that have shied away from the basic principles of human morality such as Lebezyatnikov (from *lebezit’, meaning to fawn on someone, cringe, ingratiate oneself*), Luzhin (the fiancé of Dunya, Raskolnikov’s sister) and Svidrigailov (a landowner in whose house Dunya was ill treated) and those that appear to support them: Razumikhin, Sonya and Porfiry Petróvich. It is through the discussion of the last three characters that Dostoyevsky’s own views are identifiable: Razumikhin for his dislike of socialists, Porfiry for his attempt to encourage Raskolnikov to turn away from radical ideology and Sonya for her Christian beliefs. In Part III of *Crime and Punishment*, Razumikhin lashes out against the concept of socialism

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and those infatuated with its principles. The radical socialists (the new men of the sixties), according to Razumikhin, believe that:

if only society were to be organised sanely, crime would simply disappear, as there would be nothing to protest about and everyone would become virtuous, just like that. Nature isn’t taken into consideration, nature is banished, nature is not supposed to exist. The way they see it, it’s not mankind which, moving along a historical, living path of development, will finally transmute itself into a sane society, but rather a social system which, having emanated from some mathematical head, will at once reorganise mankind and in a single instant make it virtuous and free from sin, more speedily than any living process, bypassing any historical or living path!...Their phalansteries may be ready, but the human nature that would fit them is not yet ready, it wants to live, it hasn’t yet completed the vital process, it’s not ready for the burial-ground! It’s impossible to leap over nature solely by means of logic!204

Dostoyevsky’s frustration with the radical ideals of libertarian socialists manifests itself through the character of Razumikhin. Although many of his contemporaries and of course, a large number of young radicals from the new generation, saw socialism as Russia’s future, and a prosperous future at that, Dostoyevsky retained what would have been labelled a pessimistic outlook, or a decadent perspective, for he could only foresee the degradation of the value of the human personality. Razumikhin continues his attack: “what they prefer are souls which can be made out of rubber, even if they do have a smell of corpse-flesh – but at any rate they’re not alive, they have no will of their own, they’re servile, won’t rebel!”205 It is clear that Dostoyevsky was extremely sceptical of socialism and its effects on the Russian population. In yet another letter to Kaktov in April 1866 he states: “All nihilists are socialists. Socialism (particularly in its Russian form) demands especially the severing of all connections. They are completely certain that on the tabula rasa they will immediately build a paradise.”206 On this tabula rasa, Dostoyevsky foresaw the construction of a utopian world built on the principles advocated by radical intellectuals such as Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov and Pisarev; Razumikhin shows the reader his abhorrence of the creation of such a utopia.

204 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 304-05. Italics in original.
205 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 305.
In the role played by Raskolnikov’s pursuer, the inspector Porfiry Petróvich, Dostoyevsky sends a message to the youthful Russian population reading his novels. Ernest J. Simmons claims that Porfiry possesses a deep sense of human values which he blends with a sympathetic understanding of Raskolnikov. This is visible in the way he cleverly deals with Raskolnikov’s complicated character. Porfiry is convinced that Raskolnikov has committed the murder of the old pawn broker and her sister. He seems to be the only one in *Crime and Punishment* to have fully understood Raskolnikov not only in terms of his crime, but in a more general psychological sense; it is as if he has visibly witnessed the warfare taking place within Raskolnikov’s mind. In the sixth part of the novel Porfiry invites Raskolnikov to plead guilty to the murders in exchange for a significant reduction of his final sentence. However, Raskolnikov refuses: “It isn’t worth it, I don’t want your reduction!” In front of this foreseen answer, Porfiry gives Raskolnikov some advice worthy of some attention:

“I say, don’t turn your nose up at life!” Porfiry went on. “You’ve still a great deal ahead of you... You concocted a theory, and were then ashamed that it didn’t hold water, that it turned out to be most unoriginal! And indeed, it turned out vile, there’s no denying that, but even so you’re not a hopeless villain. Not such a villain at all!... I mean, what sort of man do you suppose I think you are? I think you’re one of the kind who even if his intestines were being cut out would stand looking at his torturers with a smile – as long as he’d found a God, or a faith. Well, find those, and you’ll live.”

Porfiry captures, in essence, the reason behind Raskolnikov’s sufferings and points towards a path that could bring him to redemption. As Philip Rahv attests, Porfiry has understood that Raskolnikov, deranged by radical theories and unconscious urges, has killed for himself, and not for the common cause to which his nihilistic generation was dedicated. He senses Raskolnikov’s inner despair, even if this is masked, quite clumsily, by an ironic attitude of self-certainty. His suggestions: “don’t turn your nose up at life” and “find your faith,” indicate that aside from his duty as judicial investigator Porfiry feels a moral urge to direct Raskolnikov towards the search for life not death, or rather, towards an understanding that it is never too late to seek life. In religion, or in any other non-traditional faith, Porfiry claims, this life may be found. Once again Dostoyevsky’s own

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aspirations emerge out of one of his characters. His condemnation of socialism and those who adhered to its radical ideals was linked to a deeper yearning to see Russian young people seek life elsewhere. It is likely that he wished his readers would have had second thoughts about becoming involved with the world of radicalism after reading Raskolnikov’s story.

Finally, it is the prostitute Sonya, the meek and humble character of the novel, driven to prostitution to help her poverty-stricken family, who brings Raskolnikov to seek redemption through Christianity. A very similar character to Liza from Notes from Underground, Sonya is a symbol of unselfish love, one which seems to have clashed with and defeated Raskolnikov’s rational egoism. She convinces Raskolnikov to confess his crime and surrender himself to the authorities. He does so publicly in the Haymarket and privately at the police headquarters. Dostoyevsky thus introduces the themes of suffering and atonement in the final stages of Crime and Punishment as ways for Raskolnikov to seek redemption. Whether or not Raskolnikov is willing to be redeemed remains a question for the epilogue to answer.

VII. Epilogue: Redemption or Obduracy?

The epilogue of Crime and Punishment has often been condemned by scholars as a cheap, reassuring view of Raskolnikov’s future.\(^{210}\) It is clear why this section of the novel has received much criticism. In a few chapters, Dostoyevsky attempts to place Raskolnikov on a path of redemption with the help of Sonya’s love and Christian faith. However, he does not enter into a discussion regarding Raskolnikov’s rebirth and leaves his future to the reader’s imagination. The epilogue is the great question of Crime and Punishment and for this it has roused a debate amongst scholars. Is Raskolnikov redeemed at the end of the novel? Does he really convert? Should the reader be convinced that he will be spiritually reborn?

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At the beginning of the epilogue we find Raskolnikov in a Siberian prison. He has not repented and still believes in the validity of his radical ideals. He acknowledges that his superman ideal has failed, yet he sees this as a personal defeat, not a recognition that the radical ideals he championed were essentially flawed. Raskolnikov does not seem to have changed and remains solitary, morose and proud. More importantly however, he feels no remorse for the murder of Ivánovna and her sister and shows no willingness to rejoin common humanity:

And even if fate had sent him no more than remorse – burning remorse that destroyed the heart, driving away sleep, the kind of remorse to escape whose fearsome torments the mind clutches at the noose and the well, oh, how glad he would have been! Torment and tears – after all, that is life too. But he felt no remorse for his crime. At the very least he would have been able to feel anger at his stupidity, just as he had earlier felt anger at the stupid and outrageous actions that had brought him to the prison. But now, in prison, in freedom, he had once again considered and gone over all the things he had done and had found them to be not nearly as stupid and outrageous as they had seemed to him earlier, during that fateful time.211

According to Mochulsky, the final truth about Raskolnikov can be found in the words he speaks shortly after having these thoughts: “‘After all, why does what I did seem so outrageous to them?’ He said to himself. ‘Because it was an act of wickedness? But what do they mean, those words: ‘an act of wickedness’? My conscience is easy.’ ”212 This last phrase, “my conscience is easy” (perhaps better understood in the Jessie Coulson translation: “my conscience is at peace”) leads Mochulsky to believe that Raskolnikov is in fact a superman: “He has not been defeated; it is he who has conquered. He wanted to try out his strength and he found that there were no limits to it.” Raskolnikov’s only enemy is therefore fate: “Raskolnikov has been brought to destruction like a tragic hero in battle with blind Destiny. But how could the author present this bold truth about the new man to the readers of Katkov’s well-meaning journal in the 1860s? He had to cover it by throwing an innocent veil over it. He did this, however, hurriedly, carelessly, ‘just before the final curtain’…We know Raskolnikov too well to believe this ‘pious lie.’ ”213 Mochulsky is here referring to the final scene in which Raskolnikov throws himself at Sonya’s feet, weeping,

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and realises that he loves her deeply. This love seems to take over the feelings and doubts which had tormented him up until that point and as he opens the New Testament “a certain thought flickered through his mind: ‘What if her convictions can now be mine, too? Her feelings, her strivings, at least.’”

Perhaps too severe, Mochulsky’s view nonetheless reflects the response of many scholars (and readers) who do not entirely believe Raskolnikov’s sudden conversion to the Christian faith and passionate love for Sonya. In accordance with Mikhail Bakhtin’s comments on the element of polyphony in Dostoyevsky’s novel, Raskolnikov seems to have evaded his creator’s intentions and taken on a personal, independent voice. He expresses a desire to be reborn yet the reader senses that, in not having shown any remorse for his crime, Raskolnikov will remain the self-centred “new Russian man” he has struggled so much to become. This however does not mean that his wish to convert is undoubtedly a “pious lie” as Mochulsky has pointed out. The idea of redemption must not be ruled out. Perhaps it is from this position that Raskolnikov will be redeemed. From his inflated ego and belief in himself as a superman he may have to re-negotiate a relationship with reality and return to live amongst members of society. His love for Sonya and willingness to embrace Christian values may in fact be the genuine desires of his heart. As Dostoyevsky states at the end of the novel however: “this might constitute the theme of a new narrative.”

The change within Raskolnikov’s behaviour from his remorseless and obdurate attitude towards the crime to his spiritual revival and discovery of love for Sonya is bridged by a symbolic dream he has in prison. Raskolnikov falls prey to illness and delirium and dreams of a fast spreading disease brought on by an attack of microscopic creatures that lodged themselves in people’s bodies. But these creatures were spirits, gifted with will and intelligence. People who absorbed them into their systems instantly became rabid and insane. But never had people considered themselves so intelligent and in unswerving possession of the truth as

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did those who became infected. Never had they believed so unswervingly in the correctness of their judgements.217

This dream clearly represents Dostoyevsky’s condemnation of Raskolnikov’s rationalism and its potentially devastating effects on society as a whole.218 Total chaos on earth would be the outcome if every human believed himself to be an extra-ordinary individual in possession of a grandiose theory for solving the problems of humanity: “each person thought that he alone possessed the truth and suffered agony as he looked at the others, beating his breast, weeping and wringing his hands.”219 The dream also foretells one of the themes that Dostoyevsky would later explore in The Devils: the creation of small groups, or organisations, which secretly planned the renewal of Russia:

“In this place and that people would gather into groups, agree on something together, swear to stick together – but would instantly begin doing something completely different from what had been proposed, start blaming one another, fighting and murdering.”220

The self-destructive element which Dostoyevsky saw at the core of the philosophies of these groups is clearly pointed out. Thus, through the dream of the plague, Dostoyevsky illustrates the outcome of millions of Raskolnikovs attempting to live together. Each individual believes himself a god to whom the law does not apply, each a superman entitled to “transgress” or “step across” certain pre-determined ideals of society in the name of a “just” cause. Dostoyevsky’s fear that this contagious egoism would destroy Russian society is visible in the apocalyptic scene unfolding in the dream.

It is possible that through this dream Raskolnikov has understood that his radical theory is perhaps not so extraordinary. If everyone can be a superman then a war of individuals is inevitable. Thus another clue emerges which indicates that Raskolnikov’s conversion is in fact genuine. As Ruth Mortimer claims, the awakening of Raskolnikov from this final dream is literally an awakening from the dream of the murder.221 Raskolnikov’s sentimental encounter with Sonya at the end of the novel and decision to endure his time in

219 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 652.
220 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 652.
prison to one day be re-united with her, is perhaps his way of renouncing once and for all to ineffectual ideals which have turned him into a villain.

