

A Gentleman in Moscow Study Guide

A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles

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Plot Summary

NOTE: All citations in this Study Guide refer to the Kindle version of *A Gentleman in Moscow*, published September 6, 2016.

The novel *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles tells the story of Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov, a Russian aristocrat sentenced to house arrest for his association with a poem with revolutionary overtones. Although the Count was imprisoned during the onset of Communism, he saw the changes in government reflected in the way the hotel operated. While one might think the Count would have an unfulfilling life in the hotel, the Count's life in bondage turns out to be quite rich and purposeful. Themes in the novel include finding one's place in life, the impact of the arts, and the breakdown of the ideals of the aristocrat.

The novel opens with the Count being escorted back to the Metropol after he was sentenced to house arrest. Instead of being allowed to stay in the suite he had inhabited for nearly four years, the Count was moved to an attic room once used as servant's quarters. The Count sought a purpose for his life and decided at first it was to provide for himself the pleasures of life.

The Count became disillusioned with his life when he noticed the way in which manners and common courtesy, the ideals upon which his life was founded, were being ignored and lost. He believed that his generation had been passed over. Proof of this came when the waiters in the Boyarsky, the hotel's upscale restaurant, were forced to remove the labels from its store of wines and market them only as red or white. The Count decided to kill himself by jumping off the building. He was stopped when the hotel's handyman, Abram, shared with the Count the honey that the bees that Abram kept on the roof had made. That honey had the taste of the apples of Nizhny Novgorod, the area of Russia where both Abram and the Count grew up.

After this experience, the Count took control of his life. He used his knowledge of proper manners and serving techniques to become the headwaiter at the Boyarsky. He developed friendships with the cook at the restaurant as well as the maître d'. With the help of Marina, the hotel's seamstress, the Count learned to sew. Additionally, the Count developed a relationship with Anna Urbanova, a famous Russian actress.

The Count began his most important work at the hotel when Nina, an old friend of his, brought her daughter to the Count. Nina's husband had been arrested and sent to do hard labor in Sevvostlag. Nina was going there to join him. She planned to return for Sofia after she got a job and found them a place to live. Unfortunately, Nina never returned. The Count tried to locate her with no success.

Sofia grew up in the hotel and became a talented pianist. The Count had seen the way that Russia tended to destroy the dreams of its young women and did not want that for Sofia. When she was 17, Sofia was invited to participate in a goodwill concert in Paris. The Count used his influence to get Sofia asylum in America.



Meanwhile, the reader learns that the Count did not write the poem for which he was sentenced to house arrest. When the man who did write the poem died, the Count began his plan to get both Sofia and himself out of the hotel. In the last scenes of the novel, the Count visited the remains of his family's estate and then met Anna at a tavern.



Book 1: “1922: An Ambassador” and “An Anglican Ashore”

Summary

Included prior to the beginning of Book 1 are 19 lines of the poem for which the Count is sentenced to house arrest in the Metropol. Next is a transcript of the court proceedings in which the Count was sentenced. Mentioned in the transcript is the poem that the Count was accused of having written as well as a reference to incidents that caused him to have to exile himself from the country. He had lived in Paris for several years before returning to Russia where he had lived in the Metropol for about four years before he was charged with the writing of the poem. The men interviewing the Count asked why he returned to Russia but he did not give an exact reason why he chose to return. Noted in the transcript is that the Count was given a lighter sentence because he was considered by some Russians to be a prerevolutionary hero. He was told that if he ever stepped outside of the hotel, he would be shot.

In the chapter “An Ambassador,” the Count was escorted by two soldiers from the Kremlin to the Metropol. The Count tried to dismiss the soldiers at the door but they told him they were under orders to go with him to his rooms. At his suite, the Count was told by a captain of the guards that he would be moving from his suite to a different room.

The Count was taken to the sixth floor attic of the hotel where he was shown a room with a bed frame, bureau, closet, and a pitched roof. The bellhops moved the items that the Count directed them to move including several family heirlooms like the desk that had belonged to his godfather, the Grand Duke Demidov. The Count thought about how he had already narrowed down the family treasures to the few he had with him at the Metropol. While he was still exiled in Paris, the Count had learned that the Tsar had been executed. As a result he had returned to Russia where he made arrangements for his grandmother to be taken out of the country for her safety. The Count had loaded some of the family possessions in a wagon and had bolted the doors to the family’s mansion. As the Count prepared in the hotel to leave some of his family’s belongings again, the Count noted how people tended to get more attached to things than people.

As the Count was attempting to arrange his new, cramped quarters, several employees from the hotel came to pay him a visit. He finally realized that the employees were visiting and were so surprised to see him because they thought he would not come back from the Kremlin but would be killed or put in jail. As he looked at his friends, he realized that his friends were happy not only because of his good fortune, but also because after a 17-year period of unrest they were ready for some good news. It was also hoped the country would finally reach a period of stability.

After his friends left, the Count sat at his desk. He remembered how the Grand Duke had always told the Count that: “if a man does not master his circumstances then he is



bound to be mastered by them” (18). The Count considered the words his godfather had written at that desk. He pushed back the chair, sat on the floor and opened a door on the leg of the desk to reveal a stack of gold pieces. Each of the other legs of the desk had similar stacks.

In the chapter “An Anglican Ashore,” the Count thought about the way he would spend his day before he completely woke and realized he was in the small attic room. He stood when there was a knock on the door and hit his head on the ceiling. It was a boy bringing the Count his breakfast. During his breakfast the Count was visited by the Metropol’s lobby cat.

The Count looked around his room and realized he should not have had so much furniture brought up or so many books, especially since he did not even like the books. He moved some of the unneeded things as well as all of the books to another room for storage. He decided to keep out *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne* because he had always intended to read that book and thought his house arrest would give him plenty of time to do so. He tilted his chair back to read but his mind drifted to the days he lived at Idlehour, his family’s estate, and he would read to his sister, Helena, as she sewed.

His reading was interrupted by a visit from the Count’s old acquaintance Konstantin Konstantinovich, who bought one of the gold coins from him. As he was leaving, Konstantin asked the Count if he would be writing any more poetry. When he learned the Count would write no more, Konstantin said he was unhappy to hear that.

The narrator describes the Boyarsky, the finest restaurant in the Metropol. He explains how the restaurant was adversely affected by the Bolsheviks’ decision to prohibit the use of rubles in expensive restaurants. For that reason, only the very rich were able to eat at that type of restaurant.

The selection of foods and spices available to the chef, Emile Zhukovsky, dwindled in the years after the war. Even though Emile was forced to make do with the ingredients he could find, the Count still believed the food in that restaurant was superb. The chef was frustrated that the Count was able to identify the spice used in the meal. Even so, he congratulated him.

In order to keep himself from going crazy during his time of imprisonment, the Count decided that he should commit himself to the “business of practicalities” (29). This included getting himself good sheets and a pillow as well as several bars of his favorite soap and a mille-feuille from his favorite bakery.

Analysis

This novel quickly develops a rambling, leisurely style, somewhat like the Count’s life must have been like before his imprisonment. It is narrated in from a third-person perspective by an omniscient narrator who focuses on the house arrest of Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov. Before the revolution in Russia, the Count was a member of an aristocratic family. He describes himself as being a gentleman as well as “recipient of



the Order of Saint Andrew, member of the Jockey Club, Master of the Hunt” (3). Because he feels he needs to find some way of keeping himself from going crazy because of his sentence of house arrest, the Count decides to dedicate himself to making his life as comfortable as possible.

Even though the Count is sentenced to house arrest because of a revolutionary poem it was believed he had written, notice that the Count not only answers the questions put to him in a very vague manner, he is also described as not being the type to support the revolt. When the Count is asked if he wrote the poem “Where Is It Now?” he answers: “It has been attributed to me” (4). He also tells his questioners that the poem demanded to be written and says nothing about writing it himself when the same men ask him why he wrote the poem. In his sentencing, the Count is credited as being “among the heroes of the prerevolutionary cause” (5). This indicates that at some point in time, the Count went against his own beliefs in order to write the poem. This idea is strengthened by the idea that “we can only assume that the clear-eyed spirit who wrote the poem Where Is It Now? has succumbed irrevocably to the corruptions of his class — and now poses a threat to the very ideals he once espoused” (5). The contradiction between the ideals of the poem and the ideals that the Count had once supported are significant and will be explained later in the novel.

The political setting in Russia and the changes brought about by the beginning of Communism are central to the novel. As the Count notes, Russia has just passed through a period of 17 years of unrest that included “a world war, a civil war, two famines, and the so-called Red Terror” (17). The people are ready for a period of harmony. Regardless, they face changes because of the changes in political power. One of these changes comes in the form of a law that will not allow expensive restaurants to take rubles for payment. For this reason, the common people of Russia were no longer able to eat in those restaurants.

The Count is 33 at the point in his life when he is sentenced to house arrest in the hotel. He has already been self-exiled in France for reasons that remain unknown. Because of the revolution, the Count returned to Russia to see to it that his grandmother was safely escorted out of the country. The Count, meanwhile, packed some of his family’s treasures from their mansion and moved to the hotel where he had lived for nearly four years before his house arrest.

Although the Count could seem haughty he is made likable because of his dedication to his family. He remembers his sister fondly. For whatever reason he felt it was necessary to exile himself to Paris, he chooses to come back to Russia to see to it that his grandmother is taken safely out of the country.

Significant objects in this section include the desk that the Count insists on having moved up to his new, tiny room in the hotel’s attic. “A king fortifies himself with a castle,” observed the Count, “a gentleman with a desk.” (12). While this desk is significant because it was given to the Count by his godfather, Grand Duke Demidov, the reader learns it is important to the Count for other reasons as well. Hidden inside the legs of



the desk are stacks of gold coins that are valuable for their historical significance as well as their monetary value.

Another significant object is the book *The Essays* of Michel de Montaigne. In this section the book is important because the Count decides with all the time he will have under house arrest that it is a good time for him to finally read the huge book—one that he has intended to read for a good while. The book will continue to be of significance, for different reasons, later on in the novel.

Because this novel is written about a man who enjoys the pastime of reading, it is fitting that a good deal of literary techniques be used in the context of the novel. Looking at the Table of Contents, the reader should notice the alliteration. All of the words in the table of contents begin with the letter “A.” Also notable is the frequent use of simile. For instance the Count realizes that his act of coming back from the Kremlin must be to the employees of the hotel “like an aviator from the wreckage of a crash” (16). Another simile use that additionally adds humor to the novel is the Count’s response when Konstantin asks the Count if the gold piece the Count showed him was lonely. “It lives like a soldier in a barracks. Like a slave in a galley. Not a moment to itself, I’m afraid,” (25) the Count says as he impresses on Konstantin how many other coins he has.

The Count also uses examples from history and literature of how those exiled have determined how they should conduct themselves during their exile; he uses their examples to decide how he should react in the circumstances in which he finds himself. He draws from novels such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* with his reference to Edmond Dantes, who was motivated by revenge—a motivation that the Count does not share. He realizes he has more in common with *Robinson Crusoe*, the main character of a novel by the same name, who decided it was in his best interests to see to his own comfort.

Discussion Question 1

For what reason is the Count confined to house arrest? What is the political atmosphere in Russia at this point in time?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the Count have to move to a different room when he is placed on house arrest? What is it significant that the Count has to live in this smaller space? What is important about the things he decides to keep with him?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the changes that the narrator notes in the restaurant at the hotel. How do these changes in the restaurant symbolize the changes in the country of Russia as a whole?



Vocabulary

festooned, unflappable, penchant, conscripted, caprices, winnowing, expunged, commandeered, proprietary, rotundity, circumambulate, inscrutably, reverie, doleful, impermanence, interlocutor, metallurgical, compendium, predilections



Book 1:” An Appointment” — “Around and About”

Summary

In the chapter “An Appointment,” the narrator describes how the Count plowed through reading the book of essays but felt they were better suited to reading on a cold winter night. The Count looked at the twice-tolling clock, which had been made to the orders of his father, often as the morning drug by.

When the clock finally struck noon, the Count threw down his book and ran from his room, happy to be on his way to his weekly appointment with the barber. When he reached the shop, there was one customer in the chair and another waiting. As the Count waited for the barber to finish, he studied the barber’s cabinet. It was intended to allow the customers to see what was inside, including a black bottle that the barber referred to as the Fountain of Youth.

When the barber prepared to take the Count as his next customer the man who had been waiting became angry. He spoke up, saying that he had been next in line for service. The Count explained he had an appointment at noon. At that news, the man took one of the barber’s scissors and cut off the right wing of the Count’s mustache. He left in anger. Although the barber told the Count the man would not be allowed back again, the Count blamed himself for the man’s anger saying he should have let him go ahead. When the barber asked the Count what they should do, the Count requested a clean shave.

In the chapter “An Acquaintanceship,” the Count was dining in the Piazza, the Count’s name for the less formal of the Metropol’s two restaurants. There was a new waiter whom the Count thought looked like a bishop from a chessboard. The Count was frustrated by the Bishop’s disregard for customary manners and etiquette. He was shocked when the Bishop even suggested the wrong type of wine for the Count’s meal.

As he prepared to eat, the Count looked for anyone interesting in the room to study but could find no one with the exception of a young girl who always wore yellow dresses. She was spying on him from her table near the fountain. The Count received his soup and had closed his eyes to enjoy the first taste. He was surprised when he opened his eyes to find that the girl was standing directly in front of him. She asked directly where his mustaches went. After he answered, she pulled out a chair and began a conversation. She asked him to tell her about princesses.

After sharing part of the Count’s lunch, the girl asked if he had ever been in a duel. He told her the story of his godfather being a second in a duel. The Count mentioned that the man who had been hotel manager at the time his godfather stayed there kept a pair of dueling pistols hidden behind a panel in his office.



The Count later got unintentionally drunk at the hotel's bar. He found himself talking to the bartender about duels. Later, he sat on the landing of the second floor and talked to the stairs about dueling.

In the chapter "Anyway..." the Count accepted a formal invitation from Nina Kulikova, the girl who liked yellow, to tea. During their tea, Nina asked the Count to instruct her on the rules of being a princess. He stressed the importance of good posture as well as respect for elders. When the Count offered Nina tea cakes he pointed out to her that a princess should say thank you when she was offered a tea cake. Nina argued that she could understand saying please when asking for a cake, but she did not understand why she should have to thank someone if they offered her something for which she had not asked. Even though the Count tried to convince her otherwise, Nina told him she would never say thank you for things she had not asked for to begin with.

In the chapter "Around and About," Nina approached the Count for an adventure. They headed for the third floor. At this point, the narrator interrupts the story to tell the reader that Nina appeared to have been sent to help the Count find his way. She had confided in the Count that she spent her time exploring the hotel and sometimes eavesdropping on conversations and even political meetings. She had managed to expand her surroundings by exploring every bit of the hotel and began to take the Count along on her explorations.

Nina showed the Count the boiler room and the fire burning there. She showed him the place where all of the items left behind at the hotel were stored. The Count saw a few of his own things there. When they walked past a bright blue door, Nina mentioned that she had never been in that room before. The door was locked but Nina took the necklace from around her neck. The Count discovered the chain did not have a pendant, but a copy of the hotel's passkey. Inside the room was the silver used for banquets. The Count wondered if the Bolsheviks knew the silver was there and why they had not confiscated it. Nina suggested it was because the Bolsheviks needed the silver at the hotel.

By using her passkey, Nina also took advantage of the views from various windows in the different suites. It was for this reason the two were headed down the hallway of the third floor toward the Count's old suite. Nina watched out the window as a woman arrived at the Bolshoi in a taxi and wished she was that woman. The Count looked over the state of his old suite. Back in his own room that night, he realized how small it was and how he had no place to "while away a civilized hour before it was time to dress for dinner" (62) like he could do in his old suite.

Thinking about the way there were rooms behind rooms, the County went into his closet and pushed on the back wall of the closet. When he felt that wall flex, he kicked through it and found himself in the closet of the next room. Going through the door he found another room that was just like his. He cleaned out that room and outfitted it as his study. The Count's mood improved when he saw that he had not only a room with necessities, but also a room that catered to his spirit. Sitting in his study, the Count chose a new novel. It was Anna Karenina, one of his favorites.



Analysis

Two significant relationships are introduced in this section of the novel. The first is the relationship between the Count and Nina. The second is the relationship between the Count and the man who is known only as the Bishop.

Nina's relationship with the Count is a positive influence on him even though she is only a nine-year-old girl. Because she is a young girl and is trapped in the hotel because her governess will not allow her outside the hotel's doors, Nina and the Count are in the same boat. While the Count has struggled with boredom, Nina has entertained herself by exploring the hotel. She has even managed to get a copy of the hotel's passkey that allows her to explore the entire hotel including the other suites. Nina also engages the Count in conversation even though he considers her a bit unmannerly.

Consider the way that the narrator describes both Nina and the Count's view of the hotel: "In her first weeks, the building had grown to encompass the life of two city blocks. In her first months, it had grown to encompass half of Moscow. If she lived in the hotel long enough, it would encompass all of Russia" (57). Nina's curiosity and willingness to explore help her to expand her borders beyond their physical limitations. Meanwhile, the Count focuses on the negative changes in his life. Even though he struggles to make the best of his situation, he finds himself watching the clock and waiting for the time to come when he could go an associate with others. The Count realizes that: "If he continued along this course, it would not take long for the ceiling to edge downward, the walls to edge inward, and the floor to edge upward, until the entire hotel had been collapsed into the size of a biscuit tin" (39). While the Count's way of thinking makes the hotel shrink, Nina's causes the hotel to expand into a wonderland of adventure.

Another significant relationship initiated in this section is the one between the Bishop and the Count. The Count becomes acquainted with the Bishop when the Bishop waits on the Count's table in the Piazza. The man is not given a name, possibly to symbolize him as part of the larger society that is losing manners and understanding of small nuances that the Count thought were important. The first time the Bishop serves the Count he not only suggests a wine that would not have been good with his food but also forgets to bring his wine at all. This is the beginning of an antagonistic relationship between the two.

In his relationships with both Nina and the Bishop, the Count notices downfalls in what he believes are proper manners. There are a variety of breaches of etiquette of which the Count accuses the Bishop. The Count believes the newspaper he was reading was an "international symbol of dining alone," (39) but the man does not seem to understand the symbolism and never takes away the second place setting at the table where the Count sits. The Count is also accustomed to the waiter noticing when he has folded his menu and placed it by his plate as a sign he is ready to order. Instead of picking up on this sign, the Count has to get the Bishop's attention in order to place his order. The



Bishop's worst infraction of the rules of proper serving is his inability to suggest a proper wine to go with the Count's meal.

The Count struggles with his new identity in this section but makes some progress when he takes the liberty of expanding his quarters into a second attic room.

In the chapter "Around and About," the narrator addresses the reader directly. Thus far the novel had been narrated from the third-person point of view of an omniscient narrator. As the narrator has been telling the reader about the adventures Nina and the Count have been having in the hotel, he interrupts himself with the statement: "We are ahead of ourselves. . . ." (54). This statement draws the reader into the story, making him feel as if he has a vested interest in the story.

The Count's deep appreciation of the arts continues to be obvious in the references used in this section. For instance, the barber's act of cutting the gentleman's hair with both hands is described like a ballet. As the Count watches the clock while he tries to read the book of essays, references are made both to *Romeo and Juliet* as well as *The Nutcracker*. In the role that she plays with the Count, Nina is compared to Tiresias, a Greek prophet believed to have counseled Odysseus, while Virgil is said to have led Dante through the circles of hell in the *Inferno*.

The author continues to use literary techniques such as similes and metaphors to enliven his story. When the Count is watching the clock, for instance, the narrator describes the hands of the clock reaching noon in this way: "Until, suddenly, that long-strided watchman of the minutes caught up with his bowlegged brother at the top of the dial" (32). This phrase uses personification, a technique where the writer gives the inanimate clock hands the properties of living objects. The author also chooses to describe the Bishop in religious terms. For instance, the way he smiles at the Count when the Count selects his own wine—a different one from the type suggested by the Bishop—as "ecclesiastical" (39). These choices in religious descriptors for this man will continue throughout the novel.

Changes in Russia pointed out in this section include the reference to the fact that a person can only buy newspapers written in the Russian language. Additionally, the florist shop at the hotel has gone out of business because people can no longer afford to buy flowers. The Count hopes the time will come when flowers will come back into popularity. As the Count dines in the restaurants at the Metropol, he notices not only that the business at these restaurants is lacking but that the waiters have also become less efficient and less focused on their customers.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the Count's preference for a novel of fiction over the book of essays, which he was trying to read. How does his preference for *Anna Karenina* help to define his personality?



Discussion Question 2

What is the tone of the novel thus far? How does the author develop this tone?

Discussion Question 3

Based on his dealing with other people, like the unruly man in the barbershop, what sort of man do you think the Count is? Do his manners reflect those of a gentleman? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

peruse, chronometer, asymptotically, alacrity, bandied, erudite, lexicographer, emphatically, cede, kopek, ecclesiastical, indefatigable, denizen, penchant, harbinger, decadence, vanquished, figurative, rhetorically, comport, sentiments, abstinence, desultory, escutcheon



Book 1: “An Assembly” — “Advent”

Summary

In the chapter “An Assembly,” Nina convinced the Count to join her on the balcony of the hotel’s ballroom to spy on an Assembly meeting. The Count did not enjoy these assemblies, which the Bolsheviks had regularly, because he believed their political discussions were tedious. While he watched the men below him, he still noticed the same deference to power and ranking that he saw before the war when the ballroom was host to celebrations and dances. People acknowledged people who were revered; others wore clothing in order to make a statement, even if the statement was that they were a member of the working class.

