Great Short Works of Leo Tolstoy Study Guide

Great Short Works of Leo Tolstoy by Leo Tolstoy

BOOKRAGS

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Family Happiness

Family Happiness Summary

Marya Alexandrovna is a 17-year-old woman who grows increasingly depressed after her mother's death while spending the winter at the family's country home. The attractive teenager lives with her younger sister Sinya and Katya, an old family friend and governess. The oppressive Russian winter with its chilling and isolating snow storms drains her spirit and makes Marya yearn for Petersburg. In the midst of their grief, an old friend of Mary's father, Sergey Mikhaylych, drops by to bring a little bit of cheer. At first, Marya is repelled by his buoyant and extroverted manner. However, a long-standing feeling of friendship going back to her earliest days slowly develops into a romantic attachment when the middle-aged man of affairs returns for a visit in May, then comes several times a week during the summer. Gradually, Sergey teases Marya about her self-centered coquettish nature and captures her curiosity about practical matters such as maintaining the homes of friends in the country, planting and harvesting crops, and other matters that are spiritual and economic. They fall in love and are married.

At first, Marya is surprised that their relationship is devoid of the hard work, struggle, and sacrifice that she expected in marriage. Instead, the pair are wildly in love and each believes the other to be perfect. Their marriage is, to Marya "a selfish feeling of love for one another, a wish to be loved, a constant causeless gaiety and entire oblivion of all the world." The lovebirds can hardly bear to be separated for even a moment. With the approach of winter, Mariya feels her old depression return. She feels isolated and excluded from Sergey's life, like an afterthought. "I wanted not what I had got," she says, "but a life of struggle." Her depression and boredom turn into irritation with her husband. They visit Moscow and Petersburg, which temporarily relieves her depression, but Marya becomes jealous when Sergey talks to another woman at a ball.

Then Sergey becomes jealous when Mariya talks to a prince at another social function. In a rage, he declares that "all is over" between them. They continue with their social life, avoiding any discussion of returning to the country. When Sergey realizes their financial situation, he says they must return to the country and Mariya gives birth to their first child. Sergey's mother dies. Marya has a brief flirtation with a Frenchman who disgusts her and then quickly breaks it off. Sergey explains to her that he loves her but in a different way than they loved each other when they were younger. Mariya reflects that past feelings, like past times, are gone forever and accepts the happiness of having a family where there is love and a new kind of happiness.

Family Happiness Analysis

The marriage of Marya Alexandrovna and Sergey Mikhaylych is dream-like at first, filled in equal parts by narcissism and romantic love. Marya begins to question why their privileged life is devoid of the kind of struggle that she assumes is an important part of

the marital bond. Marya is bored and depressed with life on their country estate, so Sergey takes her to Moscow and Petersburg where they enjoy socializing and immersion in a more sophisticated urban lifestyle. The birth of their first child does not energize Marya and she again becomes depressed when they return to the country. Both husband and wife have brief flirtations with others, arousing jealousy in each other.

When Marya accepts her life and marriage for what it is and surrenders to the good things in her life, family, love, and comfort, she realizes that she is now a mature adult who is able to experience a different kind of happiness. The story ends on a positive note of harmony and hope.

Tolstoy's intention in this story is to demonstrate how marriage partners can grow from a youthful and self-centered love to a broader and more inclusive love that knows gratitude as well as personal satisfaction. By surrendering themselves to the marriage, both Sergey and Mariya are able to weather the difficult times and allow their bond to strengthen. Happiness is thus won through acceptance, forgiveness and steadfastness.

"Family Happiness" was written in 1859 at a time when divorce was becoming a social phenomenon in Europe, according to the author's observations in The Kreutzer Sonata in this collection. It is therefore possible that Tolstoy wrote this as a cautionary tale and antidote to social trends that seemed to threaten the family.

The Cossacks

The Cossacks Summary

Dmitri Olenin is a privileged 24-year-old military cadet who, after an aimless youth, decides to go to the Caucasus to serve his country and Tsar. He brings with him the servant, Vanyusha, as he goes from Moscow to pursue dreams of a heroic future filled with "Circassian women, mountains, precipices, terrible torrents, and perils." There, too, this youthful cynic who does not believe in love hopes to find the perfect woman, and to come to her "covered with dust, blood and fame." Deep in the heart of the Caucasus, Olenin encounters a complex culture along the 50-mile length of the Terek River.

Grebensk Cossacks, descendants of original Russians who migrated there, are concentrated on one side of the river where thay have intermarried with nearby Chechens but preserve their language and many of their customs. The center of their settlement is the village of Novomlinsk. On the other side of the Terek River live the Muslim Tartars, who are usually pro-Russian, and beyond them live the lawless mountain tribes. Christian Cossack men, who regard their wives as beasts of burden, engage in military patrols and keep a watchful eye on the"half-savage Mohammedan tribes," expecting an attack at any time.