The analysis of *Notes from Underground* and *Crime and Punishment* has given us an understanding of Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation and has initiated an examination of the origins of the terrorist mentality that will be expanded in the following chapter of this thesis. Through these novels we traced the evolution of Dostoyevsky’s individual from his initial encounter with radical ideals to his use of murder as an experiment that tested the validity of these ideals. In *Notes from Underground* we examined the first of many attacks from the author on the rationalism of the 1860s and the social Romanticism of the 1840s. It was concluded that the Underground Man was purposely created as a suffering, tormented individual in order to discredit the image of human perfection projected by radical intellectuals of both time frames. Although this paradoxical character appeared to have achieved his goal of not being influenced by radical ideology, his has been deemed a pyrrhic victory which has brought him to a state of self-deprivation and confined him to a lonely, isolated life in his underground world. Many of the themes discussed in *Notes from Underground* reappeared in *Crime and Punishment* and were once again subject to scrutiny in the latter half of this chapter. Raskolnikov seemed to have crawled out of the Underground Man’s dark cellar to put these radical ideals into practice and validate them through the killing of the old pawn broker. In a similar way to the Underground Man, Raskolnikov was a lonely individual, dissatisfied with his reality and obsessed with searching for truth in his life. Unlike his predecessor however, he searched for this truth in radical ideals, in these principles which promised man’s happiness and guaranteed inner fulfilment. This led him to the belief that society would certainly have been a better place without the old pawn broker, and for this, he took her life. The sense of revulsion, the feeling of failure and the moral crisis which Raskolnikov underwent in the aftermath of the murder have been identified as components of Dostoyevsky’s second, great attack on the radical ideals of the 1860s. Raskolnikov engaged with the possibility of change by mixing utilitarian reasoning with nihilist and rationally egoistic views. Moreover, he seemed to only take these ideals half-way, almost half-heartedly. Raskolnikov eventually crashed into the wall of his moral conscience; an
episode which eventually brought him to confess that the murder was an act of selfishness, a test which would prove whether or not he was a superman. As the study of the epilogue revealed, this issue remains unresolved and is still the cause of dispute amongst scholars. This chapter has concluded that through *Notes from Underground* and *Crime and Punishment* Dostoyevsky sought to reveal the flaws of radical ideology by creating two characters whose existential dilemmas were worsened by their engagement with these ideals. Both the Underground Man and Raskolnikov emerge from their stories as unresolved, destructive, but above all, unfulfilled individuals.
Chapter 3.
Terrorism and Self-Destruction in The Devils

On the 21\textsuperscript{st} of November, 1869, the young revolutionary Sergei Nechaev, leader of a secret organisation, beat, strangled and shot one of its members, a student named Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov at the Petrovsky Agricultural Academy in Moscow. Ivanov’s body was weighed down with stones and dumped into a nearby lake through a hole made in the ice. Although the actual reasons behind the murder remain shrouded in mystery, it is alleged that Ivanov had intentions of acting as informer to the police regarding the terrorist plans of his underground group. Carelessly leaving many clues at the crime scene, Nechaev and his followers were soon captured and tried. As Nechaev’s trial unfolded, Fyodor Dostoyevsky lent his attentive eyes and ears to published documents, word-of-mouth accounts and newspaper reports connected to what would later be labeled “The Nechaev Affair.” The cold-blooded murder of Ivanov had given Dostoyevsky the incentive to change his literary course and devote his time to the creation of a new novel with a strong relevance to this contemporary issue. Thus Dostoyevsky put all other work aside (he had been working on a novel entitled \textit{The Life of a Great Sinner}) and, having collected as much material possible on the Nechaev affair, threw himself into a novel he would later entitle \textit{The Devils}.

This chapter will focus on Dostoyevsky’s discussion of terrorism in \textit{The Devils}. From the Underground Man’s psychological struggle with radical ideology, to Raskolnikov’s attempt to test the validity of radical ideals, we finally arrive at the completion of Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation in the nihilist terrorists of \textit{The Devils}: Peter Verkhovensky and Nikolai Stavrogin. These two characters will be at the centre of this argument, as we examine the nature of the terrorist mentality in the context of late nineteenth-century Russia and identify the philosophy of nihilism as the source from which this desire for universal destruction originates. \textit{The Devils} is first and foremost a novel dealing with ideology and its use by men and women living in a period of revolutionary upheaval and rebellion against the socio-political order. It concentrates on the philosophies of life possessed by a group of radicals interested, each in their own way,
in solving Russia’s greatest social, political and economic problems. As Gianlorenzo Pacini explains in his introduction to *The Devils*:

> Who are these men, who are the devils? The devils are first and foremost “men of ideas” as Bakhtin defines them; possessed men, tormented, devoured by an idea, by an omniscient, omnipotent conception of reality, men who believe themselves to be in possession of the “Truth,” but each one of whom has built his own “truth” in an abhorrent, destructive and catastrophic way.  

Each character’s journey for truth will be followed throughout this chapter. Emphasis will be laid on the theme of self-destruction, as each individual’s desire to bring about radical change in Russia gradually turns into a desperate and excessive pursuit of extreme ideals which either culminates in the murder of others, or in their own self-sacrifice.

The Nechaev Affair seems to have acted as the catalyst urging Dostoyevsky to make a comment on those revolutionary terrorists he believed were destroying Russian culture and tradition. As he was composing *The Devils*, Dostoyevsky wrote a letter to A. N. Maikov in which he hinted at the issues he would be discussing in his new novel: “What I am writing is a tendentious thing; I want to speak out in an impassioned way. (The nihilists and Westernisers will cry out that I am a retrograde!) Well, let them; but I shall have my say in full.” Unlike the previous fictional novels analysed in this study, *The Devils* is largely based on real events and many of the characters are portraits of real people. This chapter will therefore focus on Dostoyevsky’s thoughts regarding the effects of the Bakunin and Nechaev propaganda on young radicals, the use of socialism by terrorists as a mask for the commitment to political chaos, the mechanism and proceedings of a small underground terrorist organisation and the role played by Russian liberals in raising the nihilist generation.

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224 The increased use of terrorist violence throughout Russia after the publication of *The Devils* affixed the label of “prophet” on Dostoyevsky. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II by the terrorists of The People’s Will confirmed the warning signs running through the pages of this great novel. For a source which deals specifically with *The Devils* as a prophetic novel and its success in fictionalising the initial signs of terrorist violence in Russia see James H. Billington, "Masterpiece: Dostoevsky's Prophetic Novel; 'The Possessed'
Before we enter into an examination of the primary characters of *The Devils*, it is important to take the epigraph of this novel into consideration. Here Dostoyevsky quotes a passage from the New Testament, namely St. Luke’s gospel, of the Gerasene demoniac in which Jesus Christ drives out several demons from a young man:

> And there was there a herd of swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.\(^{225}\)

Regarding the meaning Dostoyevsky wished to attribute to this gospel in light of *The Devils*, Joseph Frank cites a passage from one of the Russian author’s letters to Apollon Maikov:

> The Devils went out of the Russian man and entered into a herd of swine, that is, into the Nechaevs and Serno-Solvieviches, et. al. These all drowned or will be drowned, and the healed man, from whom the devils have departed, sits at the feet of Jesus...And bear this in mind, my dear friend, that a man who loses his people and his national roots also loses the faith of his fathers and his God. Well, if you really want to know – this is in essence the theme of my novel. It is called *The Devils*, and it describes how the devils entered into the herd of swine.\(^{226}\)

One of Dostoyevsky’s greatest desires in life was that Russia would be healed in the same way as the possessed man. He had by this stage of his life re-discovered Christianity and had identified the solution to his country’s troubles in the recognition of traditional national values and in Orthodox faith. However, Dostoyevsky knew that his aspirations would remain just that, remote possibilities, and thus concentrated on documenting, as Frank reveals: “the process of infection and self-destruction rather than the end result of purification.”\(^{227}\) *The Devils* consequently focuses more on the image of the Russian revolutionary nihilists as swine than on the young man sitting at the feet of Jesus. With this in mind, our study of the characters of *The Devils* takes on another dimension as we consider the form that the demonic takes within each main character. Before it was changed to *The Devils*, the original title of Dostoyevsky’s novel, *Besy*, had been translated...
from Russian into English as *The Possessed*. Although this title may not have been a correct literal translation of the original, it did accurately define, in essence, the nature and mentality of a group of ideologically obsessed characters. Indeed the level to which some of the nihilist radicals take their malignant desire for annihilation and destruction adds a demented, frenetic quality to their personalities which in turn gives them a somewhat supernatural or bewitched appearance. Standing out amongst them in his obsession with political conspiracy is the insurrectionist Peter Verkhovensky.

**I. Peter Verkhovensky: The Motivations of a Terrorist**

Peter Verkhovensky is the public, demonic figure and chief agitator of political revolutionary activity in *The Devils*. In this character Dostoyevsky centres all his hatred towards the new generation of nihilist radicals, often exaggerating Verkhovensky’s passion for universal destruction and commitment to chaos so much that he takes on clownish features. Moulded on the figure of Sergei Nechaev, Peter Verkhovensky is often labelled a “filthy human louse,” a “reptile,” a “spy” and a “scoundrel.”

However, there is one more label that must be applied to Verkhovensky which accurately defines the role he plays in *The Devils*, that of “terrorist.” Verkhovensky is the leader of a small underground organisation (named “the group of five” in the novel) which, as its primary aim, seeks the destruction or at least the injury of the State through the use of systematic violence. As the chief terrorist of this group, Verkhovensky dedicates himself completely to the revolutionary cause, often going further in his ideals than any of the other radical members. Consequently, he is often looked upon by his fellow revolutionaries and political conspirators with dismay and suspicion. Verkhovensky performs the role of chief revolutionary terrorist in *The Devils*, a part which sees him surpass the Underground Man and Raskolnikov in his destructive use of ideology. His reasoning goes beyond a longing for the fulfilment of radical ideals, as it never develops into a self-conscious debate about whether killing for an ideal is morally right or wrong. Peter Verkhovensky manipulates, extorts and eventually kills as he pleases. He is a man utterly infatuated with the concept of universal destruction and allows nothing to stand in the way of his revolutionary cause.

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228 Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, 556, 554, 413.
a result, he stands in Dostoyevsky’s literature as a symbol of the completely radicalised individual turned fully-fledged terrorist.

Indispensable to Peter Verkhovensky’s ability to maintain human relationships is his use of deceit and imposture. Verkhovensky maintains a position of power amongst his followers throughout the novel by claiming to be the representative of a world-wide revolutionary organisation located in Europe. He reinforces his stance by appearing at the meetings of his secret society accompanied by his travel companion and idol, the mysterious Nikolai Stavrogin, a supposed founding member of this foreign organisation. None of this is true, there is no foreign central committee and his declaration that there are hundreds of active groups like his across Russia is doubtful. Coming across in Verkhovensky’s lies is Dostoyevsky’s attempt to replicate some of the deceitful revolutionary tactics used by Nechaev to gain authority over others; although used only as a blueprint for the creation of Verkhovensky, many of Nechaev’s personality traits are transferred onto the fictional character. Nechaev did in fact claim to be representative “No. 2771” of the “Russian section of the World Revolutionary Alliance”: these credentials were signed by his mentor and accomplice Michael Bakunin and stamped with the seal of the “Central Committee of the European Revolutionary Alliance.” The committee never existed and was merely used by Nechaev to inflate his own importance and increase his authority. Verkhovensky claims to be the organiser of secret societies all over Russia, he diffuses proclamations, sows sedition and is preparing an uprising against the government through which he will “bring everything down with a crash: the State as well as its moral standards.” In order to successfully carry this out though, he needs the help, confidence and loyal commitment of his followers; something he will obtain by force if necessary.

Irving Howe deepens the discussion of Verkhovensky’s role of impostor in The Devils in his critical essay Dostoyevsky: The Politics of Salvation by showing how this character pretends to speak in the name of socialism in order to mask his commitment to destruction

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229 Frank, The Miraculous Years, 444. The history of the relationship between Bakunin and Nechaev is particularly intriguing and stands as another example of the conflict between the two generations of the nineteenth-century Russian Intelligentsia. For more information consult Edward Hallett Carr, “The Affair Nechaev,” in Michael Bakunin (New York: Gosizdat, 1961).