The meeting was for the Moscow Branch of the All-Russian Union of Railway Workers. They debated the use of the word “facilitate” (68) in their charter statement. After much debate the word “facilitate” was replaced with the words “enable and ensure” (69). Nina shared with the Count her wonderment at the meeting after it was finished.

Because he split the seam of his pants while crawling behind the balcony, the Count paid a visit to Marina, the single seamstress remaining at the hotel. As she fixed his pants, the Count told Marina how enthralled Nina had been by the meeting.

As the Count stepped out of Marina’s work room, he was surprised to find a bellhop standing outside the door. The boy told him that he was wanted in Mr. Halecki’s office. The Count was surprised by the request because the manager preferred to remain unseen and delegate work to others.

When the Count arrived in Mr. Halecki’s office, he told the Count that he was being forced to make his staff stop using “honorifics” (74) when referring to the Count. The Count told Mr. Halecki that he understood the times were changing and that it was his responsibility as a gentleman to change with them.

The Count was left alone in Mr. Halecki’s office for a short time when Arkady called the manager to the front desk. As the Count thought about how honorifics had outlived their usefulness, he wondered if the dueling pistols were still hidden in the office. He went to the panel, as the Grand Duke had described and found the hidden cabinet. The pistols were still there.

In the chapter “Archaeologies,” the Count was showing a card trick to some ballerinas in the hotel’s bar when he was interrupted by Arkady. Arkady told the Count that a man had forced his way into the Count’s former suite looking for the Count. When the Count saw the man in the lobby, he recognized his old friend Mikhail “Mishka” Fyodorovich Mindich. The two had gone to college together and had lived together above a cobbler’s shop. They were close friends even though they had very different backgrounds.



Mishka had come to the Count with a bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. When the Count left him alone to rinse the glasses, Mishka looked around the Count's study and remembered his visits to Idlehour. He picked up a photograph taken of the men who had signed the treaty to end the Russo-Japanese War. The Grand Duke was among those men.

Mishka remembered that he had first been introduced to the Rostov family's tradition of toasting the tenth anniversary of a family member's death with Châteauneuf-du-Pape when he was visiting at Idlehour. The Grand Duke had been in charge of the toast to the Count's parents. Back at the Metropol, when the Count joined Mishka in the study, they toasted the anniversary of the Grand Duke's death.

Mishka told the Count he had been in Moscow to help plan the inaugural congress of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP). They planned to design a universal style of poetry. He told the Count they had entered a new age in time, the Age of Steel. He forecasted they might see the end of both oppression and ignorance in times to come. The Count acknowledged to himself that Mikhail had finally found a point in time for which he was properly fashioned.

In the chapter "Advent," the Count was distracted by the smell of the outdoor, snowy air coming from the coatroom. He was caught smelling the air from the coats and tried to cover his tracks by pretending he was trying to identify the type of fur on one of the jackets. That smell of cold air reminded the Count of the parties that he and his sister would attend on Christmas Eve.

Near the end of December, Nina and the Count met for a Christmas celebration. Nina ordered herself a dish of a variety of flavors of ice cream, which the Count shared. Nina told him that she was going to have to start school in January. She thought school would be boring, but the Count tried to convince her otherwise. Even though he told her that school would broaden her horizons, Nina argued that her horizons would be more quickly broadened by travel.

The Count presented Nina with a gift: his grandmother's pair of hexagonal opera glasses, with which Nina was enthralled. Although he did not expect anything from Nina, she signaled the captain to bring a large box to their table. She gave the Count instructions that he was not to open it until midnight.

The Count stayed in the Piazza after Nina left, and watched a young couple dining together. The Count approved of the couple's choice to order the Latvian stew but was shocked when the Bishop suggested they get a bottle of Rioja to go with it. The Count knew that wine would not only clash with the stew but was also out of the young man's price range. The Count could not help but to suggest a different, less expensive wine. The young man took his suggestion.

Back in his study, the Count sat down to read A Christmas Carol while he waited for midnight to come so he could open Nina's gift. Inside the box was the passkey to the hotel that Nina has always worn on the chain around her neck. The Count went to sleep



that night with a sense of well-being. The narrator notes that in four years, however, the Count would be climbing to the roof of the Metropol in an attempt to kill himself.

Analysis

The author ends this first book of the novel with the foreshadowing of a desperate time coming for the Count within the next four years. Although the Count feels positive about his wellbeing as this part closes, it appears his circumstances will change in the coming years. At this point, he has only been living under house arrest at the Metropol about six months.

In this section there is an encounter between the Count and the Bishop that seems to cement the status of the relationship between the Bishop and the Count. The Count, who is astounded by the Bishop's lack of knowledge about wines, cannot help but suggest a more proper pairing between the food a young couple has ordered and the wine they will drink. The Count additionally suggests a wine more in keeping with the young man's price range. Although the Bishop does not react to the Count's suggestion in this section, there will be retribution in coming sections. Remember the Count's thought to himself: "there was simply no substitute for experience" (97).

Changes brought about by the Bolsheviks, including the ending of the use of honorifics and the lack of Christmas decorations, are described in this section. It is Mr. Halecki, the manager of the hotel, who tells the Count that he must instruct the staff not to call the Count by any honorific titles. Even though the Count believed it was through the use of these titles that a man knew he was in a "civilized country," (75) he told Mr. Halecki "It is the business of the times to change, Mr. Halecki. And it is the business of gentlemen to change with them" (75). While the Count outwardly accepts the changes, he inwardly mourns the act of dismissing things that seem to have outlived their usefulness, like honorary titles.

Changes noticed by the Count in the hotel include a lack of Christmas decorations in the public areas. He had always known the hotel to be decorated with greenery and lights. The tables had always been full of those wishing to celebrate the season. When he enters the Piazza for his Christmas meeting with Nina, the Count is disappointed to see that the majority of the tables are empty and there are no decorations.

Literary techniques continue to be used in this section of the novel to develop the story's settings, imagery, and characters. When the narrator describes the meetings of the new Bolsheviks, he refers to the "committees, caucuses, colloquiums, congresses, and conventions" (65), a use of alliteration. He also describes the meeting of the railway workers as being "Shakespearean," (70) and refers to the character of Dogberry from Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*. Dogberry's character is that of a bumbling constable who uses self-inflated speech riddled with malapropisms. This comparison, therefore, insinuates that the Count sees the Bolsheviks as much the same in their self-importance and their tedious obsession with wording.



The author also enjoys playing with words and using recurring images. For instance, after the Count rips the seat of his pants in the balcony of the ballroom listening to the assembly meeting, he takes his pants to Marina for repair. He describes her act of sewing the pants as the “the laying of locomotive tracks writ small, if you will” (72). He also describes the way the wording proposed by one man was “barreling toward adoption as quickly and dependably as one of the Union’s locomotives barrels across the steppe” (69). Both these images draw the reader’s mind back to the original idea of the meeting of the rail workers’ union. The word play takes place when the author describes how the “unflappable Arkady — looking unusually flapped” (78) approached the Count after Mikhail had asked for him. There is also a reference to the coatroom: “Which Tanya, the attendant, had left unattended” (88).

There are several significant objects that are mentioned in this section. The first is the copy of the *Essays of Montaigne*. Mikhail notices that the Count has used this volume to prop up his dresser, which was missing a leg. Mikhail says that the Count must not have found the book to his liking, indicating the Count did not enjoy reading the book, but the Count replied that he did like it because it was just the right height to prop up the dresser. In this section the Count also discovers that the dueling pistols his godfather, the Grand Duke had told him were hidden in the manager’s office at the Metropol, are still there. Nina gives her passkey to the hotel to the Count as a Christmas gift, symbolically giving him the gift of exploring the hotel at leisure because she will be going to school. One item introduced in this section is the bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape that Mikhail has brought so that he and the Count can toast the ten year anniversary of the Grand Duke’s death.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the Count’s comparison of the actions of the people in the ballroom during parties and dances with their actions during the meeting that he is witnessing. What conclusion does he make in his comparison?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Nina and the Count’s reaction to the assembly upon which they spied.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Mikhail and his excitement over the new form of poetry. In what ways is Mikhail better equipped to fit into the coming age, which he identifies as the age when want and ignorance may be wiped out, that the Count? In what ways are Mikhail and the Count different people?



Vocabulary

axiomatic, verve, terminus, beleaguered, honorifics, unmitigated, insignia, fortuitous, fervid, dowagers, erratic, enigma, bezique, trajectory, idiosyncratic, provenance, lucidity, canticle, desolatory



Book 2: “1923: An Actress, an Apparition, an Apiary” — “1924: Anonymity”

Summary

In the chapter “An Actress, an Apparition, an Apiary,” the Count and Mishka met in the Shalyapin on the first anniversary of the Count’s imprisonment in the Metropol. Even though it seemed a sad anniversary to mark, the Count wondered why he and others imprisoned felt the need to mark the passing of time. He came to the conclusion that they did so because it gave them an idea of how time was passing in the real world and also gave them a sense of having survived another year of hardship.

As the Count was on his way to his hair appointment before meeting Mishka, he saw a willowy woman with two large hunting dogs entering the lobby of the hotel. The Count noticed she had no control over the dogs. To make matters worse, the lobby cat, seeing the dogs were on leashes, jumped to a spot where he could be seen by the dogs. The dogs pulled away from their mistress and chased the cat throughout the lobby. The Count whistled at the dogs and made them heel. The woman commented they were ill behaved, a matter that the Count said was on account of bad handling, not bad breeding.

Later, during their drinks, Mishka talked excitedly about the work his group was doing. He described how the poet Mayakovsky had even spoken to the group. During their meeting the Count also learned that Mishka had a girl, named Katerina, with whom he was on a committee. Although the Count was glad his friend finally had a romantic conquest, he also felt envious.

After the Count had parted ways with Mishka, the bartender gave the Count a note. The bartender indicated the note was from Anna Urbanova. It contained an invitation for him to join her in her suite. In the suite, Anna had ordered room service. They talked about their childhoods. When they were finished eating, Ann kissed the Count on the mouth. The Count felt he was one step behind Anna as she unbuttoned her blouse and let it fall to the floor. They had sex but before falling asleep, Anna had told the Count to close the curtains when he left. In addition to closing the curtains, the Count also hung up Anna’s blouse.

In the hallway, as he made his way to his room, the Count felt like a ghost. On a whim, the Count decided to take the elevator. He was surprised to see the one-eyed cat inside. The cat gave him a look that was both stern and filled with disappointed silence. The Count compared it to the way that the Grand Duke had looked at him in a similar circumstance.



On the sixth floor, the Count felt fresh air on his neck. He searched out the source and found a hatch in the roof was open. A handyman who worked for the hotel was on the roof as well. The handyman offered the Count coffee and explained to get good coffee, a person had to freshly grind his own beans. The Count heard a humming, which the handyman told him was coming from the bee hives. In their honey, the Count identified lilacs from the Alexander Gardens. As they talked, the Count and the handyman learned they had both grown up near Nizhny Novgorod.

In “Addendum,” the narrator tells how Anna did not go to sleep when the Count left her room. Instead, she had trouble sleeping because she was thinking about the way the Count had hung up her blouse. She continued to think about it until she got home. At that point she was infuriated by his act of hanging up her blouse. In an attempt to retaliate, Anna began throwing all of her clothes on the floor and leaving them there. After two weeks, her dresser, Olga, told Anna she was acting like a child and that she should pick up her clothes. In response, Anna picked up her clothes and threw them all out the window. Later that night, she went outside and gathered all of the clothes up again.

In the chapter “1924: Anonymity,” the Count believed that Anna had cast over him a curse of invisibility. Even Nina seemed too busy with her schoolwork to have time for him.

The Count was supposed to meet Mishka for dinner, but received a note from Mishka stating that Katerina was sick and that Mishka had to return to St. Petersburg early.

The narrator next describes a confrontation between a man named Soslovsky and another referred to only as a bulldog that took place in the Boyarsky, as a way of introducing the Count’s excellent talents as a master of seating tables. The Count reminded Andrey of the confrontation between the two just in time to keep the two men from being seated near each other again.

After the Count was seated for his meal, he was surprised to learn that the Bishop was the one waiting on his table. The Bishop seemed to smile at him as if he knew the Count was shocked to see him there. It was when the Bishop asked for the Count’s wine order that the Count was astounded by the Bishop’s insistence that the Count tell him if he wanted red or white wine when the type the Count had ordered was available only as a red wine. The Count asked for Andrey to be sent to his table. When the Count expressed his concerns to Andrey that the Bishop did not have the experience necessary to be a server in the Boyarsky, the Count noticed how solemn Andrey looked. Andrey told the Count the hotel manager had asked for the Bishop to be promoted. It was suspected the Bishop had a friend with influence.

When the Count noted how the Bishop would not even let the Count order his specific bottle of wine, Andrey looked even more solemn and asked the Count to follow him down to the wine cellar. In that cellar, the Count noticed that none of the bottles of wine had labels on them. The labels had been removed because someone had complained to the Commissar of Food that the wine list at the Boyarsky was counter to the ideals of



the revolution. As a result, they were ordered to remove all of the labels and market their wine only as red or white. The wines would also all be sold at the same price. Andrey thought the complaint had originated from the Bishop.

As the Count looked at one of the bottles of unmarked wine, he thought about how his way of life was being erased forever by the Bolsheviks. He realized his purpose in life, and took one bottle of wine, the one with the crossed keys embossed on the glass, so he could attend to a final duty he believed he had to follow through with.

Analysis

Because the Count believes that his way of life is behind him, he decides to end his life. There are two blows to his way of life that seem to make the Count reach this decision. The first is the realization that the Bishop has been made a waiter in the Boyarsky. The Count does not think that the Bishop has the proper skill-set to provide services that are on the level of the Boyarsky. The second blow to the Count and his way of life is the demand placed on the Hotel that wines be marketed as either red or white with no vintage or brand selections available. To this end, all of the labels have been removed from the wines. The Count, who is a connoisseur of wines, believes this is an act similar to what is happening to him. By removing the labels from the wines, the identity of each individual bottle of wine is taken away. Similarly, the Count believes his own identity as an aristocrat has been lost because of the Bolsheviks and their new rules.

It is after having spent an evening with the actress Anna Urbanova that the Count believes that the actress has cursed him with the curse of invisibility. While the Count may believe he is invisible, in reality it is probably just the reality of others going about their lives when the Count's life is limited to such a small scope. He is able to interact only with people inside the bounds of the hotel. Nina, who is now in school, is no longer able to spend time with him. The employees are busy going about their jobs. Mishka has dedicated himself to his girlfriend. The Count already feels lonely and left behind when he encounters the negative atmosphere in that he decides he has no place in life any longer.

The Count's feelings of loneliness and loss of individuality are tied to the narrowing of the wine list to red or white. "Yes, a bottle of wine was the ultimate distillation of time and place; a poetic expression of individuality itself. Yet here it was, cast back into the sea of anonymity, that realm of averages and unknowns" (144). In this passage the Count mourns the loss of the individuality of the numerous bottles of wine stored at the hotel.

The Count seems to understand how his life has changed so drastically. "Popular upheaval, political turmoil, industrial progress — any combination of these can cause the evolution of a society to leapfrog generations, sweeping aside aspects of the past that might otherwise have lingered for decades" (144). Because the society of Russia is changing so quickly because of changes in politics, the Count feels his generation has been skipped over. Just as the need for different wines and the knowledge of pairing a



wine with food is being forsaken for the political views of Russia, the Count knows his own lifestyle of gentlemen and leisure are being pushed aside. “But looking at the bottle in his hand, the Count was struck by the realization that, in fact, it was all behind him” (144).

Although the Count is distressed by the changes he sees in Russia, Mishka believes the country is headed for an age of enlightenment. The differences between the two are magnified by the way that Mishka is embracing the changes while the Count is distressed by them. Their lives have inverted since they were friends in college. At that time the Count was in the heyday of his life while Mishka was thought strange because of his habit of studying and staying away from parties. Because he is under house arrest, it is the Count who must stay away from the parties while Mishka at last has found groups of people with whom he enjoys socializing.

Remember in the chapter “Advent” when the Count had thought to himself that there was no substitute for experience. He had believed there was no way the Bishop could ever be an efficient waiter simply because he did not have experience with wine and food pairings. In this section the Count has to admit that a substitution has been found for experience. The narrator indicates: “How smugly the Count had observed at the time that there was no substitute for experience. Well, thought the Count, here is your substitute” (143). He realizes that with the list of wines made extraordinarily simple, the Bishop will have no trouble with making wine suggestions. The Count gets the impression from Andrey that the Bishop knows someone of power. It is assumed this is the reason that the Bishop got his promotion to the Boyarsky and also how the complaint came to be made that caused the wines to lose their labels.

A character or symbol of interest in this section is the lobby cat. He appears at two different points in this section. The first is when the willow lady with the hunting dogs enters the lobby. The cat appears, as if on cue, to taunt the dogs. The narrator refers to the cat at this point as Field Marshal Kutuzov, a comparison to a famous Russian military leader that suggests the cat is planning warfare with the dogs. Later in this section the cat seems to endow the spirit of the Count’s godfather. The Count happens to meet the cat on the way up to his room from Anna’s suite. He believes that the cat has taken in “every detail of the Count’s appearance, the cat responded exactly as the Grand Duke had responded under similar circumstances many years before — that is, with a stern look and a disappointed silence” (124).

The use of literary techniques such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, and personification continue to be prevalent in this section. The author continues to play with inverses of his descriptions of people. For instance it is when the Count asks Andrey about the Bishop being assigned as a waiter in the Boyarsky that “the unshrugging Andrey shrugged” (142). Personification is seen in the following quote: “the pencil was moving so brightly it looked like an honor guard — parading across the page with its head held high then pivoting at the margin to make the quick march back” (132). This quote includes not only the personification of the pencil with which Nina writes, but also a simile comparing her pencil to an honor guard.



Discussion Question 1

Do you think the Count's life has really passed him by? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How does the one night stand between Anna and the Count affect both of these characters?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the role of the cat in this particular section of the novel.

Vocabulary

modulations, ostensibly, indomitability, acerbically, succinct, repose, paradoxically, unambiguously, impetuous, languid, boudoir, petulance, corporeal, impregnability, etymology, delved, diminution, caustic, pithy, permutations, ecclesiastical



Book 2: “1926: Adieu”

Summary

In the chapter “1926: Adieu” the Count stood in his old suite. He considered how he had always put his faith in meteorological conditions. He used an example of how he had been run off an icy road by a young Hussar on the way to a party.

Here, the narrative changes to the present tense and the point of view shifts to the second-person point of view to relate the story of how the Count believes the temperature directly affected the outcome of one particular party.

You are on your way to a party when it begins snowing. You are mesmerized by the snow, but are run off the road by a troika being driven with the horse at a full gallop. That officer appears at the same party you are attending. He seems to have an eye for the Princess. Instead of enthralling the Princess with tales of war, however, the young man is distracted by the roast served at the party, a food he has not enjoyed in his months of service.

After dinner, some of the men play cards because one of them fell on the ice and is too sore to dance. The lieutenant decides to join the game. After a couple of hours of playing, you hold the lieutenant’s marker. The man has already lost one thousand rubles. You decide that in the Princess’s honor, they should call the game even. The Princess hears your words and seeks you out to show her gratitude. You dance with the Princess and when you see she is getting too hot, ask if she would like to go outside for some air.

At this point the story changes back to the past tense and the third-person point of view as the narrator argues it was the temperature that caused the circumstances to be just right so that the lieutenant made himself sick on roast and the men played cards instead of dancing.

The Count was pulled from his thoughts by a couple coming into their suite to discover him there. He pretended to have been checking the drapes as a cover.

After leaving that room, the Count found Nina carrying out experiments on gravity in the ballroom. He invited Nina, and her co-experimenter Boris, to dinner but they declined.

Later, after he finished his supper, the Count believed that everything was in order. He had brought all his accounts current and left a letter to be sent to Mishka the following day. He had written out his funeral and burial instructions. He knew the world would carry on without him because it already had. He thought about how he had not mastered his circumstances, like his godfather had suggested that he needed to be able to do. The Count decided instead he would follow in the footsteps of an admiral, a friend of the Grand Duke who had commanded the Imperial Russian Navy during the Russo-Japanese War. The battle was won but the battleship on which the admiral rode home



struck a Japanese mine. The admiral had chosen to go down with his ship because he believed his job in life was done.

In the bar, a man offered a glass of vodka for any man who could name three contributions that Russia had made to western society other than vodka. The Count took on the challenge. He said one of the contributions were the written works of Chekhov and Tolstoy. The second was a particular scene in the Nutcracker, while the third was caviar.

After they talked, the Brit in the bar, named Charles Abernethy, realized that he knew the Count. Charles asked why the Count had come back to Russia after the revolution. The Count described the circumstances of the Princess's party. Seven months after that party he came home to discover the same lieutenant he had embarrassed at the party was wooing his sister. The Count knew the lieutenant was not courting his sister because he loved her but in order to get revenge on the Count. The Count could not bring himself to tell his sister what was happening.

On Helen's twentieth birthday the Count and Helen returned home to find the lieutenant there. Inside the house, the lieutenant had been having his way with Helen's handmaiden. When the lieutenant saw the Count he laughed and said they should call it even since it was Helen's birthday. The Count grabbed a pair of pistols and ran from the house. He met the lieutenant at the base of the driveway and shot at him. Instead of killing him, the Count hit the lieutenant in the shoulder. The Count was sent to Paris. When war broke out, the lieutenant insisted on fighting despite his injury and was killed in battle.