Late one evening, four Cossacks, armed to the teeth and led by Lukashka, depart the village to lie in ambush in case any Tartars decide to make a sneak attack. Toward morning, Lukasha sees what he thinks is a Tartar crossing the river with a log strapped to his back for camouflage. He fires, hits the man in the head and kills him, then realizes that he is a Chechen. Astounded, the four men leave the body and return to their outpost. Olenin begins a flirtation with the youthful Maryanka, daughter of the couple in whose home he and Vanyusha are lodged. At home, Lukashka's mute sister signals to him that she wants him to kill another Chechen. Olenin goes hunting with Eroshka, an elder of the village, and they startle a stag who runs off without harm. The next day, Olenin returns to the spot where they had seen the stag's lair. The stag is not there, but Olenin shoots seven pheasants then rests for a while, appreciating the natural beauty. Apprehension about a possible Tartar attack sends him quickly home with his dog.

A couple of enraged Chechens cross the river to pick up the corpse of the soldier killed by Lukashka. They spit contemptuously, put the body in a skiff to cross back, load it on a horse and disappear. The Russians on the other side of the river burst into a round of merriment, which puzzles Olenin. As evening approaches, Lukashka leads Olenin back to the village; even though he is aware that Lukashka is a rival for the affections of Maryanka, he gives him a horse he purchased in Grozny. An old friend from Moscow, Beletsky, arrives uninvited at Olenin's door and proposes to have a big party to which he and Maryanka will both be invited. At the affair, Olenin feels uncomfortable and shy, barely speaking to his lady love. When the servant girls offer the guests wine and kisses, Olenin embraces Maryanka but she runs away before he can kiss her. Nevertheless, Olenin realizes that a barrier between them has been broken.

Just as Olenin realizes that the Cossacks are not at all as he imagined them but more real, wholesome, and down-to-earth word comes that Maryanka and Lukashka are engaged. An engagement party becomes a drunken free-for-all, and the old man Eroshka stumbles into Olenin's house after being at the party, cursing the entire group for being "schwine." A few days later, Olenin encounters Maryanka working hard to harvest wine grapes, since it is fall. She asks him to help her cut some grapes, and as he does he tries to tell her that he loves her but the words get stuck in his throat.. That evening, he watches Maryanka prepare for bed in her yurt. When it is night, he steals to her yurt and hears her breathing but is spotted by another soldier named Nazarka who taunts him and threatens to tell his commanding officer. Olenin gives him 10 rubles as hush money, and he goes away.

A group of Cossack soldiers depart for a four-day raid, but Olenin declines their invitation to join them and remains with Vanyusha in the village. He encounters Maryanka baking bread at the oven with her mother; after a few sips of wine he approaches and tells her that he loves her desperately,. beseeching her to call off her engagement to Lukashka. As the harvest holiday festivities get underway, a dashing Lukashka rides up on his horse accompanied by Nazarka. Lukashka tries to carry Mayanka off on his horse but she snubs him and runs off. Later that evening, Olenin hopes to meet Maryanka at the annual ball that attracts the most beautiful, young, and eligible Cossack women so he can propose to her. He again encounters Maryanka later that night, runs up to her and asks if he can seek her father's approval to marry. Maryanka indicates she will do so, if her father approves.

The next day, a group of Cossack soldiers under the command of Lukashka rides off to search for invading Chechens. Olenin offers to ride with them, but is rebuffed. He hears gunfire in the distance. Lukashka is shot and gravely wounded and the nine Chechen men lie dead in the grasses. Once more, Olenin tries to see Maryanka in her yurt but she yells angrily at him to leave her alone. The steely determination in her eyes convinces him that she will never be his. The next day, Olenin and Vanyusha give their farewells to their Cossack friends and depart the village to go back to Moscow. Maryanka does not even look at Olenin as he rides off.

The Cossacks Analysis

In this story, a proud Muscovite soldier goes to the Caucasus to "find himself" helping an enclave of Cossack Russians fight off the savage Tartars. As a member of the Caucasian Army, Dmitri Olenin soon discovers that he is not held in particularly high esteem by the Cossacks, whom he considers country hicks. He notices that the woman are particularly beautiful and strong. This is the result of the Cossack men for generations leaving the heavy work of survival to the women while they go off on hunting or fighting expeditions. On one of those expeditions, several Cossacks hide along the banks of the Terek River to watch for any attack by their arch enemy, the Tartars. A strong young man named Lukashka accidently shoots and kills a Chechen crossing the river at daybreak. This is an offense certain to stir up trouble.