230 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 602.
and chaos. Howe touches on an important point which sheds light on another accusation directed by Dostoyevsky at the new nihilist generation: their tendency to use idealism as a banner behind which their true political intentions were hidden. Verkhovensky is well aware that it is essential for him to mask his apocalyptic, terrorist ideals with some sort of progressive purpose, acceptable to his cause. He does this through the socialist ideology of Shigalyov, the theorist of his secret terrorist organisation. In a scene which reveals his deceitful personality, Verkhovensky initially exalts Shigalyov for his ideals yet almost immediately after scoffs at him and his solution of dividing mankind into two unequal parts, one tenth of which will enjoy complete freedom of personality and rights over the remaining nine tenths, who will be transformed through coercion into an obedient herd. “We don’t want the Shigalyov order, for that is something too exquisite. That’s an ideal. That can only come to pass in the future. Shigalyov is an aesthete and a fool” Verkhovensky admits to Stavrogin in a heated conversation we shall soon observe more closely. Verkhovensky refuses to acknowledge the revolutionary plans of others, such as those conceived by the Shigalyovs of the 1860s and 1870s, for they look to the future in the hope of one day establishing a functioning society in which individuals may have equal rights. His own ideas however, forbid any sort of future planning. In what seems to be a contradictory and irrational approach, Verkhovensky’s answer to Russia’s socio-political problems lies in the complete destruction of society. Because of this, although he attempts to come across as socialist, Verkhovensky suspiciously regards the socialist ideology as an obstacle standing in the way of his principle of total destruction. Here one recognises Dostoyevsky’s creation of Verkhovensky as an individual in whom radicalism reaches its apex. In him all the refashioned and re-modelled ideals of the Russian radical intelligentsia, from Herzen to Bakunin, to intellectuals such as Chernyshevsky and Pisarev, culminate in the untameable desire for the total destruction he seems to be blinded by.

In order to gain a proper understanding of Dostoyevsky’s discussion of terrorism and political violence in The Devils, it is essential to observe the revolutionary thoughts of

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232 Dostoevsky, The Devils, 405.
233 Dostoevsky, The Devils, 419-21.
characters such as Shigalyov in more detail. As Leatherbarrow points out, Shigalyov is not a rogue obsessed with destruction, nor is he the fool his paradoxical view of equality may make him out to be. Shigalyov represents the typical dreamer, a “Fourier” as Verkhovensky labels him, who has understood that his own socialist theory is ultimately flawed.\textsuperscript{234} He discovers this by observing what most social dreamers of his time often overlooked: the uncontrollable egoistic nature of man. It is under the subheading \textit{At Virginsky’s} in the second part of the novel that Shigalyov voices his revolutionary theory.

In this section, Dostoyevsky allows the reader access into the clandestine meeting held by Verkhovensky with his secret society, composed of the chosen five: Liputin, Virginsky, Lyamshin, Shigalyov and Tolkachenko. Present are also other individuals with radical aspirations, such as three teachers, a student, an army Major, a schoolboy and two central characters of the novel: Alexei Kirilov and the double of the murdered student Ivanov, Ivan Shatov. Entering the meeting with Verkhovensky is Stavrogin, officially not a member of the secret society, but a symbol of authority nonetheless. Those present have gathered to discuss a solution to Russia’s unacceptable socio-political situation. Each has brought his or her ideals as to how society should change; not all however are given the opportunity to speak. Shigalyov stands out clearly in the discussion with his aforementioned theory. His vision of an earthly paradise achieved through the separation of humanity into free men and obedient followers resembles the ideas presented in Raskolnikov’s article \textit{On Crime} and in Chernyshevsky’s ideal of the Crystal Palace. It can in fact be seen as a continuation of those ideals. In both, man can only achieve happiness through the restriction of his freedom and, as the Underground Man clearly pointed out, he will be deprived of choice. Shigalyov envisions a society founded on revolutionary principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. However, he also admits that: “I’m afraid I got rather muddled up in my own data, and my conclusion is in direct contradiction to the original idea with which I start. Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrived at unlimited despotism.”\textsuperscript{235} Shigalyov seems to have dug deep enough into the nature of man to understand that equality and freedom are impossible under the rule of despotism for man’s


\textsuperscript{235} Dostoyevsky, \textit{The Devils}, 404.
innate egoism will eventually seek a way of becoming free from its grasp. He realises that his earthly paradise will eventually become a place in which man will become enslaved. Here transpires Dostoyevsky’s own questioning of the principles of Western European thought and its contradictory declarations. His fears of the kind of impact that socialism would have in Russia are clearly reflected through Shigalyov’s recognition of a major problem within his own theory.

Nonetheless, Shigalyov remains one of the members of Peter Verkhovensky’s secret society. This can raise questions as to the kind of role he plays in The Devils: is Shigalyov a social theorist? Is he a revolutionary terrorist? A nihilist? The same question can indeed be asked about the other primary characters in the novel, a fact which sheds light on the enigmatic nature of this book. Dostoyevsky has often been criticised for misinterpreting the Russian radical movement as a whole and for having used the figure of Nechaev to represent the intentions of late nineteenth-century revolutionaries. Ernest Simmons identifies Dostoyevsky’s error in The Devils as being rooted in his indiscriminate mixing of nihilists and revolutionary terrorists.\(^{236}\) This point of view is, however, not entirely accurate. Whilst it is true that Dostoyevsky used the Nechaev affair as a corner-stone on which The Devils would be built, he did not reduce the growing revolutionary movement in Russia to an act of violence committed by one revolutionary. What Simmons seems to have overlooked, and what Dostoyevsky wished to reveal in his novel, is that the creation of a philosophy of nihilism within the Russian revolutionary movement had an explosive power to send those influenced by it in different directions, including that of revolutionary terrorism. We notice that Verkhovensky, though leader of his secret society, is often opposed and mistrusted by the other members. No one at the second meeting of the group of five, in which the need to murder the suspected traitor Shatov is discussed, really agrees with Verkhovensky, and when Shatov is murdered, Shigalyov refuses to take part in the assassination. Furthermore, the final image we have of Verkhovensky at the end of The Devils is that of a lonely individual who leaves a scene littered with the dead bodies of his followers. We begin to see how, rather than categorising the revolutionary movement under one label, Dostoyevsky has in fact purposely endowed the characters in The Devils

\(^{236}\) Simmons, Dostoevsky: The Making of a Novelist, 228.
with different, often conflicting personalities and political solutions for Russia’s problems. His message to readers concerned the inevitable self-destructive end radical conspirators would meet in their use of political violence as a solution to the backward, autocratic Russian State.

The meeting at Virginsky’s in Part II of *The Devils* does not end with Shigalyov’s declaration of his socialist theory. The quarrelling between those present continues as the discussion is steered by Peter Verkhovensky away from theory and towards the urgent need for revolutionary action:

> Let me ask you which you prefer: the slow way consisting of the composition of social novels and the dry unimaginative planning of the destinies of mankind a thousand years hence, while despotism swallows the morsels of roast meat which would fly into your mouths of themselves, but which you fail to catch, or are you in favour of a quick solution, whatever it may be, which will at last untie your hands and which will give humanity ample scope for ordering its own social affairs in a practical way and not on paper? They shout: a hundred million heads; well, that may be only a metaphor, but why be afraid of it if with the slow paper day-dreams despotism will in a hundred or so years devour not a hundred but five hundred million heads?  

Verkhovensky’s greatest ability to manipulate others around him and sway the public opinion towards his own aims, is manifested here. Dostoyevsky begins to reveal Verkhovensky’s real intentions in these pages as those of a man who seems to have found a way to by-pass the age of socialism and who seems unperturbed by the idea of killing a million people if this will ensure the socio-political development of his country. What is missing until this point, however, is a reasonable theory which would replace Shigalyov’s. Verkhovensky’s views are supported by another member, Lyamshin, who in response to Shigalyov’s theory voices his own opinion: “for my part, instead of putting them into paradise, I’d take these nine-tenths of humanity, if I didn’t know what to do with them, and blow them up, leaving only a small number of educated people who’d live happily.”  

Lyamshin’s barbaric suggestion proposes a more rapid and effective solution to the problem. His statement intensifies the discussion and introduces the reader to the destructive capacity of the concepts and ideals raised within Verkhovensky’s revolutionary

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group. It is not long, however, before Verkhovensky himself voices his own scheme, a plan he has long kept secret from the other members. So diabolical in nature, the scheme is revealed only to one another character, Stavrogin, for as we shall now see, it is because of him that Verkhovensky’s apocalyptic ideas are set in motion.

Following the meeting at Virginsky’s, Peter Verkhovensky rushes to meet his companion Stavrogin in private. Little does Stavrogin know that he has been identified by Verkhovensky as the rock on which his plan will be realised: upon the discovery of this, he is left in as much astonishment as the reader of this section of The Devils, entitled Ivan the Crown Prince. In a chapter which sees him turn from the self-composed leader of a secret organisation to an infantile plotter of destruction overcome by a state of wild frenzy, Verkhovensky delivers a speech to Stavrogin regarding his aim to expand the network of groups of five throughout Russia. His declaration is as follows: “we’ll create political disturbances…Don’t you believe we’ll create political disturbances? We shall create such an upheaval that the foundations of the State will be cracked wide open.”

Verkhovensky stresses the need for “something more immediate, something more thrilling” to take place if Russia’s socio-political system is to change. However, he does this in a peculiar way, paradoxically reverting to a declaration of love for a concept he seeks to include in his plan of universal destruction: beauty. Verkhovensky’s initial attempt to persuade Stavrogin to join him in the dissemination of political upheaval becomes an exaltation of his friend’s beauty. The chronicler of The Devils recounts the scene:

“Stavrogin you’re beautiful!” Verkhovensky cried almost in ecstasy. “Do you know that you are beautiful? What is so fine about you is that sometimes you don’t know it….I love beauty. I am a nihilist, but I love beauty. Don’t nihilists love beauty? The only thing they do not love is idols, but I love an idol. You are my idol!...I-especially need someone like you. I don’t know of anyone but you. You’re my leader, you’re my sun, and I am your worm.”

Verkhovensky gives the concept of beauty a different interpretation from the one held by the mainstream culture of men such as his father, Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky, the symbol of romantic liberalism in the novel. What Verkhovensky sees in Stavrogin is the concept of beauty redefined by the nihilists. It is the beauty of destruction, the beauty of

239 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 417.
240 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 419.
241 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 420.
rebellion, the beauty which, as Dostoyevsky wrote in one of his letters: “the Communards saw in the flames engulfing Paris during the last days of the Commune.”²⁴² It is essentially a beauty seen in revolution, an apocalyptic revolution which Verkhovensky wishes to spark and hopes his idol Stavrogin will lead.

As Murry indicates, the beauty that Verkhovensky sees in Stavrogin is an “absolute beauty” which is not of this world. He therefore sees his friend as the perfect revolutionary leader whom people will respect and follow because of the “god-like” features he possesses.²⁴³ In accordance with the redefined concept of beauty held by the nihilists, Dostoyevsky, through Verkhovensky, inverts the images of authentic, religious beauty in the novel from that of God, His creation and His son Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to that of Stavrogin, that is, of the demonic. Why Stavrogin’s beauty is labelled by critics as demonic will soon be discussed. What needs an urgent answer at this moment is the question: What drives Peter Verkhovensky? What has brought him to espouse his commitment to political violence with the image of beauty he sees in Stavrogin? As the speech glorifying Stavrogin reverts back to a declaration of terror, Verkhovensky’s true motives for causing chaos and destruction finally emerge:

Do you realise that we are very powerful already? Our party consists not only of those who kill and burn, or fire off pistols in the classical manner or bite their superiors. Such people are only in our way. Without discipline nothing has any meaning for me. You see, I’m a rogue, and not a Socialist, ha, ha! Listen, I’ve summed them all up: the teacher who laughs with the children at their God and at their cradle is ours already. The barrister who defends an educated murderer by pleading that, being more mentally developed than his victims, he could not help murdering for money, is already one of us. Schoolboys who kill a peasant for the sake of a thrill are ours. A public prosecutor, who trembles in court because he is not sufficiently progressive, is ours, ours…The Russian God has already capitulated to cheap vodka.²⁴⁴

As noted by H. A. Gomperts, Verkhovensky’s words evoke many of the points made in the Nechaev-Bakunin propaganda of the late 1860s, particularly in the manuscript *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, which states that the revolution requires a complete break with all laws, codes and moral injunctions of the civilised world. True to his role of instigator and

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²⁴⁴ Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, 421.
manipulator, Verkhovensky speaks in accordance with the *Catechism* and states that the evils of society must be amplified, unrest must be sown and the feeling that the existing order is on the brink of collapse must be spread. All this, of course, is to be carried out with the underlying objective of recruiting the greatest possible number of people, peasants included, to fight for the revolutionary cause. Within the Russian revolutionary movement, the idea of fostering the revolutionary spirit of the masses against the autocracy was very much a Bakuninist concept. Twice Verkhovensky makes reference to a powerless God who has lost all significance in Russia. Convinced that God is dead, he prepares himself both for the mass recruitment of revolutionaries and for the revelation of a new god, Stavrogin, whom he intends to use as leader of the revolution. Here Dostoyevsky forges a link between the concepts of nihilism and atheism, a combination of principles which he believed was corrupting the revolutionary minority of Russia.