The Count told Charles that the following day would mark the ten year anniversary of Helen's death. She had died of scarlet fever while he was in Paris. He said the entire chain of events leading from his decision to turn the tables on the lieutenant had led to him not being able to be with his sister when she died.

Later, the Count went to the roof, and stood at the parapet when he heard Abram, the handyman, calling him. The old man was excited, but not from seeing the Count on the edge of the roof. He told the Count he would not believe what had happened. The bees, which had been gone for months, had returned. Abram made the Count sit and have a taste of the honey. It has the essence of apple blossoms. They believed the bees had been to the apple groves of Nizhny Novgorod.

Instead of returning to the edge of the roof, the Count went back to his room. The next day, he was at the Boyarsky as soon as it opened at six. He asked Andrey for a moment of his time.

Analysis

The Count believes the world has no more use for him and that it has moved on without him. He believes the ways things are happening in the Boyarsky are representative of the way things are happening in all of Russia. In order to better understand what is



happening in Russia one must understand a little bit of the political atmosphere at this time. The intent of the revolution was to overthrow the rich leaders of that country. With the birth of Communism, the Russian government sought to make all people equal. People were not to work just for themselves, but for the common good. In this type of atmosphere, manners and gentlemen were not of high importance. Because the Count believes his way of life is being killed by the new politics in Russia, he believes he has no purpose in life and decides to kill himself.

Temperature is a factor that the Count believes is a ruler in the outcome of his life. He believes it was because of a few degrees of temperature change that caused the birthday dinner of the princess to end the way it did. While it might be thought by the reader that this ending would be cherished by the Count, it appears he blames his actions of that evening on an eventual deep hurt to himself and his sister.

In order to get revenge on the Count, the lieutenant begins to court Helena. The Count knows the lieutenant is not serious in his intentions but cannot bring himself to tell Helena what has happened. When the relationship finally falls apart, the Count rides out with the intention of shooting the lieutenant. Even though his gunshot does not kill the lieutenant directly, the Count blames himself for the lieutenant's death. During his discussion with Charles Abernethy, the Count tells him "Yes, Charles. I killed him" (162) as Charles continues to question the Count, the Count clarifies that the lieutenant was not killed right then but instead eight months later in battle. The Count believes the wound was the reason the lieutenant was killed. The Count further feels guilty because it was while he was exiled in Paris that his sister died. He had not acted impetuously, he would not have been exiled and would have been at home during his sister's illness and death. Because it is the ten-year anniversary of his sister's death, the Count may feel this guilt freshly—another aspect that may contribute to his decision to kill himself.

In the structure of the novel, the author uses an interesting technique to draw the reader into the Count's situation with the lieutenant. When the narrator describes the incidents at the princess's party he switches to the second person point of view and to the present tense. This allows the reader to put himself directly into the Count's circumstances.

An important symbol in this section of the novel is the honey that Abram shares with the Count. It is this honey that changes the Count's mind about killing himself. That is because the taste of apples in the honey reminds the Count of his home. This reminder of home can perhaps be seen as a sign that the Count's way of living is not completely gone. For whatever reason, the honey gives the Count enough of a promise of hope that he chooses to continue living.

Notice the Count's change in life perspective at the point in his life that he decides life is not worth living. While he had at first acted under the assumption that he needed to master his life so it would not master him, he chooses instead to go down with his ship. He backs up this new philosophy on life with the Grand Duke's story of the leader of the Russian navy that had defeated the Japanese fleet but was hit by a mine on the way home from the successful battle. The leader went down with his ship, symbolically killing



himself while his life was at its high point. The Count decides this is the new philosophy he wants to pursue. For this reason as the slightly drunk Count tries to make his way across the roof of the hotel “one could almost imagine one was crossing the deck of a ship on high seas. How fitting, thought the Count, as he paused to steady himself at a chimney stack” (163-164).

The changes taking place in Russia continue to be reflected in the atmosphere at the Boyarsky. It has already been discussed how the labels were removed from the wine bottles in order to keep the purchase of these wines from being determined by a person’s state in life. Additionally, the street names in Russia, Moscow in particular, have been changed. As the Count listens to Vasily giving directions to a couple who are visiting Moscow, he realizes that “more than half of the streets he named were unfamiliar to the Count” (154).

The author continues to use literary techniques to enliven and add humor to the novel. For instance, the narrator indicates “a young Hussar returned his supper to the pasture from whence it came” (150). The lieutenant ate and drank so much at the princess’s party that he was not only able to pay the attention to the princess he had wanted to, he was also physically ill. One should understand that the meal that evening was beef roast from a cow that assumedly had been raised on the property on which the princess lived. Therefore when the lieutenant relieved himself of his meal, he was returning at least part of the cow back to the pasture.

Another example of literary technique comes when the Count proves to the disillusioned German that Russia had made more contributions to Western culture than just vodka. The Count indicates that the German has used “a form of inverted hyperbole — an exaggerated diminution of the facts for poetic effect” (156) in his statement about Russia. The Count proceeds to prove to the German that the Russians have contributed two influential novelists — Chekhov and Tolstoy — one particular scene of the Nutcracker, and caviar.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe, like the Count does, that the temperature was ultimately responsible for the events of the evening of the Princess’ party? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the reminder of his home in the taste of the honey give the Count the will to keep living?



Discussion Question 3

Consider the Count's argument that it is more cruel to exile a man to his own country instead of making him leave his home. Do you agree with his argument? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

proclivity, coherent, gallivant, emulation, dotage, erudition, anarchist, inclement



Book 3: “1930” — “An Afternoon Assination”

Summary

In the chapter “1930,” the Count’s morning routine of grinding coffee beans, exercising, and enjoying breakfast is detailed. As he stepped outside his door to leave his remaining cream for the lobby cat, the Count noticed there had been an envelope slipped under his door. The contents of the envelope made the count say “My God” in French.

In the chapter “Arachne’s Art,” the narrator compares the historical events that happened in the late 1920s to the changes in the pattern of a kaleidoscope rather than monumental quick changes. The narrator also notes that things were much the same at the Metropol. The bellhops were different and the Bishop had been promoted to the assistant manager of the hotel. Dinners of State took place in the ballroom.

The narrator next describes Emile with his chopper as he oversaw the kitchen of the Boyarsky. Andrey entered the room with his reservation book in hand, and then the Count entered the kitchen as well. He was carrying a white dinner jacket worn by the staff of that restaurant.

Emile, Andrey, and the Count met each day in the kitchen office where they planned for that day’s menus and seating. They came to refer to themselves as the Triumvirate. The narrator notes that wines with labels were again being served at the Boyarsky because a member of the Central Committee had been unable to order the wine he had wanted.

Although the other men prepared to leave the room, the Count stayed at the table; he told them he had one more matter of business. He poured out the contents of the envelope he had found under his door into a teacup. The other men told him that there was enough saffron there for what they planned to do. They began to discuss other ingredients including oranges and fennel.

In the lobby, which was almost as busy as it had been in the prewar times, the Count heard people calling each other comrade. He noticed how it was now the most commonly used word in the Russian language. He said the word could be used to call any person, man or woman, regardless of his or her ranking. It could also be used as greeting or as a means of getting another person’s attention.

The Count heard the greeting again and realized the man from the mail window was talking to him, telling him that he had a letter. The Count recognized Mishka’s writing and sat down to read the letter right away. The letter contained memories of St. Petersburg but what bothered the Count the most was that he recognized that Mishka



was following the same path through St. Petersburg that he and Katerina, who had left Mishka for another man, had walked during their first conversation.

After the Count had paused in reading Mishka's letter, he intended to keep reading but three young people leaving the Piazza caught his attention. When a fourth young person, a man, joined the group, he told the blonde girl that he had gotten her coat for her when he had gotten his. The Count noticed that the girl did not thank the boy for getting her coat. When he thought about the significance for a moment, he realized the blonde girl was Nina.

The Count called out to Nina and the two visited briefly. She told him that she and the others were going to an agricultural center in the Ivanovo Province to help convert the farms and make them operate as part of the collective.

Later when the Count went to Marina for a spool of thread, he discussed with her how serious Nina was. He told Marina he was afraid that Nina would not enjoy her youth because she was so serious and so intent upon doing something about the ideas in which she believed. Marina observed that the Count had always liked Nina because she was an independent spirit. For this reason, she told him that he had to trust life would find her, just like it found everyone.

Realizing it was just after 4 p.m., the Count hurried to Suite 311. In the bedroom a willowy figure waited for him.

In the chapter "An Afternoon Assignment," the narrator describes the path that led Anna back to the Count. When they first met, Anna was haughty because she was a celebrity, a movie star. Because the politicians favored her, Anna was given benefits like uses of mansions and dachas.

It is noted that when artistic preferences were reconsidered, the fourth film in which Anna was the leading lady was not as big of a success. Her fall from popularity began when it was noticed that General Secretary Stalin was not smiling at the movie. Others believed they should not smile either. For this reason the response of the entire audience to the film was muted. Instead of films about princesses and nostalgia, the people were believed to want movies that included historical immediacy and collective struggle. Because of this response, not only was the director put in the position of not having any more movies funded, but his political loyalties were also questioned.

Even though Anna tried to stay away from the doomed director, her voice became her undoing. Even though she was beautiful, she had a deep, husky tenor for a voice. Before she was even thirty, Anna was a has-been.

The Count saw Anna again in 1928. She was to meet someone at the Boyarsky. Her companion was 40 minutes late and refused to join her in her suite for a night cap. Anna mentioned to the Count it was the second time she was embarrassed in front of him. She invited the Count upstairs to have a drink with her. The narrator indicates the two were members of the "Confederacy of the Humbled" (195) because they had both fallen from grace so quickly.



After that point in time, Anna would visit the hotel every few months. She not only met with some director or another but also had an appointment with the Count. Anna found fame again after she was cast as a middle-aged factory worker. Her speech of encouragement to her fellow workers in this movie inspired a senior official in the Ministry of Culture to recommend her to directors.

It is during their afternoon tryst that Anna admitted to the Count that she was not raised on the Black Sea. She said she had told him that story only because she thought it would appeal to him. She assumed the story he had told her about the apples in Nizhny Novgorod was fabricated as well, but he insisted it was true.

Analysis

Four years pass between the ending of Book 2 and beginning of Book 3. These sections are mostly concerned with the way that life has changed in the years from 1926 to 1930. It has been four years since the Count attempted to kill himself. He seems much more in control of himself and his life. He is working as head waiter at the Boyarsky and has been reunited with Anna. Although there have been political changes in Russia, not much is different yet at the Metropol.

One of the trends the reader may notice in this section of the novel is the reference to the weight given to the opinions of political figures in Russia. For instance, it is when a member of the Central Committee is unable to order a particular wine he wanted that the rules are changed and allow the Boyarsky to once again leave labels on the wine bottles and serve particular vintages instead of just red and white.

Anna's career as an actress also appears to have been derailed and then sparked to life again by the whims of political leaders. It is because Stalin did not react favorably to Anna's fourth movie that the critics as well as other people claim not to like it either. When the senior official in the Ministry of Culture notices Anna's performance in her role as a factory worker and mentions her to other directors that she begins to get acting roles again.

The narrator, however, is careful to note that Anna's success does not hinge only upon the whims of the politicians. He notes that Anna has changed from a haughty woman to one who realizes how easily she could lose her fortune. Instead of her previous childish behavior she has begun greeting people who come to her door. She also arrives on time for practices and has her lines memorized for each rehearsal.

The author has developed the characters through their descriptions to the point that the reader can recognize which character the author is talking about based only on a description, and in some cases a single word. When the reader sees a reference to a "willowy figure" he knows that it is Anna. Meanwhile, the "shy delight" is Marina, while the "new assistant manager with the smile of an ecclesiast" (174) is the Bishop. When the narrator describes the writing on an envelope addressed to the Count as being



“indifferently groomed, relatively reclusive, occasionally argumentative” (182) the reader realizes the writer is Mishka.

The transition between the chapters “Arachne’s Art” and “An Afternoon Assignation” are notable because the last two sentences of “Arachne’s Art” are repeated verbatim in the opening of “An Afternoon Assignation.” This suggests that the narrator is trying to make sure that the reader has noticed them and that he took proper notice of what happened. This emphasis indicates how unlikely it had appeared that the Count would ever see Anna again as well as the unlikeliness that she would transform into a person whom he could enjoy being around.

Because the Count is now working in the Boyarsky, it is assumed that it was the taking of this position that the Count had wanted to speak to Andrey about the day after he tried to commit suicide. The Count has made a place for himself where his talents are in high demand. He feels he has a place in life because he is actively helping the status of the restaurant as one with impeccable service, as defined by his generation, to live up to its standards.

The Count and two of the men with whom he works at the Boyarsky refer to themselves as the Triumvirate. This is a term borrowed from the ancient Romans to refer to the three men who held the highest power in the country. They are, in essence, comparing themselves to Julius Cesar, Pompey, and Crassus, the members of the first Triumvirate.

As the Count grinds his coffee beans and makes coffee, the smell of the coffee is credited with having creative powers. As the coffee starts to brew, “In that instant, darkness was separated from light, the waters from the lands, and the heavens from the earth. The trees bore fruit and the woods rustled with the movement of birds and beasts and all manner of creeping things” (171). This description is very similar to the description of creation in the Christian Bible. For this reason it appears that the coffee has godlike qualities.

Meanwhile, another important object is introduced in this section of the novel. That object is Emile’s chopper. This chopper is a knife with which it is said Emile can carry out any of the needed activities in the kitchen like flipping pancakes, stirring soup, peeling a grape or chopping meat. Emile’s relationship with his knife is compared to that of an orchestra master with his baton. “If the kitchen of the Boyarsky is an orchestra and Emile its conductor, then his chopping knife is the baton” (175). This is a form of extended metaphor comparing cooking to a work of art, just like music.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the Count’s meeting with Nina. Do you think she is too serious for her age? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

In what ways does the author indicate that time has passed? How does he describe its passing?

Discussion Question 3

What appears to be one of the benefits of holding political power as indicated in this section of the novel?

Vocabulary

somnolence, filaments, malingering, rendezvous, semantic, perplexed, ephemeral, privations, conciliatory, plethora, forlornly, minion, incessant, predilection, adulation, condescension, enumerate, fabricate, absolve



Book 3: “An Alliance” — “1938: An Arrival”

Summary

In the chapter “An Alliance,” the narrator describes the day to day activities at the Boyarsky. On this particular day, during the second seating for that evening Andrey learned there would be a party in the Yellow Room, one of the restaurant’s private dining rooms. The party was requesting the Count specifically as the waiter.

The Count arrived at the door to the Yellow Room to find there was a rather large man guarding the door. Inside, the room had been arranged with only one table set for two people. After much discussion the man in the room made it clear to the Count he did not want to be waited up by him but instead wanted to dine with him.

The man addressed the Count by his full name and titles, but the Count admitted he did not know who the man was. The Count was correct in guessing the man’s age and also that he had been a colonel when he ended his career in the military.

The colonel told the Count that he had an interesting history and began to recount the things that he knew about him. The colonel asked the Count why he had shot Lieutenant Pulonov, the incident that caused the Count to exile himself in France. The Count explained it was because Pulonov was an aristocrat. He goes on to tell the colonel that he did not enter the military when he returned to Russia because he made a promise to himself that he would not shoot another of his countrymen.

After the Count explained to the colonel why he did not consider the colonel to be a gentleman, the colonel finally introduced himself. He was Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov, the former colonel of the Red Army. He explained the nature of his visit to the Count. The leaders of the country were looking to open diplomatic relations with the Americans. He believed it would be in the best interest of Russia for them to be able to “listen with care and speak with clarity” (211).

The man wanted the Count to teach him the speak French and English, and to understand the people who speak those languages. He especially wanted to understand the privileged among those people. The lessons were to take place once a month in the Yellow Room of the hotel. The colonel let his words trail off when he began to talk about what he could offer the Count in exchange for the lessons but the Count indicated that if Osip were a customer at the Boyarsky, he was already at his service.

In the chapter “Absinthe,” the Count discovered the bar was full of conversation and laughter when he entered. In addition to the comeback of jazz music, the foreign correspondents who frequented the bar were entertained by three hostesses charged with spying on them and reporting to a Russian official the things they had overheard.



The Count located Audrius and asked for absinthe. The bartender was curious because the Count had never asked for absinthe before but showed his curiosity only by raising one eyebrow. In his cabinet, the bartender found a bottle of the spirit containing only an ounce or two of liquid. The Count took the glass of liquid the bartender offered and headed out of the bar.

The Triumvirate had planned a celebration that night that was three years in the making. They needed fifteen ingredients to make the dish they had decided to prepare. The problem was that four of the ingredients were hard to find at that time in Russia. Two ingredients had come to the Metropol by accident while Anna had gotten one of the most difficult to acquire ingredients—the saffron—for the group.

The Count was thinking of the meal they were going to make as he made his way down the hall. He was surprised to hear the Bishop calling out a greeting to him. The Bishop questioned the Count's actions and even made a comment referring to the poem that had resulted in the Count's house arrest.

After his encounter with the Bishop, the Count went on to the Boyarsky where Emile had already begun preparations on their meal. The Count set a table as Andrey came in with an armload of oranges. They were all stunned when the door to the kitchen swung open and the Bishop entered the kitchen. They lied and told the Bishop they were taking inventory. When the Bishop asked at whose request they were taking inventory Emile got so angry that he raised his chopper at the Bishop. This sight caused the Bishop to run from the room. Andrey and the Count were amused when they looked at Emile to see he had not raised his chopper at the Bishop but instead a stick of celery.

The men talked as they enjoyed the bouillabaisse they had waited so long to make. One of the most interesting things they learned in their discussions with each other was that Andrey had once worked as a juggler with the circus. He demonstrated his talents by juggling oranges but said in the circus that he had actually juggled knives. To demonstrate this ability, Emile loaned Andrey his chopper.

When the Count finally returned to his room at about three in the morning, he shared with the portrait of his sister that while death was described as a being that could sneak up on a person, life could do the same. He believed life had snuck up on his friend Mishka and he told Helen that he believed Marina was right—that life would sneak up on Nina as well.

The next morning, the Count attempted to read the rest of Mishka's letter but was unable to find it. The narrator indicates that the letter had fallen behind the bookcase and that it was probably just as well that the Count did not read the rest of the letter because it contained verses written by the poet Mayakovsky. Mishka had written to tell the Count that the poet had shot himself.

In the chapter "Addendum" the narrator relates how Nina and her three friends were headed toward Ivanovo with plans to help exile the enemies of progress in farming and convince the peasants that tractors and other innovations were benefits to their farms.



When she arrived in Ivanovo, Nina felt her life had just begun. She did not know yet she was to be part of a man-made disaster in which many peasants would starve to death.

In the chapter “1938: An Arrival,” the narrator first notes how “unkind” (229) the early 1930s were in Russia. A speech from Stalin in 1935 convinced the people that life was better even though it really was not. His words, however, caused the direction of the people of the country to change. A time was ushered in that allowed the people more glamour, luxury, and laughter.

The Count was in the lobby talking to Vasily when he heard his name being called. It was Nina. She got right to the point and told the Count her visit was about her husband. They had been attending a conference on agricultural planning during which Leo, her husband, was arrested. She has learned he has been sentenced to five years of labor in Sevvostlag. She planned to follow him there but was not able to take her daughter, Sofia, with her. She promised the Count that she would come back for the girl in a month or two after she had gotten settled. She begged the Count to take her daughter as she had no one else to turn to.

Nina introduced Sofia and the Count before giving the Count a bag of Sofia’s things as well as a picture of Nina and her husband for the girl. She left quickly. The Count took Sofia upstairs to his rooms where she quickly fell asleep on his bed.

Analysis

Just like the Count told Helena’s portrait that life could take one by surprise, the Count is taken by surprise by life. He does not know that his reason for living comes in the form of Nina’s young daughter. The Count is, of course, a bit overwhelmed by the task of caring for the girl. “Granted it was only for a month or two. He would not be responsible for the girl’s education, her moral instruction, or her religious upbringing. But her health and comfort? He would be responsible for those even were he to care for her for one night” (234). Even though the Count realizes the seriousness of the job he has been given, he knows that even if he had more time to consider Nina’s request he would not have refused to help. Because Nina had been a friend to him, he feels he owes her the favor of caring for her daughter.

In reference to structure, it is notable that this change in the Count’s life comes at almost exactly the halfway mark in the book. It is as if the first half of the book has worked up to this change in the Count’s solitary life. Up to this point, even though he has been in the hotel, he has been able to live much like he pleased, staying out drinking and even spending time with his friends until early in the morning. For a short while, at least, the Count’s habits will have to change.

Of next significance in this section is Osip’s employment of the Count as a sort of advisor on the workings of the upper class, particularly in the West and in France and Britain. In addition to his job at the Boyarsky, this gives the Count the opportunity to



exercise his abilities to speak a variety of languages and his ability to interpret people and their desires.

The topic of identifying a gentleman comes up in Osip's conversation with the Count. Osip becomes interested in the Count's take on a gentleman when the Count is able to correctly guess Osip's rank in the military as well as the country from which he came. "It is the business of a gentleman to distinguish between men of rank," (207) the Count tells Osip when he asks how the Count is able to correctly guess his background. Because Osip senses that the Count does not think he is a gentleman, Osip asks what it is about him that keeps him out of that rank. The Count first tells Osip that he has proven that he is not a gentleman because a gentleman would not have asked such a question. The Count also points out that a gentleman would have served his guest before himself, he would not point at his guest with his fork while eating, and that he would not speak with his mouth full.

