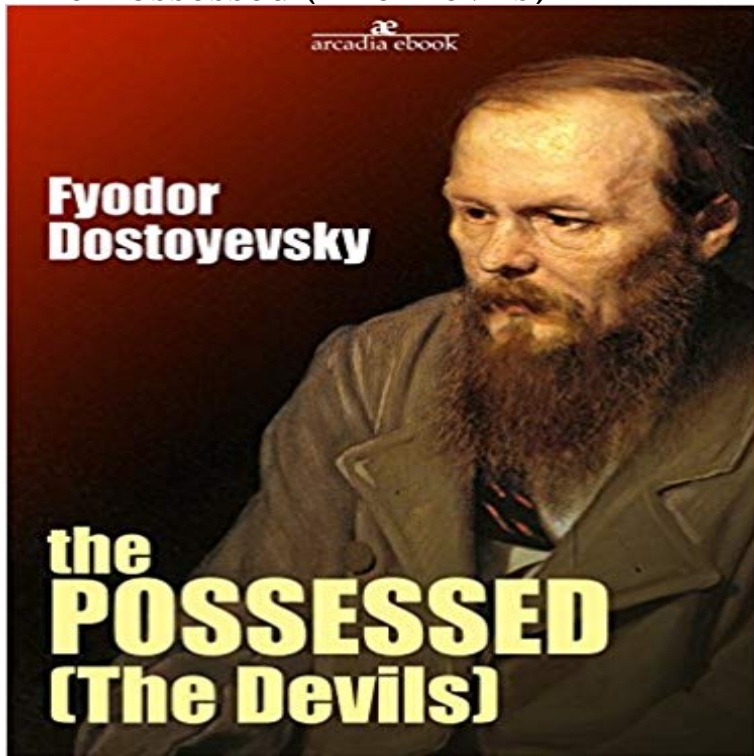


The Possessed (The Devils)



The Possessed is an anti-nihilistic novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, first published in the journal *The Russian Messenger* in 1871-2. It is the third of the four great novels written by Dostoyevsky after his return from Siberian exile, the others being *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1869) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). The Possessed is a social and political satire, a psychological drama, and large scale tragedy. Joyce Carol Oates has described it as Dostoyevsky's most confused and violent novel, and his most satisfyingly tragic work. According to Ronald Hingley, it is Dostoyevsky's greatest onslaught on Nihilism, and one of humanity's most impressive achievements perhaps even its supreme achievement in the art of prose fiction. A fictional town descends into chaos as it becomes the focal point of an attempted revolution, orchestrated by master conspirator Pyotr Verkhovensky. The mysterious aristocratic figure of Nikolai Stavrogin Verkhovensky's counterpart in the moral sphere dominates the book, exercising an extraordinary influence over the hearts and minds of almost all the other characters. The idealistic, western-influenced generation of the 1840s, epitomized in the character of Stepan Verkhovensky (who is both Pyotr Verkhovensky's father and Nikolai Stavrogin's childhood teacher), are presented as the unconscious progenitors and helpless accomplices of the demonic forces that take possession of the town.

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