Peter Verkhovensky continues his proclamation of terror, by now almost in a frenzy of enthusiasm, and as he combines his plan of universal destruction with a messianic hope his gaze towards Stavrogin turns from that of an admirer to that of a worshipper:

“But one or two generations of vice are absolutely essential now. Monstrous, disgusting vice which turns man into an abject, cowardly, cruel and selfish wretch – that’s what we want. And on top of it, a little ‘fresh blood’…We shall proclaim destruction – why? why? – well, because the idea is so fascinating! But – we must get a little exercise. We’ll have a few fires – we’ll spread a few legends. Every mangy little group will be useful…There’s going to be such a to-do as the world has never seen, Russia will become shrouded in fog, the earth will weep for its old gods. And it will be then that we shall let loose – whom?”

“Whom?”

“Ivan the Crown-prince”

“Who-om?”

“Ivan the Crown-prince. You! You!”

Stavrogin thought for a moment

“A pretender?” he asked suddenly, gazing at the madman in sheer amazement. “Oh so that’s your plan is it?”

“We shall say that he is ‘in hiding’ ” Verkhovensky said quietly, in a sort of amorous whisper, as though he really were drunk.

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246 See Chapter 1, p. 29.
“Do you know what the expression ‘in hiding’ means? But he will appear. He will appear.”

Through a melange of destruction, Russian folk myth and messianic hope, Verkhovensky aims to carry his fantastic terrorist scheme to fulfilment. Although it may seem clear by this stage (Stavrogin himself repeatedly pointing this out) that Verkhovensky is overtaken by madness, it is essential to note the hidden redemptive element in this amalgam of obscure ideas. In a technique of linking fiction with reality often used throughout The Devils, Dostoyevsky once again mixes fictions of his imagination with facts; this time however he adds a legendary element which goes back to peasant tradition. Behind the violent peasant revolts of the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries (such as the one lead by the Cossack leader Pugachev), was the idea of a Tsar in hiding who would one day appear to rid the world of injustice. The overthrow of the reigning Tsar was justified by the belief that he was a false pretender to the throne. Pugachev in fact claimed to be Tsar Peter III, who had been killed in a court conspiracy. In a similar fashion to this peasant myth, Peter Verkhovensky intends to place Stavrogin at the centre of his scheme, identifying him as the legendary Prince Ivan who will emerge from the fog Russia will be shrouded in. In Stavrogin, Verkhovensky embodies Russia’s hopes; through him Russia will be redeemed and it is to his heavenly image that the new generations will look for guidance. Verkhovensky is convinced that this messianic hope will only become a reality once Russia undergoes a material and spiritual death. For this reason he has made a firm commitment to chaos and destruction; for this reason also, he seeks, through events which unfold at the end of the novel, to bind his followers in blood and guilt, guaranteeing their loyalty to him and his revolutionary plans.

The socio-political message Dostoyevsky was communicating through the creation of Peter Verkhovensky is highlighted by Professor Václav Černý. In order to properly understand Verkhovensky and his nihilistic nature, he argues that it is necessary to briefly return to the historical evolution of the concept of socialism. Černý underlines that Dostoyevsky modelled Verkhovensky as the embodiment of the mistakes made in the

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247 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 422.
248 See Chapter 1, pp. 13-14.
249 Frank, Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 451.
creation of European atheistic socialism. Essentially deriving from a human craving for freedom and liberation, the ideology of socialism underwent a fatal turn in history when it began to promote the idea that the respect for human individuality was a bourgeois fraud and that social liberation could only be achieved by restricting man’s individuality and freedom. This “deformed socialism,” Černý argues, separates true freedom from true human justice, two concepts which complement each other and cannot be divided. The outgrowth of this is Peter Verkhovensky, an individual who sacrifices present-day man to a false, illusory value: the promise of absolute justice in the future.250 Faced with this observation we recall Verkhovensky’s statement: “I’m a rogue, and not a Socialist, ha ha!” and his use of Shigalyov’s theory to mask his own, destructive aims. Verkhovensky has in some way emerged from the cracks of Shigalyov’s socialist theory to create an ideal which goes beyond the depravity of human freedom and justice and towards a greater, demonic ideal: the complete annihilation of the world. With this as the substance of his promise for future absolute justice, Verkhovensky reveals himself as the true, completely radicalised nihilist terrorist of *The Devils*.

Mochulsky’s comments on Peter Verkhovensky put a seal on the philosophy of this dark character: “With his lips speaks the powerful and awesome spirit of non-being. Nihilism, anarchism, atheism are phantoms rising out of the metaphysical abyss ‘nothing.’”251 Nothing, Verkhovensky’s isn’t an absence of belief, it is a belief in nothing, a cleansing and purifying nothing, a messianic belief in upheaval itself devoid of any future utopian dream; Bazarov’s intentions re-emerge: “First the site must be cleared.”252 Total destruction will turn society into a *tabula rasa*; Verkhovensky’s plan stops here. As for the future, he believes in the inevitable death of contemporary Russia and the coming of Ivan the Crown Prince as messiah and new leader. With Stavrogin as this redeeming messiah the hope of the people will be fulfilled and the much awaited revolution will finally take place; the terrorist nihilist of *The Devils* once again fulfils his role of impostor and deceiver.

251 Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, 452. Italics in original.
252 Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, 68.
One judgment of Peter Verkhovensky must be ruled out before he is discussed in the context of other characters: he is not a lunatic. This leads us to draw a conclusion on the nature of his motives. Gibian asserts that “the literary images of terror in Russia discourage hopes of socio-political progress.” Indeed Peter Verkhovensky, with his antithesis of progress, fits this category well. However, even though it may seem clear from his declarations that Verkhovensky wishes the worst for his country, one must take into consideration the hidden element of redemption and messianic hope in his plans. In the same conversation with Stavrogin, Verkhovensky makes this statement: “Listen, I once saw a child of six who was taking his drunken mother home while she swore at him with foul words. You think I’m glad of it? When she gets into our hands we shall, I daresay, cure her.” Although Verkhovensky’s projects may still remain problematic for the reader, one begins to observe the bigger picture that Dostoyevsky is portraying through this character. The woman in Peter Verkhovensky’s eyes is the woman of the future, a woman who will be cured thanks to the annihilation of the present State. In this respect, one can frame the mystery of Verkhovensky’s destructive plans as redemptive; society must be cleansed of the impurities which have led the woman to drunkenness and of the socio-political ills which plague the Russian people. Thus, through what initially appears as Peter Verkhovensky’s madness, Dostoyevsky reveals the lengths to which certain revolutionaries had taken their belief in the creation of a new, redeemed Russia. The core philosophy from which this ideal of “false redemption” stems will be observed through a character fundamental to our understanding of Dostoyevsky’s discussion of terrorism in *The Devils*: Nikolai Stavrogin.

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254 Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, 421.
II. Stavrogin: The Source of Nihilism

The analysis of Peter Verkhovensky’s role of revolutionary terrorist has been revealed as one lens through which Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation and terrorism could be interpreted. However, there is one other character that outshines Verkhovensky and the other anti-heroes (including Bazarov) in this nihilistic faith that Mochulsky has pointed out: Nikolai Stavrogin. Although he is the individual who appears least in the story, some notes made by Dostoyevsky during the composition of *The Devils* reveal the importance of Stavrogin’s existence: “And so the novel’s whole pathos lies with the Prince...he is the hero, all the rest moves around him, like a kaleidoscope.”255 Another note reads: “Everything is contained in the character of Stavrogin. Stavrogin is everything.”256 Standing as one of Dostoyevsky’s most enigmatic characters, Stavrogin conceals his creator’s greatest insight into the subject of human morality. He is the experiment used to unearth the consequences of man’s rejection of morality and his interest in the primary concepts of the metaphysical realm (being, truth, reality). Through Stavrogin, Dostoyevsky’s probing of these matters goes deeper than the experience of the Underground Man and Raskolnikov. It seems that the author, in a similar fashion to his own characters, sought a breakthrough himself, one that would surpass all previous insights into the human soul carried out until his time. Carr is right in affirming that Stavrogin represents a more advanced stage in the development of Raskolnikov; he comes across as a Raskolnikov who does not believe in pure selfishness as the most important principle of morality, but continues, aimlessly and without cause, to follow its tenets, deriding the fact that he has lost faith in himself and everything that he once regarded as important.257 Stavrogin’s story is far more tragic than that of the Underground Man and Raskolnikov, and for that matter, even more tragic than Peter Verkhovensky’s. He is constantly questioning the world which he inhabits, yet his existential inquiries are

destined to drown in the same way as the Gadarene swine, for Stavrogin lacks the desire, let alone the capability, to obtain an answer. Stavrogin is a slave to his uncertainty and consequential moral indifference. He does not seem to be able to distinguish evil from good, or if he does, he often regards the two concepts as one and the same thing; such is the extent to which his lack of interest in moral principles has arrived. Finally, the roots of Stavrogin’s name are worthy of some attention. His last name is in fact symbolic of both Christ and Satan: from the Greek *stavros* (cross) and from the Russian *rog* (horn) whilst his first name and patronymic hint at supreme power: Nikolai, “conqueror of nations” and Vsevolod, “master of all.” As the various facets of his name suggest, Stavrogin is a contradictory character, at times strange and elusive, at others clear and to the point; he nonetheless remains unchallenged in his powerful ability to influence the ideas of those who come in contact with him.

The tragic story of Nicholas Stavrogin must be regarded as a moral-religious crisis. This self-degrading indifference he has developed towards the reality of his life and the existence of the world is derived from his inability to find an absolute faith, a new truth in which to believe. Critics such as Joseph Frank have linked Stavrogin to Nikolai Speshnev, the member of the Petrashevsky circle who initiated Dostoyevsky into the world of conspiratorial revolutionary activity. Others, such as the Soviet critic Leonid P. Grossman have argued that Stavrogin was based on the anarchist Michael Bakunin. Whilst linking Stavrogin to the possible real-life prototypes from whom he may have been shaped is indeed relevant, there is a more urgent and significant need to observe the literary ancestors from whom he has descended. As highlighted by both Conradi and Howe, Stavrogin must be linked to the figure of the Russian Byronic hero, the protagonist of novels and poems of the Russian romantic era such as Alexander Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* and Mikhail Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time.*

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261 Howe, "Dostoevsky: The Politics of Salvation [The Possessed]," 139. The Byronic Hero, as the name suggests, finds its origins primarily in the writings of Lord Byron during the early nineteenth-century. This archetypal hero is one of the most prominent literary character types of the romantic period and is usually represented as a “self-exiled” wanderer, physically isolated from society. For more information see Peter L.
essentially an individual suffering from the *mal du siècle*: a melancholic feeling of monotony, boredom and disillusionment experienced by the hero of early nineteenth-century romantic European literature. This *ennui* (boredom) is linked to the feeling of not finding a place in the world. It stems from a rejection of the European Enlightenment and the societal values it had introduced such as the ascetic belief in human reason and the importance of bourgeois economic comfort. Its roots can also be found in the spiritual void left by the post-revolutionary ideology, which significantly downgraded the importance of religious faith. Thus Onegin (*Eugene Onegin*) isolates himself from his friends and family in search of an ideal in which he can believe absolutely. He refuses to gain pleasure from a world of poor quality and becomes an egoist who ultimately suffers greatly from the hollowness of his life. Lermontov’s Pechorin (*A Hero of Our Time*) on the other hand, is a wandering nomad on a constant search for truth. His frustration and inability to find an absolute truth leads him to strange and outrageous behaviour and eventually to a useless death. He is insolently detached from reality and indifferently bored; his passion for contradiction and rebellion both fascinated and repelled the readers of this tale. One notices that both Onegin and Pechorin’s repeated failures to discover truth in their lives are followed by a regression to self-degradation and self-alienation from society. It is here that Dostoyevsky’s interpretation of these literary heroes of the early eighteen-hundreds must be considered in more detail. Dostoyevsky dramatises the torments of the Russian Byronic type, and relates them to the problem of religious faith. From the outline of the Prince he was creating in *The Life of a Great Sinner*, he begins to sketch the character Stavrogin; a complicated, enigmatic individual in whom the Byronic hero and the radical revolutionary of the 1860s converge and become one. Thus at the core of Stavrogin’s existential uncertainty lies a moral-religious crisis that seeks desperate answers to the question of whether God and morality exist or not.

Before he makes his appearance in *The Devils*, Stavrogin is the subject of gossip and speculation amongst the inhabitants of his small provincial home town. The narrator informs us of certain peculiar events in which Stavrogin was involved throughout his

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Conradi, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, 91.
journey abroad: “stories were told about his life of wild rioting, about people being run over by his horses, of his brutal conduct to a lady of good society with whom he had an affair and whom he afterwards publicly insulted.”