Notice the author's description of Osip. "His close-cropped hair revealed a scar above the left ear, which was presumably the result of a glancing blow that had hoped to cleave his skull" (205). This description will be used again later to identify Osip in a situation where he his proper name is not given, only his title and his description.

The author presents the Count as being very serious about the way in which the Boyarsky is run. This is proven by his act of comparing the Count to Napoleon, a military and political leader in France. The author indicates that when the Count gave the dining area of the restaurant a walk through before opening for business he appeared as "Napoleon must have appeared when in the hour before dawn he walked among his ranks" (203). The author, in fact, indicates that the Count might have more stress than Napoleon since for Napoleon, battles were fought only once. In the Boyarsky, each day is a new battle and everything has to be as perfect on that day as it had been on the prior one.

Changes in Russia have caused the bar, which the Count once considered a "chapel of prayer and reflection" (213), to become busy and boisterous. The Count notes three reasons why the bar has been revitalized. First, new rules in Russia allow for the playing of jazz music again. A jazz band plays in the bar lifting the spirits of the once quiet place. The bar is also frequented by journalists (foreign correspondents) who met there to share stories and enjoy themselves. Also adding to the popularity of the bar as a place for men particularly to hang out is the addition of three hostesses to the bar. The Count notes that the hostesses had been hired in order to eavesdrop on the men drinking there and then report to a Russian official the things they had heard.

The continued employment of literary techniques is used even in the description of jazz music. The Count believes the music "was a little unruly and prone to say the first thing that popped into its head, but generally of good humor and friendly intent" (216). The Count personifies the music by describing it in the way one might describe an acquaintance whom one has just met. The oranges that Andrey procures to make the special meal for himself, the Count, and Emile are also personified: "The orange, which was gaining in confidence, dashed behind the fennel, jumped from the counter, thudded



to the floor, and made a break for the exit” (220). The orange’s actions are described in the same way that one might describe the actions and intentions of a person escaping from prison.

Even though the Bishop has been promoted to assistant manager of the hotel, it appears that he still is trying to get revenge on the Count. When the Bishop stops the Count in the hallway on his way to the Boyarsky, “The two men took each other in from heel to hair — both practiced at confirming in a glance their worst suspicions of each other” (218). In this particular encounter, the Bishop threatens to keep the Count and his friends from making the special meal they had been waiting for three years to enjoy. Not only does the Bishop happen to run into the Count in the hallway, he also goes to the kitchen of the Boyarsky to see if he can catch the Count at any wrongdoing. The Bishop is such a coward that he allows himself to be run away from the kitchen when the cook threatens him with a stalk of celery.

Discussion Question 1

In a footnote, the author describes the end result of Nina and her friends’ attempts to help collectivize the farms in rural areas of Russia. What does this say about their plan? What affect do you think it had on Nina?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that the Count is contacted by a high ranking official in order to help him with relations between Russia and the West?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think the care of Nina’s daughter will mean for the Count and his way of life? Do you think this is his true purpose in life finally revealing itself?

Vocabulary

munitions, misanthrope, sanguine, deftly, periphery, behemoth, nuance, paucity, decadence, symbiosis, cavorting, esoteric, gregarious, collude, chicanery, periphery, innuendo, euphoria, surreptitiously, collude, antagonistic, precipitous, concede, stalwart, apparatchiks, fortitude



Book 3: “Adjustments” — “Addendum”

Summary

In the chapter “Adjustments,” the Count found Sofia unsettlingly quiet. Even though he counted himself as a seasoned conversationalist, the Count could find little to talk to the girl about. He felt that even though she was tiny, she had changed the dimensions of the room and seemed to always be where he needed to be. He came to the unsettling realization that he had become settled in his ways.

Sofia brought to him an envelope that had been slipped under his door. He had settled her in to look at a picture book and was in the process of washing up for the day when she came to him telling him she was done looking at the book and bringing the envelope.

When the clock finally chimed noon, the Count was happy with the chance to take Sofia downstairs for lunch. He noticed her looking at the clock and decided to tell her about it over lunch. Before he had the chance, however, she told him that she thought his clock was broken since it chimed only at noon. He explained to her it had been made to toll only at noon and midnight.

In the restaurant, Sofia sensed she was to be on good behavior. She mimicked the Count’s actions by putting her napkin in her lap and by thanking the waiter. When their food came, the Count noticed the waiter continued to hover by the table. He finally asked if he should cut Sofia’s meat for her. Reminded of how young Sofia was, the Count said he would take care of it.

The food seemed to give Sofia energy and she began to question the Count as he talked. He noticed that she was completely engaged in what he was saying to her. After they were finished, the waiter noticed that Sofia needed to use the bathroom. When he pointed this out to the Count, the Count felt as if he were a dunce.

In the chapter “Ascending, Alighting,” the Count asked Marina if she could watch Sofia during the hourly meeting for the Boyarsky staff. He went on to try to ask her if she would take over her care for him, but Marina indicated the Count was the one responsible for the girl.

As he made his way to his meeting, the Count tried to convince himself that he could care for Sofia. He believed it would take only some “minor adjustments” (249) to his life to make things work. Believing that his friends were looking out for him, the Count was relieved when they told him they had already arranged for his tables to be covered that night. They reminded him that he not only had a meeting with Osip, but also a meeting in the Red Room of which he was in charge.

Instead of meeting with Anna for a rendezvous as she had suggested on the envelope that Sofia had given him, the Count had borrowed suitcases from her. He used these



cases to get sheets, towels, blankets and pillows for Sofia. He additionally added an extra mattress to the room. In order to conserve space, he lofted the bed frame already in the room on tomato cans and slipped the extra mattress underneath. When he went to get Sofia, Marina offered to keep her while the Count was at work that evening.

Later that evening, the Count continued his classes with Osip. Although the colonel had read the book *Democracy in America* for the planned discussion, he threw the book against the wall when he learned that the Count had not read the book in its entirety. After Osip recovered from his anger, the Count explained that he had a young lady staying with him. Osip misunderstood until the Count indicated that his young lady was only about six.

Because he remembered the days when his children were six, Osip allowed the Count to go ahead and tend to her. Unlike the Count, however, Osip knew the Count would have to make more than just a few minor adjustments to his life in order to incorporate Sofia.

As he was running on his way to get Sofia, the Count ran directly into Mishka. He realized something of importance had happened and took his friend up to his room. Mishka went on to tell the Count he had been called in early to remove a passage from a book he had edited. This passage was about bread. The writer of the letter had praised the bread he ate in Berlin and indicated that Russians did not know that bread could be that good. Even though Mishka thought it was crazy, he marked out the passage and then left the room.

The Count told Mishka he had done what was right. He encouraged him to go back to his hotel, get something to eat and get some rest, and then come back the following day.

When the Count got Sofia from Marina's office that night it was clear she was ready to go back to the room. The Count believed she was ready for bed but instead she waited up to hear the chiming of the clock at midnight.

After she had heard the clock, Sofia went quickly to sleep. The Count stayed awake as his thoughts played through his mind. He was worried about Mishka and was afraid they had not heard the last of the fifty words he'd had to omit from the book. He was also worried about Nina. He also worried someone would discover Sofia was staying with him at the hotel. Finally, he was worried about what the two of them would do the following day.

The narrator indicates that the Count had good reason to be worried about Mishka. Although Mishka had decided that the Count was right about striking the words he had been asked to strike, his anger was reinitiated when he saw the statue of Maxim Gorky, one of Mishka's heroes, which had replaced the statue of Gogol. Mishka realized that instead of creating a new poetry for Russia, they had created a poetry of silence.

In his anger, Mishka went to the Goslitizdat's office and found the man who had asked him to cross out the fifty words. He accused that man of kissing up to the leadership of



Russia before heading back out the door, slamming it behind him. Because of his outburst, Mishka was exiled to Siberia.

Nina never returned from her trip east and was never heard from again. It was also noticed that the Count had a young child living with him. Because it was assumed the girl might have been the child of Anna and a Politburo member, no one from an orphanage was sent to pick Sofia up.

Back in his room on his first night with Sofia, the Count finally fell asleep by counting the number of times he went up and down the staircases that day. He counted fifty-nine trips.

In the "Addendum," Sofia woke to tell the Count that she had left her doll in Marina's room.

Analysis

In this section the Count is unsure of himself as he begins his new journey as Sofia's parent. Whether he knows it or not at this time, his journey with Sofia becomes his greatest purpose in life. While the Count believes he can make just a few minor adjustments in his life to accommodate the child, Osip, who has had small children, realizes what a major change the Count is looking at in his life.

The interpersonal relationship between Sofia and the Count lends a humorous tone to this section of the novel. Though the Count prides himself on being a gentleman and being able to converse with almost anyone, he is at a loss about how to deal with Sofia. He does not remember that he needs to cut up Sofia's meat and does not pick up on her need to go to the restroom. As a person who believed he was in tune with the needs of others, the Count falls very short on Sofia's needs.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the Count learning how to deal with a small child, Mishka has a breakdown that causes him to be sentenced to exile in Siberia.

A significant symbol in this section of the novel is the twice-tolling clock that the Count's father had specially made. The clock symbolizes Sofia's innocence. She assumes that since the clock only tolls twice, that it is broken. The Count is left trying to convince this small girl, who is very dependent on her own common sense, that the clock is supposed to toll only twice a day.

The fifty words that Mishka was asked to cut from the volume of letters he edited is another important symbol in the novel. These words are a symbol of the ease with which the leaders in the Russian government believe the people will be offended. Although Mishka thought that there was nothing offensive in the section of the letter he was asked to cut he at first agreed to cut the part. Later, after Mishka has had time to think about what he is being forced to do, he becomes angry and lashes out at the man who is his overseer. It is for this outburst that Mishka is ordered to be exiled to Siberia.



When Mishka is first asked to remove the passage from the book, he asks his editor what he should do with it: “And once I have taken out this little passage of the sixth of June, where shall you have me put it? In the bank? In a dresser drawer? In Lenin’s tomb?” (264). While the man tells Mishka he does not care if Mishka shoots “the passage from a cannon for all he cares” (265) there is foreshadowing of what will happen to the passage. “And the offending passage, hearing of its pending fate, could have climbed out a window and escaped down an alley never to be heard from again — that is, until it reappeared ten years later on the arm of a French countess, wearing a pince-nez and the Légion d’honneur” (265). This quote not only is foreshadowing what will happen with the passage, it is also an example of personification because the passage is given characteristics of an animate object.

Another example of the use of a literary technique in this section of the novel comes with the narrator’s description of the Count’s attempt to find a place for both himself and Sofia to sleep in his small room. The Count brings a second mattress into the room but once he gets it on the floor “it spread out its limbs, claiming every spare inch of the floor,” (251) a personification of the mattress.

A simile is used to compare the Count’s sense that Sofia is getting the best of him to the actions of a cat. As the Count comes to realize that Sofia had defeated him, his sense of defeat is described as “slinking slowly toward him like a cat across the lawn; and the name of this cat was Defeat” (256).

One fear that the Count has when he realizes that Sofia will be living with him full time is the fear that someone will alert the authorities that he has a child living with him. Even though he may never have known that someone did turn him in, Sofia is never taken away from him. It can be assumed since the Bishop is the only one who seems to have any reason to hurt the Count that he is the one who told the authorities about Sofia. It is significant that it is the Count’s association with Anna that keeps the authorities from taking Sofia from him and sending her to an orphanage. It is because the authorities fear that Sofia might be the illegitimate daughter of a member of the Politburo that keeps them from doing anything about the child.

Discussion Question 1

How does the addition of Sofia add a new dimension to the story? How does it affect the Count’s personality?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the fit that Mishka throws because of the passages he is asked to remove from his book. Do you think Mishka handled his disagreement the correct way?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Marina discourage the Count from trying to pawn Sofia off on her? Why do you think that she insists that the Count care for Sofia?

Vocabulary

recalcitrant, mordant, piqued, delve, congenial, query, paradoxes, remonstrance, profligate, cavalcade, contritely, confluence, idioms, remiss, acclimatize, erudition, paragon, elision, discrepancy, concision, denouement, paramour, pernicious, litany, salient



Book 3: “1946” — “Addendum”

Summary

Eight years after he was exiled to Siberia, Mishka returned to Moscow. On that day he watched as nearly 150 people stood in line to visit Lenin’s tomb. He noted that the people of Russia had at least learned how to stand in line during the years of what he had believed would be the age of enlightenment in the country.

Mishka was surprised so many of the familiar buildings of Moscow still stood, especially since five years before the Germans had intended to capture Moscow. The country was in the middle of transferring the capital of the country out of Moscow when Stalin arrived in the city in full military dress. He told the other members of the Party that they could leave if they would like but that he was going nowhere.

In the chapter “Antics, Antitheses, an Accident,” the Count was summoned to the Bishop’s office. The Bishop asked questions in a roundabout way to find out if the Count knew anything about an incident where some geese had caused a commotion on the fourth floor of the hotel. The Count had personally witnessed the disturbance with the geese. The Bishop told the Count he would find out who had set the geese free in the hotel.

Later, the Count remembered a phrase the Bishop had used, “a certain childishness” (281) and realized he was accusing Sofia of setting the geese free. The Count did not believe Sofia had anything to do with the geese and thought anyone who worked at the hotel would agree. Most of the employees, he believed, would describe Sofia as being “demure” (282).

The Count did realize that Sofia was very protective of Emile and that she was aware that a Swiss diplomat had questioned the freshness of the poultry served at the restaurant. For practical matters, the Count could not imagine how Sofia would have gotten the three geese to the fourth floor of the hotel.

The Count described the one game that Sofia was in the habit of playing with him. They could be sitting together reading in the study when the Count would leave for his weekly appointment with the barber. By the time he reached the barber shop, he would discover Sofia already there quietly reading on the bench. It never failed to surprise the Count.

The day the geese were set free, the Count had left Sofia in the lobby reading but discovered her at his desk when he arrived upstairs in his study. He learned she was reading the essays of Montaigne and had put Anna Karenina in its place under the three-legged bureau.

Later, at the meeting of the Triumvirate, Emile and Andrey agreed with the Count that Sofia was not responsible for the fiasco with the geese. It was at this point that Andrey



chose to tell the Count that someone needed to clean out the dumbwaiter because it was full of feathers.

The Count started to reply to this but was interrupted by a knock on the door. It was Ilya with his spoon. Even though he had not worked at the restaurant long, Ilya was promoted to sous-chef when he was only 19. He was given a spoon as a symbol of his qualifications. Ilya pointed toward a man in a ragged coat whom he had let into the kitchen. Emile took the spoon from the young man and began to berate him for letting the beggar in but he stopped when Ilya told him the man had asked for the Count.

As soon as the Emile and Andrey learned the man was Mishka, they knew he was the Count's close friend. Emile allowed the two to use his office to talk. He brought them bread and salt, symbols of hospitality among the Russians. The Count was disturbed by the way Mishka looked because he saw not just the normal signs of aging in Mishka but also the effects of abuse at the hands of other Russians. Mishka admitted that he had borrowed another man's passport in order to visit Moscow. He would return to Yavas later that night.

The Count noticed that Mishka had developed a sarcastic attitude. Mishka told the Count he had thought of one more contribution the Russians had made to Western culture. He believed this was the burning of Moscow and noted that Russians were unusually good at destroying what they had created. He described how their most famous paintings depicted a father who was thinking about killing his son and one who had just killed his son. They destroyed their own churches and removed the names and images of old heroes from history. Poets were killed.

After he had dreamed of Mayakovsky, Mishka realized his country's ability to destroy what it created might not be a bad thing but instead a sign that they believe more strongly than others in the influence these items might have on people. Mishka told the Count he was not thinking of killing himself but was in reality working on a project. Although he was not ready to talk about it yet, he said the Count would be the first person who would know about the project when it was finished. When Mishka left, both Andrey and Emile wished him well. Mishka turned to the Count and told him that when he had been sentenced to the Metropol, he had "become the luckiest man in all of Russia" (292).

Osip and the Count had been studying America through American made movies. Osip pointed out to the Count that the movies appeared to be a way that the American aristocracy had found to placate the working class of people. He reasoned it was because the people could go and watch movies that they never revolted against the aristocracy, even during the years of the depression.

During the viewing the night after the Count visited with Mishka, the Count asked Osip his opinion of the Russians who were brutes who were willing to destroy what they created. Osip was frustrated by the Count's interruption of the movie but stopped the film to talk to the Count. Once Osip had heard what Mishka said, he suggested that perhaps Mishka was only partially correct. He suggested that the Russians destroy their



heritage because they know that is what needs to happen in order for them to progress. Osip went on to say that every country, even America, had to pay a cost in order to make advancements.

Later, the Count met Richard Vanderwhile at the bar. Richard told the Count that while he loved Russia, he did not understand the cocktails served there. He believed a cocktail should consist of only two ingredients. He commented that the Count seemed to be troubled by something and asked if he would like to unburden his mind. When the Count explained what Mishka had said about the Russians' aptitude toward destruction and the conclusions both Mishka and Osip had drawn from that statement, Richard said he believed they were both missing something. He was of the mindset that grand things would persist and gave an example of Socrates who told others about his ideas, but never took the time to even write them down. Despite that and all the years that have passed, the knowledge of Socrates is still alive and well.

When the Count left the bar, he was surprised that Sofia was still reading in the lobby. Believing she intended to play her game with him, he hurried to his room, believing he would make it there ahead of her. When he arrived in the room, however, Sofia was not there. He sat in a chair and pretended to read as he waited for her. When the door finally opened, it was one of the chambermaids telling the Count that Sofia had fallen.

The Count found her on the stairs, bleeding and unconscious. Instead of allowing the chambermaid to go for a doctor, the Count picked Sofia up and went outside. The doorman looked at the Count in shock but hailed a taxi when the Count requested it.

The Count asked the driver to go to St. Anselm's, the best hospital. When he arrived, the Count realized this hospital had been neglected when new ones were built. It was now a clinic for veterans and the homeless.

An internist called for a doctor and took Sofia and the Count to a surgery room. Just as the shabby looking surgeon entered the operating room and the Count was asking if he was capable of performing surgery, another man entered the room. The man introduced himself as the chief of surgery at First Municipal. The doctor explained the prognosis to the Count and then had him ushered out of the surgical room. Sofia had a skull fracture. The main concern was that there would be swelling.

When the surgeon spoke with the Count after the surgery, he said the risk of swelling had been alleviated. He promised Sofia would be up and about in a week. He added that Sofia should have no mental or personality changes because of her accident.

Osip entered the hall where the Count and the surgeon were talking. Osip told the Count that Sofia would be taken to First Municipal the following day. He also warned the Count that it was not safe for him to stay there any longer. Since he had found out what had happened to Sofia, he knew others would too. He instructed the Count to go out the back door to the alley where two men would take him back to the hotel. When the Count balked at leaving Sofia, Osip said he had asked Marina to stay with Sofia until she was ready to go home.



Back in his room, the Count found a gift left for him there by Richard. It is a portable record player with a stack of records inside.

In the “Addendum,” Andrey was on his way home after having visited Sofia. At home, he stopped and opened the door of the room of Ilya, his only child. The boy had been killed in the Battle of Berlin. Although the room had once been a comfort to him and his wife, Andrey believed it had come to the point where it was just keeping their grief alive.

Analysis

Time has moved forward eight years since the Count received care of Sophia and Mishka was sent to Siberia. Changes are seen in both the Count and Sofia. They have both gotten older. Mishka has changed as well. When the Count sees Mishka again, he notes that it is not just age that has affected his friend, but also abuse. “Here were the marks of one man upon another, of an era upon its offspring” (288). Mishka has lost weight and walks with a limp. Mishka’s earnestness has also given way to a sarcastic attitude.

The chapter “1946” opens with Mishka walking back into Moscow after having been gone for eight years. This look through Mishka’s eyes is important because the Count’s inability to leave the Metropol limits what he can describe to what he witnesses in the hotel and what others tell him. Mishka is surprised that so little of Moscow has changed physically. Intellectually, the country has not gone in the direction he hoped. Because Mishka had believed the age following the revolution would be a new age of enlightenment, he is deeply disappointed with the direction the country has taken. He believes the only thing the people have learned to do is stand in line.

When Mishka meets with the Count during his visit to Moscow, Mishka introduces the Count to an idea that haunts the Count. This is the idea that the Russians are one of the few people who are “unusually adept at destroying that which we have created” (290). What seems to bother the Count the most is Mishka’s reference to the Russians as being “brutish” (290) in the way they believe nothing is too valuable to be destroyed. Mishka comes to the conclusion that the Russians destroy not because they have no culture but because “we believe more than any of them in the power of the picture, the poem, the prayer, or the person” (291).

The Count is so disturbed by Mishka’s statement that he tells Osip about the ideas that Mishka had proposed to him. Osip suggests that Mishka is “right in his opinions while being wrong in his sentiments” (296). Osip suggests that the things that represent the old ways have to be cleared away so that a people can progress.

Still not satisfied with the answers he has gotten to his quandary so far, the Count proposes his questions to Richard. While Richard agrees with both Mishka and Osip that the Russians do have a habit of destroying their culture, he believes that the truly grand things, like the teachings of Socrates, will persist past this destruction.



Illustrating the idea that there is a time when things need to be cleaned out in order for people to move ahead is echoed in the “Addendum.” Andrey’s son was killed in the war and his parents have kept his room just like it was. For a while, Andrey believed keeping the room as it was helped both he and his wife to deal with their grief. After a certain amount of time has passed, Andrey feels it is time to clear out the room. He believes the act of keeping the room was just a reminder of what they had lost and seemed to be encouraging them to hang onto their grief.

The way the country has changed since the Count was imprisoned in the Metropol (he has been there 24 years at this point) is shown clearly when the Count takes Sofia to the hospital. The hospital that had once been the best in the city has been demoted since newer, better hospitals have been built. The hospital at which the Count arrives with his daughter is run down and does not appear to have a good doctor on call. “By now, the Bolsheviks had presumably built new hospitals — modern, bright, and clean — and this old facility had been left behind as some sort of clinic for veterans, the homeless, and the otherwise forsaken” (305).

A change that has taken place inside the hotel is the Bishop’s promotion to manager of the hotel. The change is visible because “the delightful hunting scenes that had once adorned the mahogany panels had been replaced, of course, with portraits of Messrs. Stalin, Lenin, and Marx” (278). Instead of paying homage to hunting, a sport once enjoyed by gentleman, the pictures in the office now bear the images of important Russian leaders.

Although Sofia is not the Count’s biological child, he has come to defend her and turn a blind spot to her faults just like a natural parent would do. When he senses that the Bishop believes that Sofia was responsible for three geese set free on the fourth floor of the hotel, the Count goes to his friends for confirmation that Sofia was not capable of doing such a thing. “Is such behavior even in her character?” (285) the Count asks his friends Emile and Andrey. Although they agree the Sofia could not have done such a thing, Andrey makes a point to tell the Count that the dumbwaiter needs to have the goose feathers swept out of it, a gentle hint that it could indeed have been Sofia who got the geese up to the fourth floor by the use of the dumbwaiter.

The Count’s unconditional love for Sofia is also demonstrated by his act of running out of the hotel to get her to a hospital. He does not think about himself or the fact he has been promised he would be shot if he ever left the hotel. His concern is for Sofia alone. It is Osip who has to convince the Count to go back to the hotel and trust Marina to look after Sofia while she is in the hospital.

The author uses hyperbole when he relates the Count’s reaction to the Bishop’s question about the incident with the geese. “One might just as well ask if Noah was aware of the Flood, or Adam the Apple. Of course he was aware” (281). The Count’s reaction indicates that it would be impossible for the Count not know about the geese. Hyperbole, or exaggeration, is also seen in the description of the geese incident: “The immediate impression was of fifteen voices shouting in twenty languages” (279). How



can fifteen voices speak in twenty different languages? The incident is capped off when the American general catches the birds but his robe comes untied, displaying his briefs.

An important symbol that re-emerges in this section of the novel is the book of Essays by Montaigne. Although the Count had preferred Anna Karenina to the Essays, his daughter is of a different mind. While the Count had seen the book as being best suited for holding up his dresser, which was missing a leg, Sofia appears to enjoy reading the book. In fact, she upsets the Count by exchanging the Essays with Anna Karenina. He tells Sofia, "All I can say is that Anna Karenina would never have put you under a bureau just because you happened to be as thick as Montaigne" (284). In this comment, the Count treats the fictional character of Anna Karenina as if she were real.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Sofia was responsible for the geese on the fourth floor of the hotel? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Mishka's idea that the Russians are unusually adept at destroying things they have created. Which reason do you think best describes why they destroy their creations?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author incorporate humor into the novel?

Vocabulary

constituency, itinerant, defoliated, demitasse, perfunctory, traversed, pontifically, contingent, stymied, gregarious, demure, idiosyncratic, figments, progeny, sacrosanct, auspices, rapacious, dexterity, erudition



Book 4: “1950: Adagio, Andante, Allegro” — “1952: America”

Summary

In the chapter “1950: Adagio, Andante, Allegro,” the Count talked to Vasily about the freedom he believed that children, such as Sofia, who had just turned seventeen, should be given and the way he believed a parent should remain composed if his child did not act as he thought she should. Just after he gave that speech, the Count learned that Sofia was in the ballroom with Viktor Stepanovich, the conductor of the orchestra at the Piazza.

The Count entered that room and believed he had caught Stepanovich and Sofia in an embrace. He picked the man up by his collar even as Stepanovich tried to tell him there had been a mistake. Sofia told her father that Stepanovich was teaching her how to play the piano.

Sofia demonstrated by playing one of Chopin’s opuses. The Count was astonished by her ability. After Stepanovich left the ballroom, the Count asked Sofia why she had never told him that she was taking piano lessons. Since he sensed the sadness in her playing, the Count asked Sofia if everything was okay. She told him that she thought about how her memories of her mother were fading when she played the song--a technique that Stepanovich said was getting in the mood. The Count understood because he felt the same way about his sister.

Later, the Count told Vanderwhile the story of how Sofia came to be taking lessons from the conductor of the Piazza’s orchestra. The Count told Vanderwhile that Sofia had learned the pieces she had played up to that point by listening to the records that Vanderwhile had given him and figuring out the notes.

The chapter ends with the Count’s memory of a story his father had told him about the moths of Manchester. This tale described how the species evolved over time in order to stay alive. The Count compared the way people must adapt their passions in order to make a living to the way that the moths had to adapt in order to stay alive.

In the chapter “1952: America,” the Count and Sofia were surprised to be interrupted during their dinner by an eminent professor who was staying at the Metropol. The professor told the Count that he admired the Count’s poem and wished he would join him in his room for a nightcap.

Later, as they ate, Sofia pointed out that Anna Urbanova was in the restaurant. She asked the Count why he never invited her to join them for their meals. The Count pretended not to know who Anna was, but Sofia made it clear she knew about their relationship. Sofia went on to tell the Count that Anna believed that he was set in his



ways. The Count left the restaurant, pretending to be angry with the others for gossiping about him.

The Count met Anna as he was headed for the staircase and she was waiting for an elevator. He told her that he could not believe she was having secret conversations with Sofia. She responded they were not secret; they just happened while he was at work.

When the Count entered the professor's room, he was surprised to see Richard there. The professor closed the doors to the room, leaving the Count and Richard alone. Richard told the Count that he had been given a promotion and would be working at the embassy in Paris. Richard compared the relations between Russia and France at that time as being like a tennis game. He expressed the concern, however, that when Stalin passed from power, the French were afraid things would become unpredictable. Although it appeared that Richard wanted the Count to spy on leaders and share information about who might be the next leader, the Count asked Richard that they not talk about spying again.

It was about nine months after the conversation between Richard and the Count that Stalin died. Just as Richard had suspected, there was no plan for a leader to replace Stalin. There were, however, eight men eligible to rule the nation.

Analysis

The focus of this section is upon the Count as a parent. Four more years have passed since the Count has had custody of Sofia so it can be assumed that she is about seventeen.

Timing is at the heart of the humor in the encounter between the Count and Stepanovich. The Count has just finished sharing with Vasily his opinion of parenting a child on the cusp of becoming an adult when he reacts in a completely opposite manner than the one he prescribed to in his speech. The Count has told Vasily, "we must have faith in them to tuck and button on their own. And if they fumble with their newfound liberty, we must remain composed, generous, judicious" (322). When the Count finds Sofia and Stepanovich together, his reaction is not composed, generous, or judicious. In fact he jumps to the conclusion they are in an amorous embrace when in reality Stepanovich is teaching Sofia how to play the piano.

Also humorous is the position in which the Count finds himself once he has grabbed Stepanovich by the lapels and lifted him from the floor. The Count thinks to himself that if he had grabbed Stepanovich by the scruff of the neck "you can carry him out the door and toss him down the stairs. But when you have him by the lapels, he isn't so easy to dispense with" (324). When the Count takes the time to notice he realizes the two have been sitting on a piano bench, not a loveseat and had their hands on the keyboard.

In this section Sofia takes the opportunity to give her father grief because of his relationship with Anna. Even though the Count has not told her that he is having a relationship with Anna, Sofia has found out what is going on. In order to let her father



know that she is aware of his love interest, she suggests one night that he invite Anna to come eat with them. She goes on to tell him that she has had conversations with Anna about him and has also talked to Marina about his unwillingness to acknowledge that Anna is part of his life. As a gentleman, the Count is frustrated by this new knowledge that people have been talking about him. “As the Count marched down the hallway, he could not help but observe to himself that there was a time, not long before, when a gentleman could expect a measure of privacy in his personal affairs” (344). Humorous is the ungentlemanly way that the Count reacts to the knowledge that his daughter and others have been talking about his love life. He snaps at the waiter, shouts at Andrey, and then dumps his napkin onto his plate when Andrey comes to ask how his dinner is.

The Count is approached in this section by Richard with a request to share with Richard inside information about who might be the next leader of Russia. Interesting is that the Count appears to turn Richard down. He refuses to discuss the matter on the terms that he does not like sharing gossip--especially not about his country, with the leaders of other countries.

The continued use of literary devices in this section of the novel further develops character, setting, and theme. The author uses personification of the notes of the Chopin opus in this quote: “Why, he would have known them if he hadn’t seen them in thirty years and they happened to enter his compartment on a train. He would have known them if he bumped into them on the streets of Florence at the height of the season” (325). Both a simile and Biblical allusion are used to compare the Count’s first impression of Stepanovich to the snake from the Christian story of the Garden of Eden: “He was clearly as villainous a viper as had ever slithered from the underbrush of Eden,” (323) the Count thinks of Stepanovich when he first believes that man is making advances on Sofia.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that the Count refuses to comply with Richard’s request? What does this say about the Count’s personality and his allegiance as a Russian?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Marina’s description of the Count as someone who liked to keep his “buttons in their boxes” (343). Do you agree with this description?

Discussion Question 3

In a conversation between Anna and the Count, the Count says to Anna “These are the greatest of conveniences, Anushka — and at one time, I had them all. But in the end, it has been the inconveniences that have mattered to me most” (352). What do you think the Count means by this?

Vocabulary

interlocutor, indelibly, umbrage, blithely, conundrum, trepidation, evocative, repertoire, tenure, annals, aberrations, pragmatic, connive, interstice, viable, clandestine, parapet, flippant, quixotic



Book 4: “1953: Apostles and Apostates”

Summary

In the chapter “1953: Apostles and Apostates,” the Count waited impatiently for Sofia to return from her school contest. It had been a frustrating day for the Count. First, the assistant manager had introduced new ways of taking, placing, and billing orders that involved everything being written down on paper. The customers were unhappy with the new procedures because after all the paperwork was finished, their food arrived at their table cold.

The Count tried to present his concerns with the system to the Bishop but came away even more frustrated when the Bishop suggested the new system had been put into effect because he suspected that items of food were being stolen from the kitchen. The Bishop suggested to the Count that he should pass this information along to Emile and to Andrey. The Count said he would do so at their next meeting. This statement alerted the fact that the three men were holding meetings.

Anna and Sofia finally hurried into the study with Anna proclaiming that Sofia had won. Although he interrupted often, Anna described the genius of Sofia’s performance and the wonderful reception that she received. The Count had champagne ready to toast Sofia and the beginning of what he called her “grand adventure” (360).

They heard noises and suspected someone was in the Count’s bedroom. Slipping out of the closet, he discovered Emile and Andrey there with a cake shaped like a piano. He surprised the two so much that Emile dropped the cake but Andrey caught it. Emile demanded to know what the Count had been doing in the closet. Knowing he had little choice, the Count invited them into the closet, telling them that Sofia would be happy to see them.

Once they had gotten over their shock of seeing the study and finding Anna, the movie star inside that study, the group celebrated Sofia’s success until they were interrupted by Vasily. Vasily told the Count that the Bishop was on his way to the Count’s bedroom. Vasily said a man had come to the hotel and asked for the Count. The Bishop had met the man as if he had been expecting him and had invited him there.

Once they arrived in the Count’s room, the man introduced himself as the director of the Red October Youth Orchestra. He had attended the performance and wanted Sofia as the orchestra’s second pianist. When the Count told the man that he did not think Sofia would be interested in the offer, the Count was told that Sofia was not to be given a choice in the matter. When the Bishop commented on how excited the Count must be, the Count noticed there was a look of spite in the man’s eyes.

The Count stepped toward the Bishop in a threatening way when Anna stepped into the room from the closet. Both the Bishop and the orchestra director were surprised by her



entrance. Anna suggested that the director might know the Minister of Culture. When the director said he had never had the honor of meeting the Minister of Culture, Anna suggested that the minister had taken an interest in Sofia and her music. She believed the minister had plans for Sofia in the capital. The director apologized and took the letter from the Count that he had given him demanding that Sofia report for duty with the orchestra.

After the Bishop and director left, the group decided to take their party downstairs. The others went ahead of the Count. He was stopped by a woman who had been waiting for him in the hallway. She introduced herself as Katerina Litvinova and the Count realized she was Mishka's friend. They sat down in the study and the Count guessed that Katerina had come because Mishka was dead. Katerina told the Count that she and Mishka had renewed their relationship after her husband had died.

When Katerina credited the Count with being a fine poet like Mishka, the Count told her that he had never written any poems. The poem for which he had been imprisoned under house arrest was written by Mishka. They had put the Count's name on it because they believed he would not be punished as severely as Mishka would be because of Mishka's background. Because he would have been shot in 1922, the Count explained to Katerina that the life that was saved was actually his, not Mishka's.

Katerina gave the Count a package. She told him that Mishka had wanted her to deliver it in person. It was the final project on which Mishka had been working. After she left, the Count opened the package and saw that the name of the book was *Bread and Salt*. The book contained a variety of quotes, all containing the word "bread." The book ended with the quote about bread that Mishka had been forced to cut from his work involving Chekhov's letters.

Before the Count had even finished reading the book, he cried for his old friend and the way life had been so unfair to him. When he finished the book, he thought instead of Katerina, whom Mishka had once described as "this firefly, this pinwheel," (375) and how she could come to a point in her life where it did not matter where she was going.

Analysis

The reader makes an important discovery in this section of the novel. It was not the Count, but instead Mishka, who had written the poem that got the Count put on house arrest. The Count had agreed to take the blame for the poem because he felt he would be punished less severely than Mishka would be. As the Count tells Katerina "But for that poem, they would have shot me back in 1922," (369) he implies that if he had not been on house arrest, he would have been shot like other aristocrats.

The Count is deeply bothered by a pair of things that happen the night of Sofia's rehearsal. First, the Bishop manages to get Sofia a position in the Red October Youth Orchestra. Had Anna not used her influence, Sofia would have had no choice but to go to Stalingrad where the orchestra performs. The Count realizes that the Bishop had



contacted the orchestra and that he was trying to take Sofia away from him. As the director from the Red October Youth Orchestra talks to the Count, the Count “saw the flash of spite in the Bishop’s smile, and just like that the Count’s feelings of nausea and bewilderment were gone — having been replaced by a cold fury” (364). It is at this point that the Count realizes that the Bishop has an active vendetta against the Count and does not care if he hurts Sofia in the process.

The second thing that bothers the Count is his meeting with Katerina. He is most disturbed when he remembers how Mishka had described Katerina as a talented poet. He had also shared with the Count her energy and love of life. The person whom the Count meets the night that Katerina brings Mishka’s project to him is nothing like the girl whom Mishka described. The Count sees the same possible future for Sofia.

A significant symbol that reappears in this section is the 50 words that Mishka was forced to cut out of the volume of letters that he was asked to edit. Mishka builds his project around these fifty words. He has collected quotes that contain bread with these quotes capped off with the quote he was forced to cut.

As manager of the hotel, the Bishop has begun new methods of keeping track of the food in the restaurant. Where waiters were once taught to take orders by memory, they are required by the Bishop to write down the orders on paper. These papers have to be checked by bookkeeping and logged. By the time the food is released from the kitchen by the paper requirements, the patrons of the Boyarsky are served cold food.

Notable is the author’s use of hyperbole when he describes the way the Count feels when he is waiting to hear the results of Sofia’s competition. “The Count had been waiting for at least two hours. He had paced over twenty miles” (354). The Count has even gone so far as to decide that his father’s clock is no longer working properly until he hears the chiming of another clock outside the hotel.

In this section the author has fun with the “sight gag” of people going into and out of the Count’s closet. The reader, of course, and a few others knew that the Count has expanded his living quarters to an adjoining room. He accesses this room through the closet. When Anna walks out of the closet to confront the Bishop and the director of the youth orchestra, it could be explained that she was “meeting” with the Count and had slipped into the closet to hide. Because Emile knows the Count better, he demands to know why the Count was in the closet. Since there is no reasonable excuse for the Count to have been hiding in his own closet, the Count shows Emile and Andrey his secret study.

Discussion Question 1

What does it mean that the Count chose to take the punishment for Mishka’s poem? How did it benefit Mishka? How did it benefit the Count?



Discussion Question 2

Why is the Count so disturbed by Katerina's response to him that it does not matter where she is going?

Discussion Question 3

How do the Bishop's actions of getting Sofia requisitioned to the Red October Youth Orchestra change your opinion of him?

Vocabulary

soliloquy, tepid, emanating, posterity, aspic, vigilant, suffice, pointillist, comporting, demeanor, chagrin



Book 5: “1954: Applause and Acclaim” — “Adulthood”

Summary

In the chapter “1954: Applause and Acclaim,” Sofia had been invited to Paris to perform thanks to the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. Emile, Andrey, and the Count were discussing this opportunity when the Bishop came into the kitchen to attend the daily meeting of the Boyarsky’s staff.

After the meeting was finished and the other members of the staff had cleared from the room, the Count snuck back into the dining area to look at the reservation book. He finally found a meeting of the Presidium and the Council of Ministers that would fit what he needed. He had resolved to take action when Katerina had visited him six months prior but it was with the news of the goodwill tour that he was able to put his plan into action.

In the bar that evening, the Count celebrated the way fate had put together circumstances in a way to benefit him. Just as he had sat down his drink, Stepanovich ran into the bar and warned the Count he believed his decision would hamper Sofia’s hopes of a future in music. Stepanovich told the Count he had learned that Sofia had declined the invitation to go to Paris. The Count was shocked by the news. Stepanovich begged the Count to try to change Sofia’s mind. The Count talked to Sofia over dinner and persuaded her to travel with the orchestra to Paris.

In the chapter “Achilles Agonistes,” the Count went to the barber for a trim. He had left a note at the front desk in which he had written that the manager needed to see the barber in his office immediately. While the barber was gone, the Count took the black bottle that a former hairdresser had called the “Fountain of Youth” (394). After returning from the barber, the Count took a Paris tour guide and cut out the map. He drew a red line on that map. Then, he got the copy of Montaigne’s Essays and began cutting through the pages of that book.

In the chapter “Arrivederci,” the Count snuck into the suite belonging to an Italian couple. He took a pair of pants from the man’s closet as well as a white oxford. He later went over his checklist in the bar. One thing he had not yet accounted for was a way to send notice since it would not be possible to send a telegram.

The Count was interested by the American, Pudgy Webster, and waited in that man’s room for him. The Count told Pudgy that he had a letter he needed delivered to Richard in Paris. Even though Pudgy had at first tried to discourage the Count by telling him he had an early appointment, he wound up offering the Count a glass of brandy.



Being slightly drunk, the Count decided to visit the Italians' room again and get the newsboy hat he had neglected to pick up at first. As he was in the room, the couple returned. The Count hid in the closet. He made noise getting out of the closet and woke the sleeping couple but made his way out of the room before they recognized him.

In the chapter "Adulthood," Anna, Marina, and Sofia prepared to show the Count Sofia's performance dress for the first time. At first glance, he believed Sofia had crossed the threshold into adulthood. The Count was outraged, however, because the back of the dress was cut very low. Anna added a sapphire choker which she believed completed the outfit.

Later that day at the meeting of the Boyarsky's staff, which had been moved to the Bishop's office, the Bishop suggested it should be Andrey who would oversee the meeting of the Presidium and the Council of Ministers. The Count was disturbed by the Bishop's freedom in making arrangements. After the meeting, he pulled Andrey aside.

Analysis

In this section the Count goes about collecting a variety of strange items. His list includes a man's shirt, pants, and hat; a bottle of hair dye; and a map of Paris. The author leaves the reader in suspense because he does not include the locations that the Count notes on the map of Paris. It can be assumed that the Count has some plans for Sofia since his plan seems to turn on Sofia's decision to go to Paris.

The author continues to use humor to lighten the tone of the novel. One particularly humorous scene comes when the Count is in the Italians' room when they return. Not only is the Count in a bad position, but he is also slightly drunk. It is his drunkenness that causes him to be reckless and enter the Italians' room. As he waits in the closet, he worries that he will have to use the bathroom before the couple settles in to sleep.

The author also continues to use the Bishop as a character of comic relief. The Count has described the man as having an ecclesiastical smile and moving only on the bias. When he sits down to rule over the traditional daily meeting of the Count, Emile, and Andrey, the Count notices a change in the Bishop. "'Shall we begin?' This shockingly straightforward question came from none other than the man who ate, drank, and slept on the bias" (405).

Literary devices are also used frequently in this section of the novel. Similes are among the most frequently used techniques. When Andrey, Emile, and the Count discuss Sofia's trip to Paris they wonder what that city is like. "'Do you think it has changed?' wondered Andrey. 'Yes,' said Emile. 'As much as the pyramids'" (380). Just like the pyramids, which have existed for thousands of years and have not changed, Emile doubts that Paris has changed either.

In another section of the novel, the narrator explains why the Count has stopped drinking late at night. It is indicated that "Ever since turning sixty, the Count had generally refrained from alcohol after eleven, having found that late-night drinks, like



unsettled children, were likely to wake you at three or four in the morning” (396). In this simile, the narrator compares late night drinks to children, both of which are likely to wake the Count in the middle of the night. There is also a return to alliteration when the Count considers how probable it is that the plans he is making might not happen as he wants them to. “The designs of men are notoriously subservient to happenstance, hesitation, and haste,” (383) the Count thinks to himself as he wonders how fate has arranged things so perfectly for him.