Following in the footsteps of the true Byronic hero, Stavrogin, we are told, had renounced a life of high society offered to him by his wealthy and esteemed mother, Varvara Petrovna Stavrogin, and chosen to live as a wandering vagabond. He spent days and nights in slums, wearing nothing but rags, refusing offers of money from his family and living off the rent he had received from the sale of one of his deceased father’s properties. At last convinced by his mother, Stavrogin eventually returns to his home town; his arrival arouses sentiments of shock, distrust and fear mixed with awe, infatuation and even veneration. Through the eyes of the narrator, the first image we are given of Stavrogin is that of a surprisingly handsome twenty-five year old man, elegant, composed and very well mannered. The ladies of the town, although divided between those that hate him and those that love him, all seem to be in some way fascinated by Stavrogin. The narrator’s description of Stavrogin’s physical appearance however, is coloured by a feeling of suspicion. He seems to pick up on some hidden elements behind this image of a modest, self-confident young man as he foretells certain traits of his personality through an examination of his facial features:

I was also struck by his face: his hair was just a little too black, his light-coloured eyes a little too calm and clear, his complexion a little too tender and white, his colour a little too dazzling and pure, his teeth like pearls, his lips like coral – he would seem to be a paragon of beauty, yet at the same time there was something hideous about him. People said that his face reminded them of a mask.

There seems to be something purposely concealed behind Stavrogin’s physical appearance which recalls Dostoyevsky’s criticism of the 1860s nihilists’ disguise of evil with beauty. To demonstrate the power of this deceitful travesty he found so abhorrent, the author of The Devils goes as far as creating a character whose astonishing beauty lures and influences those around him to the point where they express a desire to become his worshippers and servants. This is the case, as we shall soon observe, not only for the already unmasked Peter Verkhovensky, but for other characters such as Shatov, Kirilov and Captain Lebiadkin. Yes, Stavrogin is beautiful, yet his beauty remains undefined, anonymous, it hides something; for this reason it arouses suspicion.

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263 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 55.
264 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 57.
The rumours about Stavrogin’s strange behaviour abroad are soon proved correct by his outrageous behaviour amongst the inhabitants of his home town. At a simple meeting of members of high society, Stavrogin suddenly pulls the nose of an elderly gentleman named Peter Gaganov who had the habit of saying “No, sir, they won’t lead me by the nose!” dragging him a few step across the floor. In front of many guests at a party he kisses the wife of the host, Liputin, three times on the lips for he had noticed how pretty she was. In another instance, he bites the ear of a former Governor, frightening him to the point where he nearly faints.\(^{265}\) No explanation is given in any of the three episodes; to the disbelief of others, Stavrogin walks away from each event with the utmost tranquillity and composure. These are just some of the instances in which we notice the contradictory element of Stavrogin’s character. Although his appearance is that of a gentleman, his behaviour resembles that of a madman.

Another suspicious facet of Stavrogin’s life worthy of some attention is his secret marriage to the poor, crippled woman Mary Lebiadkin, sister of Captain Lebiadkin. Mary is a meek woman who has spent most of her life at the service of others and has often been maltreated by her brother, who is an alcoholic. Weak-minded and physically impaired, Mary is perhaps the only character in *The Devils* who possesses a wholehearted, pure faith in Christ. For this she represents that old religious devotion to God which has begun to vanish in the more Westernised Russia of the nineteenth-century. This is reflected in her comments regarding the sacredness of the universe and in her association of the Virgin Mary with Russia, her own motherland: “the Mother of God is great mother earth, and therein lies great joy for men.”\(^{266}\) Mary stands as a symbol of abused and manipulated innocence that often reappears in theme in Dostoyevsky’s literature. The question of why Mary Lebiadkin is married to Stavrogin deepens the discussion on the dichotomy of the latter’s character throughout *The Devils*. Why does Stavrogin marry a crippled, demented woman? The answer to this question, like Stavrogin himself, is enigmatic. It seems at first


that Stavrogin is in need of a weaker, less intelligent individual than himself; a person he can submit to his rule in a similar way that the prosperous Luzhin desired to exert his superiority over Raskolnikov’s destitute sister, Dunya, in *Crime and Punishment*. Kirilov in fact had taken Stavrogin up on this matter and accused him of dishonesty; the event is narrated to us by Peter Verkhovensky:

Anyway, let’s say it was a silly idea of his, the whim of a prematurely tired man, or even, as Kirilov maintained, a new experiment of a man who was weary of life and who was anxious to find out to what a pass a mad cripple could be brought. “You’ve purposely chosen one of the most wretched human beings,” Kirilov said, “a cripple, a woman doomed to suffer disgrace and blows all her life, knowing, too, that this poor woman was dying of comic love for you, and you’re trying to spoof her on purpose just to find out what will come of it.”

Accusations such as these, combined with other facts such as the marriage between the two remaining unconsummated and Stavrogin’s own declaration to Captain Lebiadkin that he married his sister after a drunken banquet, indeed render doubtful the existence of a valid reason for Stavrogin’s marriage to Mary. However, as is the case with most of Dostoyevsky’s characters, Stavrogin seems to have another façade which stands in contrast to what we have observed up until this point. Once again through Verkhovensky, the reader is informed that Stavrogin has in fact expressed feelings of great respect towards his wife: “‘You, Mr Kirilov,’ he said, ‘think that I’m laughing at her, but you’re wrong. I do indeed respect her because she is better than any of us.’ And, you know, he said it in such a serious tone of voice too.”

In other instances, Stavrogin manages to hold back an act of retaliation after having been suddenly struck in the face by Shatov and he deliberately misfires his shots throughout a duel between him and Gaganov. Is Stavrogin behaving in a Christ-like way by turning the other cheek? Has he taken on the responsibility of spending his life with a crippled, demented woman for unselfish reasons? For love? Or are these, as Peace suspects, attempts to prove his strength; experiments to test the supremacy of his will? The reader is left to decide.

The theme of dualism reappears in *The Devils* and is embodied in Stavrogin. It is evident that Stavrogin’s persona is split, in a similar way to Raskolnikov’s, between a longing to

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269 Peace, *Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels*, 183.
do good and an attraction to evil. He resembles, even more closely, another character of *Crime and Punishment*, also a Byronic type: Svidrigailov, the self-absorbed egoist who pictures eternity as “one little room, something akin to a country bath-house, with soot on the walls and spiders in every corner.”\textsuperscript{270} One among the many reasons why critics often draw a comparison between these two characters is the feelings of nausea they manifest towards existence; an indifference towards life which goes beyond mere boredom. If Dostoyevsky intended Stavrogin to appear in a dual light of sanctity and profanity then he also gave life to two other characters that stand as the embodiment of his conflicting ideals: Kirilov and Shatov. One is an unsociable, impoverished engineer, the other, a clumsy, former university student, abandoned by his wife; both are linked to Verkhovensky’s group of five. As pupils and admirers of Stavrogin these two individuals have been so heavily influenced by their mentor that certain aspects of his thinking have become their life’s creed. In order to shed more light on Stavrogin’s character, it is essential to observe these two individuals as they profess those ideals which have changed their lives completely.

III. Kirilov

Kirilov is the image of the Westernised nihilist in *The Devils*. Dostoyevsky uses the absurd theories of this character to once again make a statement regarding the potentially harmful effects of radical Western ideals on Russian individuals. Whilst living in America for a time, both Kirilov and Shatov became convinced that, as Russians, they were so inferior to Americans that they even looked upon lynch laws, guns and homeless people with awe and admiration. Kirilov is burdened by a loss of national identity and a thirst for some kind of answer to the sufferings of his life. As Jones underlines, this character gives the novel its example of theoretical absolutism. Kirilov has identified with the worst feature of Stavrogin’s character; his unwavering self-will, only he has become obsessed with it and will use it to bring his idealism to fulfilment.\textsuperscript{271} The grandiose idea that Kirilov holds on to with such pride is that of suicide. He is convinced that his self-sacrifice will free mankind from the pain and the fear of death:

\textsuperscript{270} Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 345.
Life is pain, life is fear, and man is unhappy. Now all is pain and fear. And that’s how they’ve done it. You’re given life now for pain and fear, and that’s where the whole deception lies. Now man is not yet what he will be. A new man will come happy and proud. To whom it won’t matter whether he lives or not. He’ll be the new man! He who conquers pain and fear will himself be a god. And that other God will not be…He who kills himself only to kill fear will at once become a god.

Kirilov has placed himself at the centre of his theory. It is he who will commit this act of self-sacrifice in order to allow the man of the future to live without God and thus without pain and fear. By killing himself, Kirilov will take the place of God and thus become what Gomperts has labelled a self-crucified atheistic Jesus Christ. In the same article, Gomperts makes another observation worthy of attention: “Kirilov is the cold one, who regards atheism as inevitable but at the same time impossible.” Kirilov is clearly an atheist, yet at the same time he knows that the existence of the true God cannot be ignored as he is well aware that it will be very difficult for others to agree on his theory of the man-god. He holds God in contempt for having given man pain, fear and death and in an ultimate expression of his self-will announces his suicide and subsequent apotheosis: “Is there no man on this planet who, having finished with God and believing in his own will, will have enough courage to express his self-will in its most important point?...I may be the only one, but I’m going to do it”. Through his own martyrdom Kirilov hopes to emulate Jesus Christ and thus free man from eternal suffering, yet the messianic vision this time is utterly and unapologetically self-indulgent.

Although Kirilov’s is a desperate search for truth, Khazarnufsky points out that what he is really searching for is a self-glorifying, self-liberating, self-destroying truth. Indeed, the self-destructive element of Kirilov’s philosophy is astonishing. Khazarnufsky’s observation unveils the extreme level to which Kirilov’s infatuation with Stavrogin has been taken. As a confused and indecisive pupil, he has not only fully absorbed his master’s teachings, but has attempted to create his new self, the new man he so desperately wants to

272 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 126.
275 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 612.
be, in Stavrogin’s image. This combination has led him to become obsessed with the ideal of self-will to the point where he has appointed himself as God and saviour of humanity. To render his theory even more diabolical, he has agreed to use his suicide to cover up the murder by Peter Verkhovensky and the group of five of the supposed traitor Shatov: he will write a letter in which he takes responsibility for Shatov’s death. It is ironic that it should be Peter Verkhovensky who manages to capture the weakness and flaw in Kirilov’s theory, and of his character in general, with one phrase: “I know, too, that you haven’t swallowed the idea, but that the idea has swallowed you.”

According to Banerjee, Kirilov seems to have surrendered his mind, will and body to the American spirit, to the superiority of Western civilisation he has witnessed on his trip abroad. In this respect, his suicide and attempt to introduce the man-god ideal can be seen as a desperate yearning for superiority as well as a desire to take that one step closer to the greatness he has identified in the American nation. His exhilarating journey of self-discovery under the influence of such ideals, however, brings him to a state of self-destructive delirium. Kirilov eventually takes his own life, proving nothing except the failure of his ideals. It is not by chance that he uses a six-chambered revolver which he imported from America to shoot himself and that Verkhovensky, standing beside him to assure he remains focused on taking his life, utters this sentence: “It is best of all that you should consider yourself a Columbus and look on me as a mouse.”

Much like Raskolnikov, Kirilov has become blinded by his excessive trust in reason and by his determination to break through accepted ideals. In doing so, however, he crashes into the same wall of the laws of nature the Underground Man dreamt of breaking with his head and, like the protagonists of *Notes from underground* and *Crime and Punishment* finally emerges as yet another one of Dostoyevsky’s self-destructive creations. Kirilov’s man-god ideal also mirrors the inner desires of other radical characters in *The Devils*, including the older men and women such as Stepan Verkhovensky and Varvara Stavrogin. Within these individuals is visible a hunger to take the place so desired by Kirilov and become God,

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279 Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, 606.
play God, to be the one with the power to destroy and rebuild Russia according to their own rules and judgment. We notice once again Dostoyevsky’s criticism of radical ideology and of Russian radicals. His fears that every Russian man and woman who took the road of radicalism would eventually develop the egoistic desire of playing God is reflected in the self-destructive end met by Kirilov and most of the characters in The Devils.