A significant object that resurfaces in this section of the novel is the copy of Montaigne’s Essays. One of the things that the Count does in preparation for the plans he has made is to cut a cavity into the pages of this book.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the things that the Count gathers in this section of the novel. What do you think that he has in mind to do with these things?

Discussion Question 2

What argument does the Count use to convince Sofia to go to Paris to participate in the Goodwill concert?

Discussion Question 3

Compare the atmosphere of the Triumvirate before the Bishop was involved and after he began leading these meetings. Why does the author allow the Bishop to become involved in these meetings? What does it add to the novel?

Vocabulary

obviate, denizens, prerogative, trepidation, moniker, alacrity, patina, conundrum, malaise, penultimate, rudiments, liaisons, compunction, carafe, penitent, vertiginous, nadir, trepidation, stodgy, abdicate



Book 5: “An Announcement” — “Antagonists at Arms (And an Absolution)”

Summary

In the chapter “An Announcement,” the Count arranged to serve at the combined dinner of the Presidium and the Council of Ministers by talking Andrey into telling Emile that his palsy in his hands had suddenly gotten much worse. As a result, a liaison from the Kremlin shared with the Count the guest list. The Count knew the personalities of many of the people on that list from having served them at the Boyarsky. When the Count learned there would be no required seating arrangement, he believed the evening would be a success both for himself and for the leaders.

The Count was happy to hear there was not going to be a seating arrangement because he believed the spontaneous arrangement the attendees showed would “tell the studious observer all he needed to know about the governance of Russia for the next twenty years” (411). The Count believed it was his business to overhear what the people sitting at the table were talking about.

Near the end of the meal, an announcement was made by Malyshev. He told the people gathered there that the Obninsk facility had become fully functional that week. As they watched, part of Moscow grew dark as preparations were made to switch the grid to nuclear power. The narrator notes that the only place in the city that was not disrupted by this disturbance in power was the Boyarsky, since that restaurant used candles as its form of lighting.

In the chapter “Anecdotes,” the Count had told Sofia his plans for her. She was upset because he had waited so long to tell her what he had in mind. He finally asked Sofia to trust him that he was acting in her best interests. She was unable to refuse this request.

The following day the count was feeling relief that everything was in order when the door to his room suddenly opened. Sofia announced that the venue for the concert in Paris had been changed. The Count took the change in stride and drew Sofia out a new map.

The Count and Sofia enjoyed a special dinner that night in the study. The meal was served by Andrey who called it “Goose a la Sofia” in a jab at the geese Sofia had put into the dumbwaiter so many years before. The Count told stories and waited until the end of their visit to give his advice. He also gave Sofia the picture of himself and Mishka. At the end of their conversation, the Count told Sofia that life had required him to be at one particular place only one time: that was when Nina had left Sofia with him at the Metropol.



Marina came at 10 p.m. to escort Sofia from the hotel. The Count went to the front door with them where Sofia and the Count said their goodbyes. When he returned to his room, the Count was unsettled by the emptiness.

In the chapter “An Association,” Osip and the Count, who had abandoned their habit of meeting monthly, happened to see one another at the Boyarsky. The Count suggested they should get together to watch a movie. The Count named a date and suggested they watch *Casablanca*. The Count was unable to pay strict attention to the film. He instead thought about what Sofia might be doing at that time. Osip, on the other hand, was enthralled with the movie even though he had told the Count at first he did not want to watch it.

In the chapter “Antagonists at Arms (And an Absolution),” the Count asked for the room number of a Swedish couple as he waited on them in the Boyarsky. He had been waiting for a couple of this nationality to visit the hotel and had needed them to visit at the last minute so that he could get a passport from the man. The Count knew his task was risky because he would have to visit the couple’s suite while they were inside it, sleeping, in order to get the passport.

After he left the Boyarsky, the Count took off his shoes before entering suite 322. He took not only the man’s passport but also some money from the bureau. Once he was back in the hall, his shoes were missing. He believed the shoes had been picked up and taken to be shined and that they would be put in the hotel’s collection of unidentifiable objects.

When he reached his room, the Count was surprised to see the Bishop sitting at his desk. He was not only angry with the Bishop for being in his room but noticed the man had also opened drawers and had a piece of paper in his hand. At first, the Count believed it was one of his letters but instead the first map that the Count had drawn for Sofia. He also knew the Bishop had seen the look of horror on the Count’s face when he saw it was his map that the Bishop was holding. The Bishop simply put the map on the desk and walked out of the room past the Count.

When the Bishop reached his office on the main floor, it is noted that his feelings of satisfaction probably changed to one of shock since the Count was seated at the Bishop’s desk in his office. He was holding a pistol.

The Bishop told the Count to leave and even threatened to call the authorities when the Count pointed one of the pistols at him and ordered him to sit down. To prove he was serious, the Count shot the portrait of Stalin between the eyes. When the Count told the Bishop again to sit down, the Bishop complied.

The Count knew they needed to wait until at least 2:30 in the morning when the hotel would be quiet. In the meanwhile, he took the files that the Bishop had compiled detailing all of the flaws of all of the hotel’s employees. The Count noticed that his file was the thickest of all of these files.



When the time came for them to leave, the Count had the Bishop bring along all of the files. They first went to the boiler room where the Count instructed the Bishop to put the files into the fire. The Count next had the Bishop retrieve from a shelf the tourist guide for Finland. Although it seemed the Bishop's knees were about to buckle, the Count prodded him on. The Count unlocked the bright blue door and told the Bishop to go inside. The Bishop asked what the Count intended to do with him. The Count told the Bishop he was not going to do anything with him and that he was never coming back. He reminded the Bishop there was a banquet on that coming Tuesday. He was sure someone would find him when they came to get the china.

As the Count went up the service stairs to his room, he encountered the ghost of the lobby cat on the fourth floor. The cat appeared to turn his blind eye on what the Count had done and did not look disappointed at what the Count had done at all.

Analysis

It has already been documented that the Count is uniquely talented in the area of seating arrangements and the relations of people to each other. In the case of the dinner of the Presidium and the Council of Ministers, the Count believes that the men in attendance will naturally arrange themselves in the seating order that will determine the power in the coming years. He believes the people who see themselves as least powerful and least influential will sit at places at the two legs of the "U" formed by the tables while the more powerful will sit at the head table.

In his unconventional form of writing, the author even gives the reader a look into what is happening in the background when Malyshev makes his announcement and demonstration of the change to nuclear power. Although the people of power are impressed by the display, the lives of the common people are badly disrupted when the city suddenly goes dark. It is noted that the only place where there are no disruptions because of the power outage is the Boyarsky, which is lit by candles. The idea is that while new ideas and methods are exciting, sometimes it is the old ways that are most dependable.

It is in this section that the antagonism between the Count and the Bishop comes to a head. The Bishop has gone to the Count's room with the intention of snooping in his things and has discovered the map that the Count had drawn for Sofia. Although the reader still does not know at this point to what location the Count was giving Sofia directions, it can be assumed that the Bishop has stumbled upon some information devastating to the Count—information that the Bishop could use to put the Count's plan for Sophia into jeopardy.

Again, the Count proves that sometimes the older things can perform just as well as newer things when he uses the dueling pistols he knows are in the manager's office in order to subdue the Bishop. The use of these pistols has been foreshadowed since their first introduction in the earlier chapters.



The reader can assume that the Bishop has put the Count in a position that he feels he must retaliate since the Count has sworn that he would not injure another of his countrymen. When the Count takes up the pistols and shows his intention to use them by shooting the portrait of Stalin, the Count proves that he could injure the Bishop if he had to do so.

Instead, the Count is able to restrain the Bishop without using violence. After the Bishop begins to obey the Count's commands, he only uses the pistol as a threat at one point. "Generally speaking, the Count was not in favor of relieving men of their possessions at gunpoint, but having prided himself on ignoring the second hand for so many years, the time had come for the Count to attend to it" (433). The Count knows that he will need to time his locking of the Bishop in the china storage perfectly in order that he not get caught.

While the Count is escorting the Bishop downstairs, he makes a point of collecting a few more items with the Bishop's knowledge. One of these is the tour guide to Finland. He also makes sure that the Bishop is aware that he has stolen a passport and some money from a Finnish guest.

Once again, the Count has an encounter with the lobby cat—only this time he encounters the ghost of the lobby cat. The cat, which is blind in one eye, both literally and figuratively turns his blind eye on the Count and his activities. Again, the cat brings to the Count's mind a story told to him by the Grand Duke. This story involved a military leader who turned a blind eye to the danger he and his forces faced and was victorious in battle. The cat is a talisman for the Count, indicating that his plans are blessed despite the fact he has come close to resorting to violence in order to make his plans work.

The literary technique of personification is used in the definition of cruelty. The narrator indicates that the Bishop is acting in a way that is simply cruel. Cruelty is given the attributes of a person when it is described as purposefully planning how to best hurt a victim. "Cruelty knows that it has no need of histrionics. It can be as calm and quiet as it likes. It can sigh, or lightly shake its head in disbelief, or offer a sympathetic apology for whatever it must do. It can move slowly, methodically, inevitably" (430). Notice also the alliteration of the "p" sound in the quote: "Having felt belittled by the Count for over thirty years, perhaps he now felt the pleasure of finally putting this pretentious polymath in his place" (430).

Discussion Question 1

There is little reference to God in this novel but there is one point at which a "divinity" is mentioned. The narrator thinks: "What sort of Divinity, Emile? The very same who rendered Beethoven deaf and Monet blind. For what the Lord giveth, is precisely what he cometh later to taketh away" (408). What is the meaning of the quote?



Discussion Question 2

At this point in the novel, what is the role of the cat? Whose spirit does this cat seem to embody?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Sofia is so upset when she hears the Count's plan? Why does she agree to go along with it?

Vocabulary

malady, sacrilegious, scrum, mundane, sardonically, cynicism, consternation, venue, lore, embarkation, deign, berated, litany, arrondissements, histrionics, polymath, enshrouded, sacrilege, spurious, apocryphal



Book 5: “Apotheoses” — “Afterword”

Summary

In the chapter “Apotheoses,” the Count followed his usual schedule the following day. That night he packed his rucksack with his necessities and said goodbye to his study and bedroom. As the Count was preparing to leave, Sofia had finished her performance, to warm applause, and was locking herself in the bathroom to put on the disguise the Count had put together for her. She followed the line he had drawn on the map to the American embassy.

Meanwhile, Richard and his wife had just arrived at the embassy after having attended an engagement. Billy, one of Richard’s employees, entered the room to tell Richard there was a young man there who was asking for him. Billy was not sure but it appeared the boy, who was not wearing shoes, was seeking asylum. Inside the room, Sofia took off the newsboy’s cap and Richard recognized who it was. Sofia was surprised because Richard did not seem to be expecting her but Richard said he had been expecting her; he just was not sure when she would come because the Count had not given him a specific day.

While Mrs. Vanderwhile looked for clothes for Sofia, Sofia and Richard talked business. Sofia told Richard her father had said Richard would have something for her once she arrived. Richard gave her the package which Sofia unwrapped to display the Count’s edition of Montaigne’s Essays. When Sofia opened the book she showed him some of the pages had been cut leaving an empty space in the book. This space was filled with stacks of gold coins.

Because Richard had given Sofia the item she was expecting, she handed him the knapsack from which Richard cut the lining to find a piece of rolled paper on which the seating order of the dinner of the Council of Ministers and Presidium was noted. The Count had included personality descriptions along with the seating order of the people and their titles. He had also described the conversations and events of that evening.

The Count had additionally sent a note detailing to Richard how he was to signal him that Sofia had arrived at the embassy safely. Richard called for all available workers to be called to man the switchboards. Meanwhile, the Count waited without fidgeting in the lobby of the Metropol. His waiting was rewarded when all of the phones on the first floor of the Metropol began to ring at once. There was confusion in the lobby during which the Count picked up his bag and walked outside.

In the first section of the Afterword titled “Afterwards...” Viktor Stepanovich left his apartment just before midnight the same night of Sofia’s performance. Stepanovich was not sure if he was doing what he was for Sofia or for the Count, but he knew what he was doing felt right. Stepanovich waited in a cafe for the Count to arrive. The Count gave Stepanovich a little red book and thanked him for what he was doing.



The next morning, two KGB officers visited to Metropol to talk to the Count. The Count could not be located. The hotel manager had not come to work yet. Two more officers were sent for so that a more thorough search could be completed. The officer asked Vasily where the Count was but the concierge replied "I haven't the slightest idea" (453).

At their daily meeting, Emile and Andrey talked about the meaning of the Count's disappearance. Since the KGB seemed so intent on finding the Count they assumed he had not been taken prisoner by them. Suggestions began to slip out that Sofia had also disappeared from Paris. Emile and Andrey began to wonder if were possible the two had both escaped.

Their discussion was interrupted by the mail clerk knocking on the door. He handed them each an envelope. He had already made deliveries to Marina, Vasily, and Audrius. The letters were a note of thanks from the Count. Each included four gold coins.

At the Kremlin that afternoon the Chief Administrator, who had a scar above his left ear, was interrupted by a lieutenant knocking on his door. The lieutenant told the Administrator that a student, Sofia, was missing from the goodwill tour. He added that her father had gone missing as well but the hotel's manager had been found locked in a storeroom in the basement of the building. The story continued that the Bishop had discovered the Count's plan to sneak the girl out of the country. The Count held him at gunpoint and then locked him in the closet.

The lieutenant went on to say that a passport, currency, a hat and a raincoat had been stolen from the hotel. A man had been sighted at the Leningradsky Railway Station wearing that coat and hat. That man had boarded a train headed to Helsinki. The coat and hat were found in a station in Vyborg along with a travel guide for Finland from which the maps had been removed. Because the Bishop had seen the Count with the travel guide for Finland, he assumed the Count had stolen the passport and cash, and was headed for that country. The lieutenant wondered why the Count did not shoot the Bishop when he had the opportunity. The Chief Administrator quipped it was because the Bishop was not an aristocrat.

Stepanovich was the one who left the items in the bathroom at the station in Vyborg. After leaving them, he had boarded the train and returned to Moscow.

In the section "And Anon," the Count paid a visit to the Nizhy Novgorod Province. He found evidence of an old road and heard a voice above him asking where he was going. There were siblings, a boy and girl, in the apple tree above him. The girl asked the Count if he was going to the mansion. They walked with him until they reached the spot where the mansion had been burned down years before. All that was left were two chimneys. The Count was not surprised by what he saw because he had expected his old home to be completely different.

The Count next walked to the village where there was an inn at the edge of the town. Inside, the Count was directed to the tavern where Anna waited for him.



Analysis

The reader learns in this section that the Count had planned and put into place a way to get Sofia out of Russia permanently. The map he had drawn showed her the way to the American embassy in Paris. Waiting for her there is the Count's friend Richard. The Count had used the dinner of Presidium and the Council of Ministers as a way to determine how the leadership of Russia might work itself out. In an earlier section of the book, Richard had asked the Count to share with him what he might learn about what direction the leadership of the country might go. The Count had refused at that time because he did not want to appear as a spy on his own country. When it comes to his daughter's safety, however, the Count decides that sharing some information about his country is not too high a price for him to pay for her freedom.

The Finnish tour guide that the Count has the Bishop get for him as well as the passport and money that he steals are merely the Count's way of laying a false trail for the KGB to follow. The Count knows that the Bishop will believe that he really intends to go to Finland. He will never dream that it is just an elaborate ruse.

The book of Essays of Montaigne re-emerges as an important symbol in this section. In the previous section the reader had learned that the Count had cut out a section of the pages in this book after reading passages of it that his father had underlined, as if he would never see the book again. The Count has sent this book to Richard for Sofia. It is what she asks for when she arrives. When she unwraps the book, it is discovered the cavity in the pages has been packed with gold coins from the legs of the Count's desk. The Count has thus provided monetarily for his daughter.

Richard mentioned to Sofia that he had been curious to see what was inside the package since it was the size of a large book but much heavier than a book that size should have been. When he sees the coins, he understands the weight of the book. "He's substantially heavier than Adam Smith or Plato. I really had no idea" (444). This quote can be interpreted two ways. First, Richard can be referring to the physical weight of the book. He could also be referring to the depth of Montaigne's thinking. Remember the book was a point of contention between Sofia and her father as well as Mishka and the Count. While Sofia and Mishka understood and appreciated the weighty essays of Montaigne, the Count preferred the lighter novel Anna Karenina.

Since he has gotten Sofia to safety, the Count decides to leave the Metropol. He believes that he has finally seen the purpose of his life through to its end. Not only would the Count put both himself and Sofia in danger if he were to remain in the hotel, but he also takes the opportunity to see his home again. The Count would be able to tell the KGB where Sofia was. To avoid being forced to give away her location, the Count chooses to disappear.

The Count takes advantage of his freedom by going to see his home again. He is not surprised to see that the driveways are overgrown but seems to be surprised to see the house was burnt to the ground. A pair of children, a brother and sister, offer to take the



Count to see the mansion. These children could remind the Count of himself and Helena playing in the apple trees near their home.

The author has a final surprise for the reader when the Count goes into the tavern near his home village to find Anna waiting for him. There is no way this meeting could have been a coincidence. The reader can assume that the two plan to have a life together for as long as they are able. This reunion gives the reader a feeling of catharsis, emotional cleansing, and feeling that the Count's life will continue to improve.

The Count was always a thorough person. He does not let any person at the hotel who helped him slip through the cracks when it comes to letting them know his plans and thanking them. Of course, the Count is intelligent enough to have his letters of goodbye delivered after he has left the hotel. Emile and Andrey are just talking to each other and wondering what happened to the Count when his notes are delivered to them. They recognize that the letters are from the Count because of the envelopes are labeled with "a script that was at once proper, proud, and openhearted," (455) a description that fits the Count perfectly.

Also notable is the Count's explanation to Osip why he shot the lieutenant who hurt Helena so badly. He told Osip he shot the lieutenant because the lieutenant was an aristocrat. When the young man asks Osip why the Count did not shoot the Bishop, the Bishop reasons that it was because the Bishop was not an aristocrat. Even though the author does not tell the reader in a straightforward manner that Osip is the Chief Administrator, the reader should recognize him by the way he is described as looking like everyone else in the office with the exception of "the scar above his left ear where, by all appearances, someone had once attempted to cleave his skull" (456).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the Count's plans to get Sofia out of the country. How is this a benefit to both her and to the Count?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the ending of the novel. Do you like the way the author left things for the Count?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Osip's reaction to the news that Sofia and the Count have disappeared. Do you think he will press for an active search for the two of them? Why or why not?



Vocabulary

purloined, egret, assuaged, nuances, pandemonium, melodramatic, unambiguously,
plausible, sojourners



Characters

Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov, referred to most often as the Count but sometimes called Sasha by his friends and family, is the main character of this novel. He is a descendant of an aristocratic Russian family. He is also the godson of a counselor of the Tsar.

At the beginning of the novel, the Count has been sentenced to a life sentence under house arrest at the Metropol. He received this sentence because of an inflammatory poem to which the Count had signed his name as the author. It is not until almost the end of the novel that the reader learns that the Count did not write the poem that got him placed on house arrest. The poem was written by Mishka, the Count's best friend. Because Mishka already had a reputation it was believed he would be killed if it was discovered he had written the poem. The Count agreed to put his name on the verses because it was believed he would get a lighter sentence than Mishka.

The Count was driven by guilt because he believed he was the cause of the circumstances that caused him to be out of the country when his sister died of scarlet fever. He had turned the tables on a lieutenant during a birthday party for a princess. The Count felt he was getting his revenge because the lieutenant had run him off the road on the way to the party. After the Count ruined the lieutenant's opportunity to woo the princess, the lieutenant sought out the Count's sister and began to seduce her. On her birthday, the lieutenant made a pass at Helena's handmaiden, breaking Helena's heart. The Count had shot at the lieutenant with the intent to kill him. He had missed and only wounded the man.

Because of his actions, the Count exiled himself to Paris. He made a promise to himself that he would never shoot at another of his countrymen again. For this reason the Count did not join the military when he returned to Russia. The Count did not return to Russia until he learned that the Tsar had been executed. He went back at that time to see that his grandmother was moved safely out of the country. Instead of leaving the country as well, the Count moved into the Metropol. Four years later he was put on house arrest.

Despite being on house arrest, the Count lived a very full life. At one point shortly after he was sentenced the Count considered killing himself but honey with the taste of apple blossoms from the apple orchards where he had grown up changed his mind.

While at the Metropol the Count fell in love with a Russian actress and worked as the headwaiter at the Boyarsky, the Metropol's high scale restaurant. The Count also became the parental guardian of a young girl, Sofia, who was daughter of a girl the Count had known at the hotel. He had taken on the child believing that her mother would return for her in a month or so. Instead, no word was heard from Nina again. The Count raised Sofia from the age of six. The Count was also called upon to give lessons



in English and French to a Russian diplomat and was asked by a member of the American embassy to share information regarding the leadership of Russia, a position the Count at first refused.

Above all else, the Count considered himself a gentleman. He enjoyed fine food, literature, and alcohol. He knew what wine paired best with each meal and expected the servers at the restaurants to live up to his high expectations for service. He was frustrated by a new waiter, the Bishop, who did not seem to have the natural ability need to be a waiter. The Count and the Bishop develop an antagonistic relationship that lasts the course of the novel.

It was after he had gotten word that Mishka had died and learned that Sofia would play in a goodwill concert in Paris that he decided to put into action a plan to get Sofia out of Russia. The Count also planned to make his escape from the Metropol.

Considering what the country did to Nina and also to Katrina, Mishka's girlfriend, it can be assumed that the Count did not want this same future for Sofia.

The Bishop aka Leplevsky

This man is called the Bishop because he reminds the Count of a bishop in chess set. The Bishop is the main antagonist in the novel. He is jealous of the Count because he believes the Count thinks that he is superior to the Bishop.

The Bishop is described at several different times in the novel as having an "ecclesiastical" (39) smile. He is also described as being a person who, like the bishop on the chessboard, "never moved along the rank or file. With him it was always on the bias: slipping diagonally from corner to corner" (218).

The Bishop used his influence to climb the ladder at the Metropol. The Count was disturbed because the Bishop was hired to work in the Piazza even though he did not have the skills that the Count believes a waiter needs. The Count was even more disturbed when the Bishop was promoted to a position in the Boyarsky, the Metropol's high class restaurant.

Even when the Bishop was promoted to general manager of the hotel, and then manager of the hotel, he continued to find ways to antagonize the Count. He joined the daily meeting of the staff of the Boyarsky even though he was not asked or wanted. He seemed to follow the Count in an attempt to catch him doing something wrong.

Sensing the importance of the relationship between the Count and Sofia, the Bishop tried to hurt the Count by drawing the attention of the leader of the Red October Youth Orchestra to Sofia's talent for playing the piano. Had Anna not interfered, the Bishop would have successfully separated the Count and Sofia because the citizens of Russia were given no choice when the government called for their services.



The Bishop also stumbled upon the Count's plan to get Sofia to the safety of the American embassy in Paris. Because he knew the Bishop intended to tell the officials of his plans, the Count locked the Bishop in a storage room in the basement of the hotel until Sofia could get to safety.

Sofia

Sofia is the daughter of Nina and Leo. Nina left Sofia with the Count when the child is six years old. Although Nina intended to return for Sofia when she got settled in the city where her husband had been sentenced to hard labor, Nina never came back for Sofia so the Count adopted her and raised her in the hotel.

Sofia is described as being “a veritable gadabout, a gadfly, a ne'er-do-well” (321) as a young child when she let some geese free on the fourth floor of the hotel—the same floor where a man who had insulted Emile's cooking was staying.

Sofia often played a game with her father where she would run through the hotel hallways and stairways to arrive in his destination before he did. It was while she was playing this game with her father that Sofia fell on the stairs and fractured her skull. After this injury, Sofia had a section of her hair that grew over the spot of the injury that was white.

Like her mother, Sofia is described as a serious person. She enjoyed the Essays of Montaigne even though the Count believed they are boring. When Sofia was older, the Count described her as being “studious, shy, and well behaved; or in a word, demure” (283).

After hearing classical music on the phonograph the Richard gave to the Count, Sofia began to teach herself to play the piano. When Stepanovich, the conductor of the Piazza's orchestra, heard Sofia playing he offered to teach her.

Sofia's talent was renowned and she was invited to perform a goodwill concert in Paris. Her father had arranged for her to be accepted at the American embassy so that she would be safe from the Russian government.

Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich

Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich, Mishka, is the Count's closest friend. Mishka is actually the one who wrote the poem for which the Count was put under house arrest. Because the Count was an aristocrat, they believed the Count would not be punished for the poem but suspected that Mishka would be killed for it.

Mishka is described as being “indifferently groomed, relatively reclusive, occasionally argumentative” (182).



There was a short while after the revolution that Mishka found a place in the world. Where he had once been strange and studious, Mishka believed a new age of enlightenment was dawning in Russia. He was even on a committee to determine a new type of poetry.

Mishka was sentenced to hard labor after he belittled the man who oversaw his work on the editing of Anton Chekhov's letters. Mishka was upset because he had been asked to remove a passage from the book, including the word "bread," that Mishka felt was not offensive and should not have to be removed.

After Mishka was released from his labor, he dedicated the rest of his life to putting together a volume of quotes that included the word bread. Mishka ended his volume with the quote he had to remove from the collection of Chekhov's letters.

Katerina Litvinova

Katerina Litvinova is the poet from Kiev with whom Mishka fell in love. At one point in his courtship with Katerina, Mishka describes her as a "firefly" and a "pinwheel" (135).

Even though Mishka followed Katerina to Kiev where she taught elementary school, she left him for another man.

Years after Mishka and Katerina parted ways, Katerina met with the Count at the hotel. She had made her way up to the sixth floor and hid in the hallway to wait for the Count to finish with the people who were visiting him.

Katerina brought the Count news of Mishka's death. She told him they had been together as a couple for six months before his death. Even though Katerina claimed to have known Mishka well, she learned from the Count that it was actually Mishka who had written the poem that got the Count sentenced to house arrest. It had been decided to credit the poem to the Count because they knew that Mishka would be killed if it was discovered he had written it.

Katerina brought the Count a final gift from Mishka, a copy of his final work.

Nina Kulikova

Nina Kulikova is the nine-year-old girl who made friends with the Count during his first years at the Metropol. She is often described as "the young girl with the penchant for yellow," (10) because she almost always wore yellow dresses. Nina was the daughter of a widowed Ukrainian bureaucrat.

Nina is described as a serious young girl who enjoyed spying on meetings of governmental bodies that took place in the hotel's ballroom. As a young idealist, Nina went with a group to the rural areas of Russia to help collectivize the farms there.



The next time Nina was seen, she was leaving her young daughter with the Count. She told the Count that her husband had been arrested and that she was going to the place where he was being held. She planned to come back for Sofia but never returned again. Although the Count attempted to track down Nina, she was never found.

Anna Urbanova

Anna Urbanova is the actress who seduced the Count. At the end of the novel, after the Count has left the Metropol, it is Anna whom he met with in a tavern in his hometown of St. Petersburg.

Throughout the novel Anna is described as being “willowy” (110). It is by this description that the reader recognizes it is Anna who is waiting for the Count in the tavern.

When the Count first met Anna, she was spoiled and haughty. It was only after she was displaced from her career as an actress and had all of her possessions taken away from her that she began to treat people in general, and the Count in particular, with more respect.

It was because of Anna’s influence that the Bishop did not succeed with his plan to have Sofia sent to Stalingrad to play with the Red October Youth Orchestra.

Richard Vanderwhile

Richard Vanderwhile is one of the friends whom the Count made in the hotel’s bar. Richard was eventually promoted to a position at the American embassy in Paris.

Richard approached the Count about sharing information with him about the rumors of who would take over rulership of Russia after Stalin’s death. The Count at first refused to help Richard but realized the man had given him a valuable offer that could help him get Sofia safely out of the country.

It is Richard whom Sofia was directed by her father to ask for when she arrived at the embassy. In exchange for the information the Count was able to give him about the arrangement of the leadership in Russia, Richard gave Sofia amnesty.

Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov

Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov is the former colonel of the Red Army who employed the Count to help him learn English and French as well as the culture of the Americans.

The distinguishing feature assigned to Osip is a scar “above the left ear, which was presumably the result of a glancing blow that had hoped to cleave his skull” (205).



Osip is the one who arranged for a good surgeon to meet the Count at St. Anselm's to take care of Sofia. Osip additionally made arrangements to get the Count back to the hotel without being killed.

It is Osip to whom the Count told that he shot the lieutenant who broke his sister's heart because he was an aristocrat.

Andrey Duras

Andrey Duras is the maître d' of the Boyarsky. He became one of the Count's closest friends at the hotel. Andrey is one of the three who made up the Triumvirate, a group of men who met each day to discuss the evening's expected menu and reservations at the restaurant.

Andrey is distinguished by his long fingers. It was to the members of the Triumvirate that Andrey admitted that one of his first jobs was in a circus where he performed as a juggler. Emile showed his trust in Andrey by allowing him to use his chopper as one of the knives that he juggled to prove his talent.

Mr. Jozef Halecki

Mr. Jozef Halecki was the manager of the Hotel Metropol when the Count was first put on house arrest there.

He is described as being lazy and having the habit of delegating all of his duties onto other employees. It was Mr. Halecki who told the Count that the staff members could no longer refer to the Count by the honorifics he was accustomed to hearing.

Halecki appears to be the one who insisted that the Bishop be promoted even though the Bishop was not qualified for the promotions he was given.

Viktor Stepanovich Skadovsky

Viktor Stepanovich Skadovsky is the conductor of the orchestra at the Piazza. He is the man who gave Sofia formal piano lessons.

It is Stepanovich who traveled to the Vyborg terminal, strengthening the farce that the Count had attempted to flee the country into Finland. Stepanovich left the journalist's hat and coat as well as the Finland travel guide that the Bishop saw the Count take from the hotel, in the bathroom at that station to make the KGB believe that the Count had been there.



Marina Samarova

Marina Samarova is described as the “shy delight with the wandering eye” (16). She is the hotel’s only seamstress. The Count employed Marina to teach him how to sew.

After Sofia came to live with the Count, Marina became Sofia’s aunt. Marina stayed with Sofia in the hospital after she fractured her skull. It is also Marina who designed the dress that Sofia wore for her appearance in the goodwill concert.

Vasily

Vasily is the concierge at the Hotel Metropol. He has an uncanny ability to tell the location of any specific person at any given time. The Count often referred to this ability on the part of Vasily when he asked the man about Nina.

At the end of the Count’s story, after he has snuck out of the hotel and the KGB is looking for him, the officers of the KGB asked Vasily where the Count was and he replied that he had no idea.

Emile Zhukovsky

Emile Zhukovsky is the renowned cook at the Boyarsky. He was one of the three men who make up the Triumvirate. He was one of the Count’s closest friends at the hotel even though he at first seemed frustrated by the Count’s ability to identify the ingredients that he had used in his recipes.

Abram

Abram is the handyman who tended the bees on the roof of the Metropol. He is the one who stopped the Count from killing himself by sharing with him the honey with the taste of the apples from Nizhny Novgorod.

Pudgy Webster

Pudgy Webster is an American vending machine salesman.

Pudgy is the man who agreed to take a letter from the Count to Richard in the American embassy. This was the first step in the Count’s plan to get Sofia safely out of Russia.



Arkady

Arkady is the head desk clerk at the Hotel Metropol. Arkady is among the employees of the hotel who visited the Count in his sixth floor room after the Count returned from his hearing at the Kremlin.

Helena

Helena was the Count's sister. She died of scarlet fever before the point in time that the Count was sentenced to house arrest.

Audrius

Audrius is the bar tender at the Metropol.



Symbols and Symbolism

Desk

The Count's desk is a symbol of the Count's aristocratic background. This desk belonged to the man who was called the Grand Duke. He was the Count's godfather and a counselor to the Tsar. The desk also has hidden compartments in the legs where the Count has kept gold coins hidden from those who have imprisoned him.

Hotel Passkey

The passkey is a symbol of Nina and the Count's friendship. Nina gave this key to the Count as a gift the first Christmas they celebrated together. It was with the help of this passkey that the Count was later able to gather the things he needed to help Sofia escape Russia.

The Essays of Montaigne

The book of the Essays of Montaigne is a symbol of the differences between the Count and Mishka, and also the differences between the Count and Sofia. The Count preferred novels like Anna Karenina whereas Mishka and Sofia appreciated the worth of Montaigne. In fact, the Count was outraged when Sofia removed Montaigne from where it had been used to prop up the three legged bureau and replaced that book with a copy of Anna Karenina. Montaigne later proved his worth when the Count cut out some of the pages and used the book to send Sofia a supply of gold coins to her when she reached the American Embassy.

Bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape

The bottles of Châteauneuf-du-Pape represent the respect that the Count had for his deceased relatives. When Mishka visited the Count for the first time he bore a bottle of this wine so they could toast the ten year anniversary of the Grand Duke's death. The Count later used this same wine to toast the ten year anniversary of his sister's death. He took a bottle of the wine with him when he left the Metropol so he could toast Mishka's death when the time came.

Honey

The honey that Abram shared with the Count on the roof of the Metropol is an important symbol because it reminded the Count of his home at the point that he had decided that life had gone on without him. It was after tasting this honey that the Count decided not to commit suicide but instead to pursue his purpose.



Twice-Tolling Clock

This twice-tolling clock that sat in the Count's room is an important symbol because it represents the Count's father and his viewpoint on the importance of the hours of noon and midnight. Sofia's assumptions that the clock was broken because it tolled only twice each day show how innocent she was as well as how intelligent she was.

Chekhov's Letters

Mishka was forced to cut 50 words from a book of Chekhov's letters that he was editing. The censorship of this book is a symbol of how the Russian government took the liberty of editing things that were not even offensive.

Emile's Chopper

Emile's chopper is a symbol of Emile and his status as the head cook at the Boyarsky. Emile used this large knife to take care of all sorts of tasks in the kitchen including delicate tasks like peeling grapes. The only person that Emile ever allowed to use his knife during the course of the novel was Andrey when Andrey displayed his ability to juggle knives.

"Where Is It Now?"

This poem is a symbol of the friendship between the Count and Mishka. Because he knew Mishka's punishment would be great if it were known that he wrote the poem, the Count agreed to take credit for the poem. It was in order to keep Mishka from being punished that the Count lived under house arrest in the Metropol for more than half of his life.

Little Red Book

The little red book is a symbol of the trick that the Count and Stephanovich played on the Bishop and others who wanted to locate him. The Count had the Bishop give him this book in order to make the Bishop think he was planning to head to Finland. Instead, Stepanovich planted this book in a train station on the route to Finland while the Count headed for the area of Russia in which he had grown up.



Settings

Hotel Metropol, Moscow

Almost the entire action of this novel takes place in the Hotel Metropol, a luxury hotel in Moscow. It is at this hotel that the Count has been condemned to house arrest.

Idlehour

Idlehour is the name of the Rostov estate in Nizhny Novgorod. The Count grew up on this estate. The estate was abandoned in 1918 when the Count arranged for his grandmother to leave the country after the Tsar was executed.

After the Count left the Metropol when he was in his sixties, he returned to the property on which the estate had been located. He discovered the house in which he had lived had been burned to the ground.

Sixth Floor of the Metropol

The sixth floor of the Metropol, the floor where servants once lived, is the place to which the Count was moved when he was put on house arrest in the hotel. The Count was assigned one small room in the attic but found a way to incorporate a second room to use as a study.

When Sofia moved in with the Count, they remained in this small set of rooms.

The Boyarsky

The Boyarsky is the name of the fancy restaurant located on the second floor of the Metropol. It was at this restaurant that the Count eventually began working as head waiter during his stay at the hotel.

Piazza

The Piazza is the restaurant on the main floor of the Metropol near the lobby. It was in this more relaxed restaurant that the Count first had a conversation with Nina and where he first encountered the Bishop and his poor serving skills.



The Wine Cellar of the Metropol

It was to the wine cellar at the hotel that Andrey took the Count to show him how they had been required to remove all of the labels from the bottles of wine. Customers could then only order either red or white wine.

Shalyapin

Shalyapin is the name that the Count had given to the bar in the Metropol. The Count often visited this bar for conversation and a nightcap. It was in this bar that the Count met Richard Vanderwhile, the man who eventually was assigned to work at the embassy in Paris, France.

The Kremlin

The Kremlin is the building in Moscow that houses the governmental activities. It was in the Kremlin that the Count's trial was held and he was sentenced to house arrest at the Metropol.

St. Anselm's

St. Anselm's is the hospital to which the Count had the cab take him and Sofia after Sofia's accident.

The Ballroom

The ballroom is the place where the Count watched as Nina performed her scientific experiments. They also spied on the assembly meetings from the ballroom balcony. It was also in the ballroom that the Count first heard Sofia play the piano.

Suite 317

Suite 317 is the suite in which the Count lived before he was placed on house arrest. It was when the Count and Sofia snuck into this suite to enjoy the view that the Count realized he was unhappy in his one small room because he did not have a place for his spirit to be fed. Later, when Richard arranged a secret meeting with the Count, that meeting took place in that suite.

Suite 417

Suite 417 is the suite in which the Presidium and the Council of Ministers was held.

American Embassy

After she finished playing at the Salle Pleyel, Sofia went to the American Embassy in Paris where she asked for asylum.



Themes and Motifs

Finding One's Purpose in Life

With his new life of imprisonment in the Hotel Metropol, the Count sets out to define his purpose in life. He tries to follow the Grand Duke's advice to try to master his circumstances. When this fails, the Count considers going down with his ship. A memory of home keeps the Count from killing himself so he tries again to master his life. The Count finds some purpose when he begins working in the Boyarsky but his true purpose in life is unveiled when he takes charge of raising Sofia.

After the Count has been under house arrest only a few days, he decides that his main priority is to look after the practical things he believes he will need. He compares his position to Robinson Crusoe who must learn how to start a fire using a flint. The Count is in a slightly different position since his idea of "practicalities" (29) consists of things like fine linens, good soaps, and pastries.

The Count begins to understand his purpose in life when he becomes friends with Nina. The narrator indicates that Nina is a muse to the Count. She shows him the ins and outs of the hotel and for a short while pulls him out of the doldrums of his life in bondage.

The Count completely loses his way when he decides that life has passed him by and that his best answer to his situation is to kill himself. It is only when the Count is reminded of his home that he gains the strength to continue living.

After this foiled effort at suicide, the Count takes an active role in giving himself a purpose for his life. He asks Andrey for a job at the Boyarsky. As headwaiter, the Count has more influence on the behavior of the waiters at the restaurant. He is able to teach them how to properly serve and make dining suggestions instead of just being frustrated when the waiters make mistakes in their jobs.

The Count's greatest purpose in life comes when Nina brings Sofia to him. Even though he does not know he will be going to have to care for Sofia for her entire childhood, the Count does take on the responsibility willingly. He feels that even if he'd had more time to consider Nina's request that he watch Sofia, he would still have agreed to take care of the child because he believed he owed Nina.

When Sofia has reached the age of seventeen, the Count tells her that he believes that she is the reason he is alive. "Well, since the day I was born, Sofia, there was only one time when Life needed me to be in a particular place at a particular time, and that was when your mother brought you to the lobby of the Metropol" (421). Although it may seem that the Count would have a very unfulfilling life because of his imprisonment in the hotel, his life, particularly his fatherhood of Sofia, has been very fruitful.



Russia's Transition from Revolution to Cold War

Because the Count lives during the time that Russia is transitioning to Communism, the changes that he witnesses compile a significant theme in this novel. Even though he is imprisoned in the hotel, the Count can judge the atmosphere of the country by the atmosphere of the restaurant. Because the Count is a relic of the age of aristocratic rule, he is also able to share his own opinion of the changes taking place in his country.

Some of the changes that the Count observes take place in the restaurants in the hotel. First, he notices these restaurants are not as busy as they once were. Because the government has prohibited fine restaurants from taking rubles as a method of payment, a good deal of the population is no longer able to eat in these restaurants. The Count additionally reports that the cooks at these restaurants have to make do with what ingredients they can find since refined ingredients are hard to get after the Revolution. The difficulty in getting these ingredients is the result of declines in the economy, failure of crops, and the halting of trade.

Other changes deal with the way that people treat each other. While the Count had once been called using terms like “your excellency,” the manager of the hotel tells the Count the members of the staff will no longer be able to call him by those titles. In fact, the vague term “comrade” soon replaces all titles. The Count indicates that “comrade” could refer to a man or a woman of any rank or position in life. He believes that the word comrade has replaced the titles that once defined a person's role in life.

Nina's story illustrates other changes in Russia that are brought about by the transition to Communism. Believing they are doing good for the country and their fellow men, Nina and her friends go to a rural area of the country in order to help farmers there become part of the collective. Instead of giving up their livestock and crops to the collective, the farmers choose to kill their animals. Hundreds of people starve in the attempt to form a collective.

Young people, like Nina and Katerina, who were full of hope and support for Communism are soon disillusioned by the things they see and experience. Nina's husband is arrested after he is lured to an agricultural conference. When Nina tries to join her husband she disappears. Katerina, meanwhile, was a promising poet. By the time she delivers Mishka's final work to the Count, she has given up hope for her life and has no hope for her future. She is so disillusioned that when the Count asks Katerina where she will go from there, she asks him if it matters.

The Impact of the Arts

The impact of the arts is a significant theme in this novel. The most important reference to the impact of the arts is Sofia's decision to teach herself to play the piano based on her father's phonograph recordings. Poetry and writing are also discussed as important forms of art. Not only is the Count imprisoned because of a poem, Mishka is sentenced to hard labor because he has such a bad reaction to his editor's request that he remove



what appears to be an inconsequential section from a book. The movies are also depicted as a form of art with the ability to move people to action or placate them.

It is Sofia's act of teaching herself to play piano that leads the reader to the idea that art can lead a person to better himself. Because she was so moved by the music she heard played on her father's phonograph, Sofia decided to teach herself to play those pieces. She sat down without even having sheet music to work out the tunes note by note. When Stepanovich hears her playing, he steps in to give her lessons. Sofia turns out to be a natural at the piano. Her ability to play also opens a way for her to escape the dangerous and oppressive atmosphere of Russia.

The ability of art to motivate people is demonstrated by the poem for which the Count is imprisoned under house arrest. The leaders of Russia are so afraid that the poem "Where is it Now?" will motivate the people to revolt that the Count is basically put in jail. When the reader learns that it was not the Count who wrote the poem but instead Mishka who wrote it, it is better understood how severely writers could be punished if they were suspected to be writing revolutionary works. The Count took credit for the poem because he knew that Mishka would be killed if it was known he had written that poem.