IV. Shatov

“A man who does not belong to the Christian Orthodox faith cannot be Russian.”280 This sentence had come straight from the lips of Stavrogin during a conversation with a very attentive Shatov just before the latter’s departure for America (roughly two years before the time in which the novel is set). In this section of Part II of The Devils, Shatov repeats the fundamental ideals Stavrogin had passed on to him. Staring menacingly into Stavrogin’s eyes, he lists the principles once cherished by his mentor and teacher; so assiduously had Shatov been listening in those days, that he has the ability to repeat the teachings word-for-word:

The purpose of the whole evolution of a nation, in every people and at every period of its existence, is solely the pursuit of God, their God, their very own God, and faith in Him as in the only true one…Reason has never been able to define good and evil, or even to separate good from evil, not even approximately; on the contrary, it had always mixed them up in a most pitiful and disgraceful fashion.281

The other side of the coin is revealed: the atheistic Stavrogin once held strong religious beliefs. Yet not only had he identified the key to Russia’s prosperity in the search for God, he had also understood that with reason, socialism and science as the guiding national principles, this “spirit of life” he speaks of could not be searched for, let alone achieved. What we witness in this passage is a Stavrogin who is alive, who is in search of meaning in life, who lucidly distinguishes the good from the bad. He shows a deep understanding of the concept of faith and clearly sees both himself and his own nation benefiting from an absolute trust in God. The importance of not losing sight of the conception of good and evil is stressed several times by Stavrogin in this section as he foresees the downfall of those nations whose distinction between good and evil has become blurred. It is difficult to

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280 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 255.
281 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 256.
think that this is the person who would eventually become Peter Verkhovensky’s companion and helper. In Shatov’s recollections, one can in fact hear the urgent tone of someone who has witnessed his friend turn from a full appreciation of life to a disregard for any kind of moral value.

In contrast to the way in which he had poisoned Kirilov’s mind with ideas of atheistic humanism based on the concept of the man-god, Stavrogin has conveyed ideas of spiritual salvation and nationhood to Shatov. What renders his deed even more perplexing is that Stavrogin had played this distasteful game simultaneously between the two individuals. Shatov had noticed this and accuses Stavrogin: “at the very time you were planting the idea of God and country in my heart, that at that very time, perhaps during those very days, you had been envenoming the heart of that poor fellow, of that maniac Kirilov.”282 In the same way that Kirilov took the expression of his self-will to the extreme by committing suicide, Shatov falls in love with his belief in God, using it to turn away from the radicalism which keeps him enslaved to Verkhovensky’s group of five. Shatov’s name however, from shatkij (wavering), is suggestive of the kind of the unstable position he occupies in relation to the beliefs he has drawn from Stavrogin. Shatov has in fact arrived at the conclusion that the Russian Christ is the people itself.283 He sees Russians as the “god-bearing people”284 (this was also originally Stavrogin’s idea) through whom Russia will be re-generated, yet he confesses to his wife that “No, I’m not a Russian” but “since I cannot be a Russian, I became a Slavophil.”285 Here lies yet another of Dostoyevsky’s attacks, this time directed towards the Slavophils and their reduction of Orthodoxy down to mere national faith. Furthermore, Shatov’s declaration that he is not a Russian but a Slavophil may also be seen as a criticism of the hypocritical position of the Slavophils, who according to Dostoyevsky preached an insincere love for the Russian people and the Orthodox Church.286 We must also remember that Shatov is part of Verkhovensky’s terrorist organisation, another fact which indicates his hypocrisy and false love of the Russian nation. By playing the roles of

286 Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years*, 483-84.
Westerniser and Slavophil, Kirilov and Shatov mirror the two opposing poles of Stavrogin’s thinking. They are symbolic of the two extremities of Stavrogin’s deepest desires. Yet, as Davison justly affirms, the master has come to reject the views which live on through his pupil. They no longer appeal to him and so he retreats into isolation, refusing to become a Crown Prince, a man-god or a religious believer.\(^{287}\) The end which Kirilov and Shatov meet is also symbolic of this final stage of disappointment reached by Stavrogin. Kirilov, as we have already mentioned, commits suicide, Shatov on the other hand, is lured into a trap prepared by the group of five, and is shot by Peter Verkhovensky. They therefore also stand as indicators of the doom to which either side of Stavrogin’s persona is destined, a fate which will be observed in the following discussions of this chapter.

As mysterious and outrageous as he may appear, Stavrogin is the key to understanding Dostoyevsky’s portrayal of individual radicalisation and terrorism in *The Devils*. Leatherbarrow’s analysis of Stavrogin concludes that “Stavrogin embodies mystery and evil. He is the life-denying principle, the spirit of negation and non-being, the vacuum left by a totally free will that has tired of its freedom and consumed itself.”\(^{288}\) Finding a proper category or definition for Stavrogin has often been a difficult task for scholars. Such an attempt proves to not only be compelling, but also goes against the purpose Dostoyevsky assigns to this character. Stavrogin was introduced into *The Devils* as an enigmatic entity with the purpose of evading potential labels that could be affixed on him. With Leatherbarrow’s observation in mind, however, it is possible to delve into that which Stavrogin essentially stands for and point this analysis towards a deeper understanding of what Dostoyevsky saw at the core of both radicalism and terrorism in Russia: the philosophy of nihilism. It is difficult to properly label Stavrogin because he himself does not know who he is or what he believes in. His story, as we will now observe, is more tragic than that of the archetypal romantic hero or the Byronic type, and for that matter even more tragic than the Underground Man and Raskolnikov’s. If we single out the phrase “a totally free will that has tired of its freedom” from Leatherbarrow’s comment, it


\(^{288}\) Leatherbarrow, *The Devils in the Context of Dostoevsky's Life and Works,"* 43.
is possible see why. We noticed in both protagonists of *Notes from underground* and *Crime and Punishment* a strong desire to discover whether absolute freedom could actually be obtained. In the Underground Man this was manifested in an obsession with the reassurance that his senses were alive and functioning, even if this meant behaving in a ridiculous manner. Raskolnikov’s gamble to test the practicality of his radical ideals was itself a search for freedom. Kirilov’s suicidal theory was the ultimate assertion of his freedom and even Peter Verkhovensky’s apocalyptic plan of razing Russian society to the ground was also the expression of a desperate and unquenchable thirst for freedom. Each character shaped his concept of freedom according to the reality in which he found himself. Stavrogin’s case, on the other hand, seems to be one of ideological bankruptcy. If the effects of radical ideology for Peter Verkhovensky resulted in a commitment to destruction and chaos, for Stavrogin they have culminated in a rejection of both radical ideals and moral values. In this respect, Stavrogin resembles the Underground Man in his sceptical refusal to abide by radical ideals and Raskolnikov in his desire to experiment with radical ideology. Stavrogin is unique, however, in that he has developed a state of indifference to his thoughts and actions. As Offord points out, due to the ideological void he experiences, his pleasure is derived indiscriminately from both acts of good and evil.  

It is Shatov, in the section of the novel entitled *Night*, who asks Stavrogin a crucial question which he refuses to answer: “Is it true that you maintained that you saw no distinction in beauty between some voluptuous and brutish act and any heroic exploit, even the sacrifice of life for the good of humanity?”  

The contemporary French philosopher André Glucksmann, in his book *Dostoïevski à Manhattan*, demonstrates that the terrorism of Peter Verkhovensky’s group of five is a consequence of Stavrogin’s nihilism. Glucksmann links the theme of nihilism raised in Dostoyevsky’s novels with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre of the 11th of September 2001. He focuses on those forces which drive the group of five in *The Devils* to seek the well-being and prosperity of Russia through its complete annihilation. Of the

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members of the terrorist group he says: “The group of nihilists, the demons, is far from being organised around an idea or a line of conduct, it is rather the absence of a guiding ideology which embodies itself in the figure of the agitator, Stavrogin.” It is indeed fitting that Stavrogin be labelled an agitator, for although he does not practically participate in any of the murders or the distribution of illegal revolutionary leaflets, he indirectly plays the part of the instigator and inspirer of evil in his admirers and followers. We see him silently throwing money to Fedka, the ex-convict; a gesture which signals his tacit approval of the murder of his wife Marya Lebiadkin and her brother. He plays with the ideas of Kirilov and Shatov in a bizarre way and is, essentially, the source of Verkhovensky’s apocalyptic plan: “I invented it all while looking at you. If I had not watched you from a corner, nothing of all this would have occurred to me!” Glucksmann’s reference to Stavrogin’s lack of a guiding ideology ties in with Leatherbarrow’s and Offord’s comments as this young, complex character is identified as the individual in whom the philosophy of nihilism reaches its apex. Stavrogin has no beliefs, he has no hopes in life, what we see in him is Dostoyevsky’s portrayal of the final stages of disappointment met by the revolutionary radical who has broken through all the obstacles standing in the way of his pursuit of freedom. Having given free reign to the expression of his self-will and rational egoism, Stavrogin has indulged in the sense of absolute freedom and, following in the footsteps of the traditional Byronic hero, has experienced a deep, nauseating boredom which eventually urges him to self-degradation and total negation. In the letter left to Shatov’s sister, Dasha, before his suicide he writes: “from me has come nothing but negation, with no magnanimity and no force. Even negation has not come from me. Everything has always been petty and lifeless.”

291 André Glucskmann, Dostoevskij a Manhattan, trans. Pietro Del Re and Nicoletta Tiliacos (Firenze: Liberal Libri, 2002), 143. Translated from Italian into English by Marco Ceccarelli.
292 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 424.
293 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 667.
V. The Forbidden Chapter: At Tikhon’s

As we have seen through his “intellectual offspring” Kirilov and Shatov, Stavrogin’s search for an absolute truth has been strongly linked to the question of whether God exists or not, a question often pondered by Dostoyevsky himself. Once a fervent believer in God, Stavrogin has experienced a moral-religious crisis from which he never seems to have recovered. In order to journey deeper into the complexity of Stavrogin’s existential dilemma however, it is necessary to observe the section of the novel which was suppressed by M. N. Katkov, editor of The Russian Messenger (the journal in which Dostoyevsky’s novel was being serialised) entitled At Tikhon’s. In this chapter Stavrogin confesses to the monk Tikhon his violation of a twelve year old girl and subsequent indifference to her suicide. Two elements of this chapter are relevant for this discussion of Stavrogin: his recognition of a self-destructive moral indifference to life and the longing he still has for beauty represented in a dream we will shortly observe. Stavrogin demands that Tikhon read a Biblical passage from the Book of Revelation which judges those who, like him, show a passive apathy towards life. Tikhon remembers the passage and recites it: “So that because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

Later, as Tikhon reads Stavrogin’s written confession, we hear of Stavrogin’s sordid relationship with little Matryosha, the daughter of a working class couple in whose lodgings Stavrogin was living. Very little is told about what happened when he was left alone with her (critics such as Peace state that Stavrogin may or may not have committed a crime against her) but we are told that he was certainly present when she hanged herself in the chicken coop. Moments before the suicide, Matryosha had shaken her fist at Stavrogin, perhaps expressing her only means of vindication towards him. Stavrogin writes that after having witnessed, impassive and motionless, Matryosha’s suicide, he sat down to have tea with some acquaintances and came to this realisation: “I formulated, for the first time in my life what appeared to be the rule of my life, namely that I neither know nor feel good or

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294 Peace, Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels, 181.
295 This chapter should have followed chapter eight of the second part (Ivan the Crown Prince). Although it was subject to substantial revisions, the editorial office would still not consent to its publication. Dostoyevsky eventually decided to exclude it entirely from the first edition of the novel in 1873. The chapter was found amongst Dostoyevsky’s papers in 1921, and published as an appendix to the book since 1922.
evil and that I have not only lost any sense of it, but that there is neither good nor evil (which pleased me).”\textsuperscript{297} The secret of Stavrogin’s past is finally revealed. It seems that Stavrogin needed to commit the most extreme act of cruelty in order to realise that he was unable to draw neither happiness nor sadness from his deeds, whether they be in the name of good or evil. Unable to bear the suffering caused by the emptiness of his existence he has set out, like Raskolnikov, to experiment with other people, to test how forcefully he could break through the boundaries of morality. Plagued by a persistent feeling of dissatisfaction, Stavrogin seems to have developed a sentimental indifference towards his own existential reality. He thus emerges as a “successful” Raskolnikov who commits a crime without a consequential feeling of remorse. As Grossman justly affirms: “In him the intellect has swallowed up all other spiritual manifestations, paralysing and sterilising his emotional life.”\textsuperscript{298} Stavrogin stands as the romantic hero reduced to impotence; in him is manifested the failure of man coming to terms with the meaninglessness of the universe. The nihilist hero of \textit{The Devils} commits suicide in the closing chapters of the story. He hangs himself, perhaps emulating the death to which he drove his young victim, in the loft of his mother’s building. The novel concludes with the verdict of the doctors after the post-mortem: “it was most definitely not a case of insanity.”\textsuperscript{299} Like Verkhovensky, Stavrogin was not insane; one could say he was “driven mad” by the search for truth and freedom in his life.

In identifying Stavrogin as the source, or more precisely, the means through which radical ideals have been channelled to the other characters, we can now return to analyse Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation and terrorism more closely. The purpose of Dostoyevsky’s creation of Stavrogin was to exemplify the Russian intellectual who, having remained so bitterly disappointed by his endorsement of Western radical ideals, has let himself go to his own despair and permanent state of cynicism. This has proven devastating for those who have been in close contact with him, and fatal for himself. Yet how did Stavrogin manage to influence those around him to the point where they pursued a path of radicalisation and eventually became radical proponents of terrorist

\textsuperscript{297} Dostoyevsky, \textit{The Devils}, 692. Parenthesis in original.
\textsuperscript{299} Dostoyevsky, \textit{The Devils}, 669.
activity? Dostoyevsky’s answer points to nihilism. Stavrogin is not himself possessed by an ideal, he does not wish to introduce a new doctrine through which Russia will be freed from the grasp of autocracy and begin marching towards prosperity. Propelled by the very absence of a guiding ideal, this character is symbolic of the aforementioned explosive effect of the philosophy of nihilism. He corrupts those around him, indiscriminately sending them in random directions. Once again, the clearest example is the game he has played with Kirilov and Shatov. He turns Kirilov into a suicidal self-proclaimed god and Shatov into a hypocritical Slavophil. In Peter Verkhovensky, instead, he inspires the path of terrorism, the way of ultimate destruction devoid of any future planning. Glucksmann refers to this game Stavrogin plays with the other characters, taking the discussion of its malignant purpose even further. He affirms that the fulfilled nihilist is in fact a man who plays. Stavrogin plays with ideas in the same way in which he plays with human beings. In a world where nothing is forbidden, he plays with the atheistic idea of a God who is dead (Kirilov), in the same way in which he plays with the fundamental idea of a God who is alive (Shatov). It is almost as if the kind of idea thrown into play is unimportant, as long as the game continues and a new match is begun. Everything which comes into contact with Stavrogin seems to become corrupted in some way. We also notice Stavrogin’s choice of targets: he aims for the weak-minded, for the insecure, for those who suffer from an inferiority complex. In front of the greatest act of evil, the violation of Matryosha’s innocence, he acknowledges the damage he is causing and takes his life.

Stavrogin’s primary reason for visiting the monk Tikhon was to see whether he could forgive himself for the grave sin committed against Matryosha. Stavrogin is haunted by hallucinations of the devil at night and repeatedly tormented by an image of Matryosha which comes to him in one particular recurring dream. He believes that if he can forgive himself for what he has done, the apparitions will stop. The dream merits some attention, for it is created by Dostoyevsky as yet another symbol of the theme of corrupted beauty. Stavrogin dreams of the earthly paradise portrayed by Claude Lorrain in his painting Acis

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300 Glucksmann, Dostoevskij a Manhattan, 144.
and Galatea, a portrait that Dostoyevsky believed depicted “The Golden Age.” This immaculate corner of the Greek archipelago is seen by Stavrogin as “the cradle of European civilisation, here were the first scenes from mythology, man’s paradise on earth. Here a beautiful race of men lived.” The vision of earthly perfection and social harmony fills Stavrogin with a feeling of happiness he has never experienced before. His dream of beauty is, however, interrupted by the appearance of a tiny red spider, the same red spider he had seen crawling on a geranium leaf whilst Matryosha was committing suicide. This is followed by a vision of Matryosha herself, shaking both her head and her tiny fist at him. The symbolism of this scene is particularly rich and significant. Firstly, we recall another image of corrupted beauty, that of Shigaloyev’s earthly paradise and subsequent realisation that his socialist theory would have culminated in “unlimited despotism.” Another comparison is made by the critic Glazov who looks more at the tragic element in Lorain’s painting, namely the killing of the shepherd Acis by the Cyclops Polyphemus. He compares Stavrogin with Polyphemus, and Galatea with Mary Lebiadkin. Stavrogin’s dream also recalls one of Raskolnikov’s dreams in which the murdered pawn broker appears laughing at him incessantly. In both dreams we notice the innocence which both Raskolnikov and Stavrogin have violated returning like a vengeful spectre that torments their unconscious. Finally, the spider is a symbol of the evil we often see re-emerging in Dostoyevsky’s novels. Verkhovensky’s secret organisation is referred to as a giant spider web from which those who are linked with the group cannot escape. In the moment in which the members of the group of five realise that Shatov will be murdered and that their collaboration was mandatory, they become aware of their inability to free themselves from Verkhovensky’s grasp: “They suddenly felt like flies caught in the web of a huge spider; they were furious, but they shook with fear.” Lisa, the woman attracted to Stavrogin, decides against living the rest of her life with him and leaves him saying: “I always

301 The story of Acis and Galatea belongs to the world of Greek mythology. Before Polyphemus was made drunk by Odysseus and deprived of his single eye, the Cyclops fell in love with the Nereid Galatea. Galatea however, preferred the shepherd Acis to Polyphemus. Because of this, Polyphemus crushed Acis under a giant rock. Galatea wept and Acis was turned into a river. Cited from Giuseppe Cocchiara and Francesco Cipolla, Mitologia, 7th ed. (Milano: Palumbo, 1962), 195.
302 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 695.
304 Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, 328-31.
305 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 548.
imagined that you would take me to some place where there was a huge, wicked spider as big as a man, and we should spend the rest of our lives looking at it and being afraid.”

The final and perhaps most powerful example emerges in *Crime and Punishment*, as Svidrigailov envisions eternity in the form of a soot-covered bath house, with spiders in every corner. Through all these examples, we see the importance that Dostoyevsky gives to the theme of corrupted beauty in his novels. We notice the emphasis on the impossibility of reconciliation between real beauty, the beauty of morality, with the radical philosophy of nihilism. Tikhon sees through Stavrogin’s desire to repent and identifies the element of self-will which stains his confession. More than a genuine act of humility, he sees the manuscript (which Stavrogin wanted to distribute to the inhabitants) as yet another expression of supremacy over others: “you seem to already hate and despise beforehand all those who will read what you have described here and to challenge them to battle…What else is this but a proud challenge by an accused to the judge? Once again the corrupted element behind an act of good is unveiled. Tikhon gives Stavrogin a real opportunity for repentance and invites him to spend several years under the supervision of a wise Christian elder. Stavrogin refuses and commits suicide instead.

Dostoyevsky’s discussion of terrorism in *The Devils* does not culminate with an assassination attempt on the Tsar or a government official by one of the members of Verkhovensky’s group of five. Nor does the reader see Verkhovensky’s apocalyptic plan come anywhere near fulfilment. On the contrary, the only achievement of this small terrorist group is the execution of one of its own members: Shatov. Through this event, Dostoyevsky explicitly reveals the self-destructive element he saw at the root of the radical activity of Russian revolutionaries. The episode is a reconstruction of the Nechaev affair. In the third part of the novel, Verkhovensky (Nechaev) warns the group of five that Shatov (Ivanov) will betray them by informing the police of their existence. He proposes that they lure Shatov to a grotto where an illegal printing press which had been in his keeping was buried. There, an ambush would be waiting to murder him. Everything goes according to plan; Shatov is pinned down upon his arrival outside the grotto and shot in the head by

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Verkhovensky after having had the chance to turn and briefly to stare his executioner in the face. His lifeless body is thrown into a nearby pond. It is as this point, however, that Dostoyevsky injects his version of the Nechaev affair with an unexpected twist of intense drama. In an incident which reminds us of Raskolnikov’s repulsion towards the murder of the old pawn broker, two of the members of Verkhovensky’s group seem to instantaneously fall into a state of fear and panic. Virginsky begins to yell “That’s wrong, wrong! That’s all wrong!” whilst Lyamshin utters not a human, but a sort of animal scream. Both continue their screaming until Erkel (another member of the group who is based on Nechaev’s disciple N. N. Nikolaev) gags Lyamshin and Virginsky stops to watch Shatov’s body sink underwater.

The reactions of Lyamshin and Virginsky, together with Shigalyov’s last minute refusal to participate in the murder, once again point to Dostoyevsky’s emphasis on the inevitable response of human moral conscience to the criminal act. His attack on the nihilists and their convictions is often reflected in The Devils through the weakness of the members of Verkhovensky’s group. It is likely that here Dostoyevsky was also attacking what he saw as the manipulation by more radicalised and fulfilled nihilists of the younger, ingenuous population who aspired to enter the world of radicalism. We often see the members of the group of five in disagreement with Verkhovensky yet unable to break out of the criminal web spun by their leader. The murder of Shatov, as Glucksmann indicates, is the final act which binds the members in blood and through guilt assures their permanence in the world of terror they have created. Their participation in the murder was perhaps the catalyst triggering in Lyamshin and Virginsky a frightening awareness of being enslaved to a world of deception and bloodshed. Their animalistic reactions quite possibly reflect the beastly level to which their ideology, or to be more precise, their rejection of ideology, has brought them. Through a note left after his suicide, Kirilov, absent on the day of the crime, would aid the cause by taking the blame for Shatov’s murder. His biting of Verkhovensky’s finger moments before shooting himself is yet another symbolic event revealing the beastly state to which he and those like him have arrived. Verkhovensky takes care not to leave the

308 Dostoyevsky, The Devils, 600.
310 Glucksmann, Dostoevskij a Manhattan, 129.
murder scene, now filled by an undoubtedly exhausted, shocked and frightened group of accomplices, without a final proclamation of terror:

At present all your actions must be animated by one aim – namely to bring everything down with a crash: the State as well as its moral standards. We alone will be left, we who have prepared ourselves beforehand to take over the government: the intelligent we shall bring over to our side, and the fools we shall use to carry us on their shoulders. You must not be shy of that. We must re-educate a generation to make it worthy of freedom. We shall have many thousand Shatovs to deal with.\footnote{Dostoyevsky, \textit{The Devils}, 602.}

Tear down the existing order, take over power, execute those who resist, exploit those willing to cooperate. In a statement which frames him as a true terrorist leader, Verkhovensky reminds the members of his group of their mission, warning them of the loyalty they must keep if they are to avoid Shatov’s fate.

\section*{VI. Stepan Verkhovensky}

The final character considered in this analysis is one with whom the novel begins and finishes: Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky. Father of Peter Verkhovensky and mentor to the adolescent Stavrogin, Stepan Trofimovich is the symbol of the Westernised liberals of the 1840s in \textit{The Devils}. He represents the high-minded romantic who fails to link theory with action; whilst pure and noble in spirit, his declaration of love for Russia has never been matched by the implementation of any practical measure that would prove his devotion to his country. For this he is ridiculed and judged by his son Peter, who, like many young revolutionaries in the 1860s, saw the path of individual radicalisation as a much more viable means of finding a solution to Russia’s backward socio-political situation. The character of Stepan Trofimovich is based on the Russian intellectual T. N. Granovsky, an influential historian and one of the most famous professors of the 1840s. However, Dostoyevsky focused specifically on the “Westerner” aspects of Granovsky and endeavoured to reflect these in the Westernised intellectual of \textit{The Devils}.\footnote{Frank, \textit{Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years}, 402.} Stepan Trofimovich is an admirer of science and art and is fascinated with French culture. Many of his sentences are filled with French words and dialectisms. Yet what links Stepan
Trofimovich to Dostoyevsky’s discussion of individual radicalisation and terrorism is the way in which he is portrayed as the source from which Peter Verkhovensky and Stavrogin’s nihilism derives. As a member of the “generation of the fathers,” Stepan Trofimovich is the representative of those men who introduced European radical currents of thought into Russia and witnessed their transformation in the hands of the new generation of radicals. Holding a copy of Chernyshevsky’s *What is to be Done?* Stepan Trofimovich regretfully acknowledges his part in having fostered the ideas the author expresses in the book: “It’s just our idea – yes, ours! We were the first to plant it, to nurture it, to get it ready – and what new thing could they say after us? But, good Lord, how they have expressed it all, distorted, mutilated it!” Stepan expresses not only his disgust at his son’s theories but also confirms the basic affinity between them and his own views. Having fathered Peter and acted as a teacher to Stavrogin, Stepan Trofimovich is responsible for the moral and intellectual upbringing of the two, and thus plays a significant part in their development into terrorist and nihilist. He is the representative of those fathers of the Russian intelligentsia, such as Alexander Herzen, who saw the very ideals they imported from Europe slip through their fingers and fall into the hands of their nihilist sons. Impotent before the intentions of the new generation to turn words into deeds, men such as Stepan Trofimovich stood by throughout the 1860s, perhaps filled with guilt, but never showing approval of what was happening in the new revolutionary movement.