The conflict between Mishka and his editor about the letters of Chekhov demonstrates how picky the Russian government can be when it comes to determining what might and might not offend the Russian people. Mishka argues with his editor over a section of 50 words in which the writer refers to the bread in Berlin. "People who have never been abroad don't know how good bread can be" (264). Mishka believes the passage is inconsequential and displays his anger at being forced to take it out. He is eventually sentenced to hard labor in Siberia because of his willingness to argue with his editor. Artists under the regime of Communist Russia are given no freedom of expression even though art is all about freedom of expression. They are expected to express only the ideas of which the government approves.

Because the movies are a gathering place, it makes sense that attitudes shown by members of the leading party toward that movie would spread to the lower classes. This is especially the case in an atmosphere like the one in Russia where the people fear abuse and death if their opinions are different from those of the people in power. For this reason the people as a whole go along with the opinions of the political leaders. The fact that Stalin does not appear pleased with one of Anna's movies almost ends her career as a movie star. The director of the movie, meanwhile, has his political motivations questioned because his movie has not received high praise. Also regarding movies, Osip argues that the Americans use movies as a way to placate their people and keep them under control, even during the worst times.

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal Relationships are very important to the Count. He is a man who is dedicated to his friends and family regardless of what this dedication may cost him. In



response, many of his friends and family demonstrate this same dedication to him. There is one person with whom the Count does not develop a devoted relationship. This man threatens everything that the Count holds dear.

There are a variety of actions on behalf of the Count that demonstrate how dedicated he is to his family. First, he goes so far as to shoot the man who has hurt his sister by pretending to be in love with her. The Count takes his act of having shot the man seriously. Even though he did not kill the man outright, the Count blames himself for the lieutenant's death when that man was killed in battle.

Charges were brought against the Count because of his action of shooting the lieutenant. For this reason, the Count's grandmother sent him to Paris to keep him out of danger. Despite the dangers, the Count returns to Russia when he learns the Tsar of that country has been executed and his grandmother is in danger. He sees to it that she is gotten safely out of the country.

Meanwhile, the Count also shows his dedication to his friends. One friend in particular is Mishka, a man who is very different from the Count but who has been friends with the Count since they were in college. The Count is so dedicated to this friend that he has chosen to take credit for a revolutionary poem that Mishka wrote. The Count knows that if Mishka takes credit for the poem, he will probably be killed. Because the Count is an aristocrat, and the aristocrats still held power in Russia at that time, the Count took credit for the poem because he believed he would not be punished as severely as Mishka. It is because of his friendship with Mishka that the Count is imprisoned on house arrest.

The one man with whom the Count is not able to make friends is the Bishop. The Count does not like the Bishop simply because of his lack of skills as a waiter. The Count perhaps initiates the antagonism between himself and the Bishop unintentionally when he overrides the Bishop's wine suggestion to a young couple.

It appears the Bishop takes it upon himself to get revenge on the Count for this one unintentional act of embarrassment. It is suspected that the Bishop is the one who registers the complaint that causes the labels to be removed from the wine selection in the Boyarsky. Later, it is also suspected that it is the Bishop who has reported that the Count is caring for Sofia. At this point, the officials do not do anything because they believe Sofia might be the illegitimate daughter of Anna and a member of the Politburo.

When Sofia develops her talent for the piano, the Bishop uses it to try to get Sofia removed from the Metropol again. He manages to get her an appointment to the Red October Youth Orchestra. Because of laws in Russia, Sofia would have been forced to join the orchestra regardless of what she wanted if Anna had not used her influence to make the Bishop think he was stepping on the toes of a more influential governmental leader.

The Bishop again tries to interfere with the Count's plans for Sofia when he learns of the Count's plans for Sofia to seek amnesty at the American Embassy in France. The Count



does not injure the Bishop, but makes him think he will when he threatens him with the antique dueling pistols hidden in the wall of the manager's office. The Count imprisons the Bishop in the storage room where the hotel's china is kept. He knows the man will be found, but will not be found in time to destroy the Count's plan to get Sofia to safety.

Inability to Deal With the Decreased Importance of Manners and Proper Etiquette

Growing up as a member of an aristocratic family, manners and proper etiquette are important facets of the Count's personality. As the ideals of Communism begin to be implemented in Russia, less emphasis is placed on rank and aristocracy. Manners, as well as the way of the gentleman and the upper class, no longer have the place in society they once did. This is a loss of culture that the Count finds it difficult to adjust to.

Ever since he was a child, the Count was taught proper manners. For instance, he is disturbed when Nina, as a nine-year-old, comes to him uninvited and begins to talk to him. "He had been raised well enough to know that a child should not idly approach a stranger, should not interrupt him in the middle of a meal, and certainly should not ask him questions about his personal appearance. Was the minding of one's own business no longer a subject taught in schools," (40) he wonders of the child's behavior.

Although he is disturbed by Nina's behavior, the Count is offended by the Bishop's. When the Bishop first waits on the Count at the Piazza, he appears not to recognize any of the signs the Count present that he believes should have given the Bishop clues as to how to approach him as a diner. For instance, even though the Count has "a newspaper in hand — the international symbol of dining alone — the chap didn't bother to clear the second setting" (39). This is only one of the faux pas that the Bishop commits when he first waits upon the Count. The Bishop and his substandard serving techniques seem to be the direction in which the service in restaurants is headed, the Count notices. He is frustrated and disappointed when he thinks that "The staffing trend that had begun with the appointment of the Bishop had continued unabated — such that any young man with more influence than experience could now don the white jacket, clear from the left, and pour wine into water glasses" (154).

Later, when Osip asks the Count to tell him why the Count does not think he is a gentleman, the Count is happy to tell him. For one thing, "As a host, it was perfectly appropriate for you to take up the serving tools. But a gentleman would have served his guest before he served himself," (210) the Count tells Osip. He also adds that a gentleman would not talk with his mouth full and would not motion at people with his silverware while eating.



Styles

Point of View

The majority of this novel is told from the point of view of an omniscient third-person narrator. The narrator focuses mostly on the perspective of the Count but some sections of the novel do focus on different characters. For instance, in the section “Addendum,” after the Count and Anna have had their first affair, the narrator tells the story from the point of view of Anna.

In many sections of the novel, the narrator speaks directly to the reader—a way of making the reader feel as if he is part of the novel. For instance, when the narrator is telling about Anna's second rise to popularity, he argues this rise was not entirely because of political forces that conspired to encourage her to be given roles. After he has made this point, the narrator asks the reader: “Perhaps you are still skeptical. Well then, what about you?” (198). The narrator asks the reader if he has not ever had an experience in which he takes pride but could be credited to some other force.

There are also some small sections of the novel where the narration switches to a second-person point of view in the present tense. The most significant example of this is when the story is told about the Count's experience with the lieutenant at the princess's birthday party. The use of the second-person point of view in this circumstance allows the reader to put himself in the Count's shoes.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is very sophisticated, as one might expect the language of a gentleman to be. The word “conversing” is used instead of “talking,” a person “dons” his pants instead of putting them on, and people “disembark” from cabs or automobiles rather than getting out of them.

One of the most significant aspects of the language of the novel is the descriptions that are used to identify each character. The main characters can be distinguished by the descriptions assigned to them. For instance, when there is a reference to a willowy woman, the reader knows it is Anna who is being referenced. The man with the scar above his left ear is Osip. The description of a man who is “indifferently groomed, relatively reclusive, occasionally argumentative” (182) is Mishka.

Foreign phrases are occasionally incorporated into the novel. Most can be easily understood using context clues but the reader may need to look up translations of an extended portion of Italian text in the section “Arrivederci.”



Structure

This novel covers a period of 32 years in which the Count lives under house arrest in the Hotel Metropol. The book is divided into five books titled with part of the poem “Where Is It Now?” and the transcript of the Count’s appearance at the Kremlin included at the beginning of the book. There is an Afterword at the end of the novel.

The author uses the first half of the novel to tell the story of the Count’s struggles with finding his place at the Metropol. In this section the antagonistic relationship between the Count and the Bishop is introduced and developed. The Count’s background and way of life is also described.

It is at nearly the middle of the book that Nina brings Sofia to live with the Count. At this point, much of the story focuses on the developing relationship between the Count and his daughter. The rising action comes as the Count decides to put into action a plan to get Sofia out of the country. The climax of the story comes when Sofia sneaks out of her concert to the American embassy in Paris. Another climax comes as the Count walks out of Metropol.

The action falls as the Count visits the site of his family’s estate only to find it overgrown and the house burned to the ground. The denouement occurs when the Count enters the tavern near the town where he grew up to find Anna waiting for him.



Quotes

A king fortifies himself with a castle,' observed the Count, 'a gentleman with a desk.'"
-- The Count (Book 1: 1922: An Ambassador)

Importance: Even though the bellhops complain about how heavy the Count's desk is, he insists that they take it up to his new room on the sixth floor. He tells them because he is a gentleman he has to have a desk. In reality the desk was a gift from the Count's godfather. It has secret compartments in the legs that are filled with gold coins.

For eventually, we come to hold our dearest possessions more closely than we hold our friends."
-- Narrator (Book 1: 1922: An Ambassador)

Importance: As the Count thinks about the way he pared down his belongings when he moved to the Metropol from his family's estate, and then again about the way that he pared them down again when he moved to the sixth floor, he considered the way he had to thin them down again. He noticed he cared more about the things than even some of his friends.

When he had been carted off that morning, they had all assumed that he would never return. He had emerged from behind the walls of the Kremlin like an aviator from the wreckage of a crash."
-- Narrator (Book 1: 1922: An Ambassador)

Importance: Not only is this an example of the way the literary technique of simile is used in the novel, it describes the way that the Count realizes all of his friends are looking at him strangely and are surprised to see him because they thought he would never come back from his trial at the Kremlin. They had expected him to be killed or put in jail, not allowed free on house arrest.

But here, at last, circumstance had conspired not to distract the Count, but to present him with the time and solitude necessary to give the book its due."
-- Narrator (Book 1: An Anglican Ashore)

Importance: The Count realized that since he was on house arrest, he might actually have time to read the Essays of Montaigne, a book the Count had always thought he would read but had never gotten a chance.

That is, one could expect this until 1920 when, having already sealed the borders, the Bolsheviks decided to prohibit the use of rubles in fine restaurants — effectively closing them to 99 percent of the population."
-- Narrator (Book 1: An Anglican Ashore)

Importance: The Count notes that the Boyarsky at the Metropol is not as busy as he remembered it being in the past because the government would not allow fine



restaurants to accept rubles as payment. For this reason, the majority of the population was kept from eating in these restaurants.

Having acknowledged that a man must master his circumstances or otherwise be mastered by them, the Count thought it worth considering how one was most likely to achieve this aim when one had been sentenced to a life of confinement.”

-- Narrator (Book 1: An Anglican Ashore)

Importance: The Count’s godfather had told him that he must learn how to master his circumstances, a piece of advice that the Count tries to put into practice during his house arrest. He feels that because he is on house arrest, however, he will not be able to reach his full potential. This statement is ironic because the Count accomplishes much more while living in the hotel than some do with their freedom.

Our elders planted fields and fought in wars; they advanced the arts and sciences, and generally made sacrifices on our behalf. So by their efforts, however humble, they have earned a measure of our gratitude and respect.”

-- The Count (Book 1: Anyway...)

Importance: While teaching Nina about the rules of being a princess, the Count tells her that princesses were people who were respectful to the elderly even though they may think the contributions of the elderly to society were not significant.

Now there was a wine that would clash with the stew as Achilles clashed with Hector. It would slay the dish with a blow to the head and drag it behind its chariot until it tested the fortitude of every man in Troy. Besides, it plainly cost three times what the young man could afford.”

-- Narrator (Book 1: Advent)

Importance: The Count could not help but make a wine suggestion to a couple when he heard the Bishop recommend to them a wine that would not only clash with their meal but that was also more expensive than the man could afford. This seems to be the basis of the Bishop’s dislike for the Count.

But had the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come suddenly appeared and roused the Count to give him a glimpse of the future, he would have seen that his sense of well-being had been premature. For less than four years later, after another careful accounting of the twice-tolling clock’s twelve chimes, Alexander Ilyich Rostov would be climbing to the roof of the Metropol Hotel in his finest jacket and gamely approaching its parapet in order to throw himself into the street below.”

-- Narrator (Book 1: Advent)

Importance: This quote foreshadows that the Count will reach a point in his life at which he will consider killing himself. The quote is introduced with a reference to the Christmas classic A Christmas Carol.



A complaint was filed with comrade Teodorov, the Commissar of Food, claiming that the existence of our wine list runs counter to the ideals of the Revolution. That it is a monument to the privilege of the nobility, the effeteness of the intelligentsia, and the predatory pricing of speculators.”

-- Andrey (Book 2: 1924: Anonymity)

Importance: The Count knew that it was the Bishop who was responsible for the complaint when he learned that the hotel workers had been commanded to remove label from all of its wine bottles in storage.

How was I to tell her that the man she has fallen in love with has sought her affections not due to an appreciation of her qualities, but to settle a score?”

-- The Count (Book 2: 1926: Adieu)

Importance: Because he cannot bring himself to tell his sister that the lieutenant is paying attention to her only because he is trying to get revenge on the Count for one uping him at a previous party, he lets the relationship continue without telling her anything.

But don't you see?’ explained the Count. ‘It is a chain of events. That night at the Novobaczksy’ when I magnanimously tore his marker, I knew perfectly well that word of the act would reach the Princess; and I took the greatest satisfaction in turning the tables on the cad. But if I had not so smugly put him in his place, he would not have pursued Helena, he would not have humiliated her, I would not have shot him, he might not have died in Masuria, and ten years ago I would have been where I belonged — at my sister’s side — when she finally breathed her last.’”

-- The Count (Book 2: 1926: Adieu)

Importance: The Count believes that it was his action of tearing up the lieutenant’s marker that ultimately led to him being in self exile in Paris when his sister died.

But when you exile a man into his own country, there is no beginning anew. For the exile at home — whether he be sent to Siberia or subject to the Minus Six — the love for his country will not become vague or shrouded by the mists of time.”

-- Narrator (Book 2: 1926: Adieu)

Importance: Because he is on house arrest, the Count realizes that had he been sent out of his country for his exile, he would have been able to start a new life. As it is, in Russia, the Count senses that he has no way to start a new life.

Rather than the flowering trees of central Moscow, the honey had a hint of a grassy riverbank . . . the trace of a summer breeze . . . a suggestion of a pergola. . . . But most of all, there was the unmistakable essence of a thousand apple trees in bloom.”

-- Narrator (Book 2: 1926: Adieu)

Importance: It is the taste of the apples from Nizhny Novgorod in the honey made by the bees on the roof of the Metropol that keeps the Count from jumping to his death.



Like the Freemasons, the Confederacy of the Humbled is a close-knit brotherhood whose members travel with no outward markings, but who know each other at a glance. For having fallen suddenly from grace, those in the Confederacy share a certain perspective. Knowing beauty, influence, fame, and privilege to be borrowed rather than bestowed, they are not easily impressed.”

-- Narrator (Book 3: An Afternoon Assigination)

Importance: After Anna lost her popularity as an actress, she entered the Confederacy of the Humbled, a group of which The Count was also a member. This name the Confederacy of the Humbled is a tongue in cheek way of referring to those who have been disappointed by their experience in life but have learned valuable lessons from those disappointments.

Dine with me once a month in this very room. Speak with me in French and English. Share with me your impressions of Western societies.”

-- Osip (Book 3: An Alliance)

Importance: The Count is approached by Osip Glebnikov, a former colonel of the Red Army, employs the Count to help him learn how to converse in both English and French, and to help him understand Western culture in order to help open diplomatic relations between the Russians and the French and British.

For once a week, they were required to visit a little gray building on the corner of Dzerzhinsky Street where some little gray fellow behind a little gray desk would record whatever they had happened to hear word for word.”

-- Narrator (Book 3: Absinthe)

Importance: The hostesses hired to work in the bar at the Metropol are also tasked with eavesdropping on the guests of the bar and telling this man the things they had heard. It was one of the Bolshevik’s ways of keeping tabs on the people.

For as a people, we Russians have proven unusually adept at destroying that which we have created.”

-- Mishka (Book 3: Antics, Antitheses, an Accident)

Importance: This idea, proposed by Miskha, causes the Count a good deal of contemplation as he tries to decide what he thinks about his friend’s statement. The Count confers with a couple of different people about the meaning of Miska’s statement.

And suddenly, he found himself on the steps of the Metropol in the warm summer air — for the first time in over twenty years.”

-- Narrator (Book 3: Antics, Antitheses, and Accident)

Importance: It is when Sofia is injured in a fall down the stairs that the Count takes her outside to a taxi to go to a hospital. He does not even think about the fact that he has been told he will be shot if he leaves the hotel.



For all the varied concerns attendant to the raising of a child — over schoolwork, dress, and manners — in the end, a parent's responsibility could not be more simple: To bring a child safely into adulthood so that she could have a chance to experience a life of purpose and, God willing, contentment.”

-- Narrator (Book 3: Antics, Antitheses, and Accident)

Importance: The Count criticizes himself because he believes he has failed to do even the basics of caring for Sofia because he allowed her to get injured.

It is one of the intrinsic limitations of being young, my dear, that you can never tell when a grand adventure has just begun.”

-- The Count (Book 4: 1953: Apostles and Apostates)

Importance: The Count is bragging on Sofia for winning her school's music competition when she tells him that she believes her accomplishment was not that big of a deal. He tells her it was only because she was so young that she did not understand she was at the beginning of a great adventure in her life.

For despite his friendships with Marina and Andrey and Emile, despite his love for Anna, despite Sofia — that extraordinary blessing that had struck him from the blue — when Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich died, there went the last of those who had known him as a younger man.”

-- Book 4: 1953: Apostles and Apostates (Book 4: 1953: Apostles and Apostates)

Importance: It is when Mishka, the Count's friend, dies that the Count realizes that he has just lost the last person in his life who knew him when he and his family were living as aristocrats at Idlehour.

For while the Count may have resolved to take action on the night of Katerina's visit six months before, it was only with news of the Conservatory's goodwill tour that the clock had begun to tick.”

-- Narrator (Book 5: 1954: Applause and Acclaim)

Importance: It is when the Count learns that Sofia will be participating in a goodwill concert out of the country of Russia that he begins to plan his escape from the hotel.

For what matters in life is not whether we receive a round of applause; what matters is whether we have the courage to venture forth despite the uncertainty of acclaim.”

-- The Count (Book 5: 1954: Applause and Acclaim)

Importance: Although she had at first tried to decline an offer to participate in a Goodwill concert, the Count attempts to persuade her to perform. He tells her that she must prove to herself that she has the courage to perform, whether or not is praised for her performance.

The dinner for the Presidium and Council of Ministers was tailor made to his intentions. He could not conceive of a better occasion. But even if there were one, with just sixteen



days until the Conservatory's tour, the Count was simply out of time."
-- Narrator (Book 5: Adulthood)

Importance: The Count uses the joint dinner of the Presidium and Council of Ministers to get a feeling for the way the leadership of Russia will arrange itself after the death of Stalin. He plans to give this information to Richard in exchange for asylum for Sofia in France.

But in the dining room of the Boyarsky, where for almost fifty years the ambience had been defined by candlelight, the customers were served without interruption."
-- Narrator (Book 5: Adulthood)

Importance: When the lights went out all over Moscow in preparation for the change to nuclear power, people's lives and jobs were interrupted. It is noted that there were no hesitations in the Boyarsky as that restaurant was still lit by candlelight, as it had been for years.

Well, since the day I was born, Sofia, there was only one time when Life needed me to be in a particular place at a particular time, and that was when your mother brought you to the lobby of the Metropol."
-- The Count (Book 5: Anecdotes)

Importance: In this quote the Count acknowledges that his greatest job, his reason for living, came when Sofia was left in his care. He understands now that caring for Sofia was his reason for being alive, and for being put where he was.

But the emotion the Bishop felt upon opening the door to his office was almost certainly that of shock — for the adversary that he had left in the attic just minutes before was now sitting behind the manager's desk with a pistol in his hand."
-- Narrator (Book 5: Antagonists at Arms (And an Absolution))

Importance: The Count borrowed a trick from Sofia when he hurried downstairs and got the antique dueling pistols out of the cabinet in the manger's office before the Bishop could arrive in his office. The Bishop is shocked, just as the Count had hoped he would be.

And in the midst of this commotion, Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov quietly donned the journalist's hat and coat, shouldered his rucksack, and walked out of the Metropol Hotel."
-- Narrator (Book Five: Apotheoses)

Importance: Knowing that Sofia was safe in France, the Count arranged for all of the hotel's phones to ring at the same time. It was during this ruckus that the count walked out of the hotel. Since he had gotten word that Mishka had died, the Count knew there was no need for him to protect his friend any longer. Knowing that Mishka would have been killed or sentenced to hard labor if he had taken credit for the poem he had



written, the Count had put his name on the poem. It was for this reason that the Count was placed on house arrest in the Metropol.

Obviously,' said the Chief Administrator, 'he didn't shoot Leplevsky, because Leplevsky isn't an aristocrat.'"

-- The Chief Administrator aka Osip (Book Five: Afterwards)

Importance: When a young man wonders to the Chief Administrator why the Count did not shoot Leplevsky when he had the opportunity, the Chief Administrator remembers his original conversation with the Count. In that conversation, the Count told Osip that he shot the lieutenant because he was an aristocrat. Based on this answer, it would follow that the Count would not shoot Leplevsky because he was not an aristocrat.

For as it turns out, one can revisit the past quite pleasantly, as long as one does so expecting nearly every aspect of it to have changed."

-- Narrator (Book Five: Afterwards)

Importance: Even though the Count returns to his family's estate to discover the house has been burned to the ground, he is not depressed because he had prepared himself for the fact the place had changed.