In the concluding chapters of *The Devils*, Stepan Trofimovich, exasperated by his son’s behaviour, sets out on a symbolic pilgrimage in which he encounters a young peasant woman selling copies of the gospel. He subsequently falls very ill and realises he is about to die. After his request that the peasant read the story of Gadarene swine, Stepan Trofimovich acknowledges his guilt in raising a generation of nihilists who now seek to destroy Russia and, counting himself as one of the possessed beasts, dies beside the shore of a lake. Stepan Trofimovich’s final attempt to seek a relationship with the Russian peasants is used by Dostoyevsky to reveal the social division between the Russian educated class and the masses of Russian people who lived outside the major cities. In this farcical episode, Stepan Trofimovich and the peasants he encounters confront each other.

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313 Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, 308.
with interest and confusion, almost as if people from two different races had met and struggled to communicate. Even on this occasion Stepan Trofimovich cannot help but fill his sentences with French words. Here we notice a reflection of the failure of Russian populism, the phase of the Russian revolutionary movement where those intellectuals who left the city to live amongst the peasants were met with distrust and even hostility. Although Stepan Trofimovich is perhaps the only character in *The Devils* who finds redemption through religious faith before his death, he is used by Dostoyevsky to launch another attack at the old-fashioned utopian liberals. Dostoyevsky wished to emphasise that, in introducing radical ideals in Russia as a guide to prosperity and development, these social romantics ignored the very object they were trying to help: the Russian people. By the time they realised this however, it was too late, their liberalism had been transformed by the intellectuals of the new generation into the devastating doctrine of nihilism.

Through the events unfolding in a small, provincial Russian town, Dostoyevsky made his greatest statement concerning the growing number of radical revolutionaries, nihilists, terrorists, political conspirators and members of secret societies in the Russian socio-political context of the 1860s and early 1870s. This analysis of *The Devils* has completed the study of individual radicalisation and terrorism in the three selected novels and has carried out a detailed examination of Dostoyevsky’s final and most powerful attack on radical ideology. The image of a tormented, self-destructive and unfulfilled individual has been reproposed to the reader of *The Devils* through Peter Verkhovensky’s and Stavrogin’s extreme infatuation with destruction and nihilism. These characters found themselves at the climax of their relationship with radical ideology; the final stage of a process of individual radicalisation deemed by Dostoyevsky as the most destructive and self-degrading. We have ventured into the motivations behind Verkhovensky’s commitment to political violence and shed light on his plan for Russia to be redeemed through its total annihilation. However, we found no practical solution to how this redemption may come about, except for the messianic hope in Stavrogin, the individual Verkhovensky sees emerging from the death of the old Russia, to lead the masses towards a new, prosperous future. The tragic element of the story was further intensified as we examined Stavrogin’s character and delved into his past. This enigmatic individual was portrayed as the
embodiment of the philosophy of nihilism in the novel. His moral impotence and inability to distinguish bad from good has been seen as having an explosive effect which directed those who come in contact with him towards their doom. As a result of their relationship with Stavrogin, Verkhovensky took the road of political terrorism, Kirilov developed his theory of the man-god and committed suicide, Shatov endeavoured to escape from his history of radicalism, but was murdered in the process, and Matryosha succumbed to her distress by hanging herself. This last event alone seemed to have triggered a reaction within Stavrogin’s being, one which opened his eyes to the extremity of his nihilist nature. Having become mindful of this, he too, takes his own life. In the image of Stavrogin’s suicide, and that of Verkhovensky’s murder of one of his own members, Dostoyevsky portrayed the “new man” of Russia as a failed scoundrel, unfulfilled in his terrorist mission and indifferent to the meaninglessness of his existence.
Conclusion

This thesis has discussed Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s perception of individual radicalisation and terrorism in three of his major novels: *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Devils*. Whilst these themes have been independently examined by the numerous Dostoyevsky scholars cited throughout this dissertation, little attention has been devoted to linking them into a coherent argument which sees the former playing a major role in the development of the latter. It has therefore been argued that, Dostoyevsky, urged by a desire to fictionalise the events and people of the changing Russian socio-political environment in which he found himself, created novels which firstly reflected the impact of radical ideology on young Russians and secondly revealed the devastating consequences of taking these ideals to their extreme through political terrorist violence. This study has followed the process of radicalisation of Dostoyevsky’s individual from his questioning of the validity of radical ideology, to his application revolutionary ideals in a particular situation and his eventual enslavement to the extreme fulfilment of radical principles.

The first chapter of this study has been fundamental in explaining the meaning of the various key concepts and terms such as “radicalisation” and “terrorism” running throughout this thesis. It has also been instrumental in recreating those historical phases of the Russian revolutionary movement which attracted Dostoyevsky’s attention and drove him to express his opinion regarding the experience of the Russian individual in this atmosphere of social and political transition. This chapter has traced the origins of individual radicalisation and terrorism in modern Russia by identifying and examining the two generations of intellectuals who first introduced radical thought into Russian society in the 1840s and disseminated its principles throughout the student population in the 1860s. The creation of a split between the Russian intelligentsia and the Tsarist autocracy has been identified as the cause of social upheaval throughout these decades. It has thus been concluded that radical intellectuals such as Alexander Herzen, Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Sergei Nechaev were to be held accountable for having initiated (at times unwillingly, as in Herzen’s case) and guided young Russian individuals to a process of radicalisation which culminated in the adoption of political violence as a weapon against the State. The
formation, internal structure and dynamics of the most successful terrorist organisation of
the nineteenth-century, the People’s Will, has subsequently been observed along with its
assassination of Tsar Alexander II, in 1881. The aim of this chapter has been to familiarise
the reader with the relevant issues discussed by Dostoyevsky in the three chosen novels
thus setting the scene for the textual analysis of the following chapters.

The examination of the primary characters of Dostoyevsky’s Notes from Underground,
Crime and Punishment and The Devils has been the focus of the second and third chapters
of this study. The purpose of these two chapters has been to examine Dostoyevsky’s
treatment of the concepts outlined in chapter one throughout these three fictional novels.
We begun with the observation of the Underground Man, the paradoxical character of
Notes from Underground whose rejection of radical ideology brought him to a state of self-
deprivation and isolation into a dark underground cellar from which his notes were written.
The Underground Man was portrayed as the first of Dostoyevsky’s characters to have
come into contact with radical ideology and to have fallen into an existential crisis because
of his refusal to abide by its tenets. We noticed this individual’s turn to self-degrading
behaviour in both time frames of the novel, as he manifested his resentment towards the
ideals of the new men of the 1860s and those of the social romantics of the old generation,
the men of the 1840s. Out of fear of losing his vital senses and his right to choose, the
Underground Man was terrorised by the thought of becoming a mere tool used by society
for the creation of a utopian Crystal Palace. This caused his rebellion towards the radical
ideals of his time. The Underground Man’s was a battle against reason and its use by the
radical intellectuals to claim that human nature could be perfected. For this he behaved
irrationally, demonstrated how imperfect man could be, refused to be psychologically and
physically helped and even found pleasure in pain. This novel has been identified as
Dostoyevsky’s initial response to the radical ideals he noticed gaining currency within his
society. To contrast this ideal of human perfection projected by the radicals, he created the
Underground Man, a tormented, masochistic individual who suffered because of his choice
to reject the very ideals that were supposed to guarantee his happiness. Notes from
Underground has been framed as Dostoyevsky’s initial attack on radical ideology and its
harmful effects on the Russian individual.
In the latter half of this chapter we confronted Raskolnikov, the individual who conquered the doubts of the Underground Man and put the radical ideals of utilitarianism and rational egoism into practice. The aftermath of Raskolnikov’s experiment, however, brought the validity of these ideals into question. According to Raskolnikov, society would have indeed been a better place without a wealthy, old, stingy, unscrupulous pawn broker. The elimination of this person from the world would have fulfilled the utilitarian belief that “the good is that which is useful.” As his fears before the murder indicated and his crisis in the aftermath of the bloodshed confirmed, the ideals Raskolnikov was relying on did not reward him with a sense of fulfilment but with a feeling of revulsion at what he had done. Raskolnikov did not take into consideration his humanism and the reactions of that inner conscience the Underground Man believed should not be ignored. This triggers a psychological battle between his reason and morality which remains unresolved even after the novel has ended. Furthermore, we examined Raskolnikov’s alternate reasons for having committed the murder, namely his selfish attempt to see whether he could be a Napoleon, a superman entitled to step over conventional law, an extra-ordinary human being. Whilst it was initially asserted that Raskolnikov had failed his superman ideal, the analysis of the epilogue of the novel brought this into question as his situation was deemed unresolved. Although Raskolnikov accepted Sonya’s unselfish love and strongly considered redeeming himself through Christian faith, his obdurate and remorseless attitude towards the murder of Ivánovna and her sister suggested that he still thinks he has become a superman after all and has evaded Dostoyevsky’s attempt to redeem him. Nonetheless, it has been concluded that Raskolnikov needed to re-negotiate his relationship with reality if he was to one day return to be a common man living in society. Raskolnikov has been portrayed in this study as a self-destructive individual deceived by the flawed and contradictory radical ideals of his time. Therefore, Crime and Punishment has been categorised as Dostoyevsky’s second great attempt to demonstrate the dangers of individual radicalisation and the devastating consequences of using violence for the fulfilment of radical ideals.

The third and final chapter of this thesis was dedicated to the textual analysis of The Devils. Five characters were taken into consideration in this chapter, all of whom seemed
to be obsessed by an ideal which would have provided the solution to Russia’s economic, social and political problems. All except one, Stavrogin, the character identified as the source of a cultural and social philosophy which Dostoyevsky viewed as the outcome of the young revolutionaries’ pursuit of an extreme radical ideology: nihilism. The discussion of Stavrogin’s spiritual and moral impotence has been fundamental to this chapter, for it has been used as the key to understanding Peter Verkhovensky’s commitment to terrorist violence, Kirilov’s man-god theory, Shatov’s suspicious Slavophil identity and Stepan Trofimovich’s Christian redemption. All these characters have been influenced, at some stage in their life, by Stavrogin. All, with the exception of Stepan Trofimovich perhaps, have looked upon Stavrogin as a teacher and mentor and have conceived their revolutionary ideal by being in contact with this nihilist figure. All, including Stavrogin himself, ended up either committing suicide, killing one of their peers, or being killed themselves. From the analysis of the fates met by these characters, we identified Dostoyevsky’s message regarding individual radicalisation and terrorism in The Devils. Dostoyevsky believed the philosophy of nihilism to be the culmination of the Russian individual’s infatuation with radical ideology. Therefore, he portrayed nihilism in The Devils as a dangerous and above all, contagious method of reasoning, powerful enough to send anyone coming into contact with it towards a world of terrorist violence, apotheosis, hypocrisy, atheism, murder, suicide and the belief in universal destruction justified by messianic hope. This chapter has concluded that Dostoyevsky was deeply disheartened at seeing thousands of young Russians entering into this world, thus trading their unique, traditional Russian identity for the emulation of the modern, Western revolutionary culture. Dostoyevsky’s comment in a letter to the Grand Duke Alexander Alexandrovich (son of Alexander II and future Tsar), regarding the main idea of The Devils, best reflects his affliction regarding the Russian individual’s loss of national identity: “We have forgotten, in our ecstasy of self-abasement, the most immutable law of history, which is that without an arrogant belief in our own significance as a nation to the world, we can never be a great nation or leave behind us an original contribution, however small, to the well-being of mankind.”

Since the analysis of Dostoyevsky’s use of symbolism throughout *Notes from Underground, Crime and Punishment* and *The Devils* has been fundamental for this study, one last symbolic observation must be made in order to close this dissertation. Dark, enclosed spaces have often recurred in Dostoyevsky’s novels as symbolic images of the miserable eternity to which his characters often confine themselves. From the Underground Man’s dark cellar, Raskolnikov’s Siberian prison cell, the grotto where Verkhovensky murders Shatov and finally to the loft in which Stavrogin hangs himself, these gloomy areas reflect the nature of the journey of Dostoyevsky’s individual as it has been discussed in this thesis. The dark cellar has symbolised the Underground Man’s isolation and escape from the world, the prison cell has been the physical and arguably psychological constraint on Raskolnikov’s ideals, the grotto Verkhovensky’s failure as a terrorist, whilst the loft has stood as the summit of Stavrogin’s radicalisation. Paradoxically, this will be the place of his suicide, the act he commits after having realised how insignificant the meaning of his life has become. The darkness of these enclosed spaces mirrors the inevitable surrender of each of Dostoyevsky’s individuals in front of the impossibility of finding self-fulfilment through the tenets of radical ideology.
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