Meanwhile, Olenin flirts with the peasant girl Maryanka and asks if she will marry him. She says she will ask her father, but seems to shun Olenin at a social event. Then Olenin learns that Maryanka has become engaged to Lukashka, which comes as a terrible blow to his ego. Lukashka gives a horse to Olenin as a gesture of goodwill, but Olenin is bitter that he cannot marry Maryanka and tries to convince her to leave Lukashka. She laughs evasively and becomes coquettish. Olenin is not invited on any of the Cossack forays in search of enemy soldiers and feels the sting of rejection twice. Olenin is impressed with the strength and beauty of the Cosasack women who have "a peculiarly independent masculine character and remarkably developed physical powers, common sense, resolution, and stability." Expecting to find an inferior race of backwoods people, Olenin finds the women "in most cases stronger, more intelligent, more developed and handsomer than the men."

Finally, frustrated with his inability either to find and wed the perfect woman or to enjoy the type of high adventure in the mountains he'd expected, Olenin petitions Moscow to return and receives orders to return. As his cart is leaving, Maryanka emerges from the barn, casts a side-wise glance in his direction and continues on her path. Olenin doesn't even look at her.

In Tolstoy's fictional world, Olenin represents the type of urban character who disdainfully regards country people as oddities, and whose arrival in the midst of the Cossacks is really a career move by which he hopes to experience adventure and to earn a big promotion in the Caucasian Army. It is revealing of his character that he is shocked to discover that the Cossacks are real life, flesh-and-blood creatures like himself with their own hopes, fears, dreams, and desires. The Cossacks figure Olenin out at once and can not take him seriously. The closest Olenin comes to having a genuinely human emotion is when he falls in love with Maryanka. However, she is not swayed by his advances because, as Olenin himself discovers, the Cossack women are very strong and independent.

The Olenin who returns in frustration to Moscow is a sadder-but-wiser figure who has gained some real respect for the Cossacks, who are so completely different than him.

The Death of Ivan Ilych

The Death of Ivan Ilych Summary

Ivan Ilych is a bright and promising law school graduate with a cheerful and engaging personality who begins his career as a magistrate in a provincial district. After five years, he secures a higher position in another province administering a new set of laws and legal procedures known as the Code os 1864. He grows a beard, buys fancy clothes, and finds a wife in the person of Praskovya Federovna. Right away, Ivan Ilych's wife shows mental problems in fits of jealousy, unreasonable demands for his constant attention, and her general displeasure with everything in her life. With the birth of their first child and his wife's ill temper, Ilych seeks an identity for himself separate from his home life. He finds this is renewed dedication to his work and by developing a passion for bridge. Ilych becomes assistant public prosecutor after three years. Seven years later, he moves with his family to another town where he is promoted to public prosecutor. Despite his ascendancy through the legal ranks and steadily increasing salary, Praskovya Fedorovna continues to blame him for her every inconvenience in their new house.

After 17 years of more children, complaints from his chronically unhappy wife and more debts, Ilych applies for and receives a position with the Court of Justice in Petersburg where he started his career. The salary of 5,000 rubles per year is precisely what Ilych wants. In addition, he is given 3,500 rubles for moving expenses. At last, Ilych is comfortable and happy. He and his wife arrange a truce and all is well as the family settles into a peaceful domestic routine. He continues to play bridge and maintains a clear distinction betrween his public and private lives. Ilych notices a strange taste in his mouth accompanied by a pain in his wide. Quarrels between husband and wife resume. He consults wirth several doctors but none can make a clear diagnosis after many tests; they mumble about his liver and appendix while Ilych's fears about his health grow.

Ilych continues to report to the court and do his duties, despite the increased pain, and feels sorry for himself that no one seems to understand his condition or offers him any sympathy. Ivan Ilych can barely make it through the work week, and must come home promptly each night and fall into bed. He becomes obsessed with his nameless illness, and with death. His irritability becomes evident. Once he stumbles in pain from the toilet, pants pulled down, and falls. For the first time, Ilych sees just how atrophied his leg muscles have become and is convinced that death is closer. As his health deteriorates, Ilych becomes infuriated with his family and doctors who act as if he will recover soon when he knows full well that he will not. He scolds them for "lying" to him. During one particularly painful and sleepless night, when his wife puts her hand on his head to comfort him, Ilych realizes that "he hates her with his whole soul."

As he descends into a morphine-induced trance, Ilych reviews his life from its beginning and from several different vantage points. He concludes that his life has been unacceptable and a major disappointment. He blames himself for everything in his life

that he now finds revolting. And yet, he wants to cling to life despite the fact his mental torture makes his physical suffering worse. Then, the three days Ilych struggles in "that black sack into which he was being thrust by an invisible, resistless force." As he sinks deeper into that darkness, he enters light and realizes that his fear of death is removed because there is no death. "In place of death, there was light." Ilych, composed for the first time in months, draws a deep breath, sighs, and then dies.

The Death of Ivan Ilych Analysis

This is a tale of suicide through ambition. Ivan Ilych is the Russian equivalent of "the all-American boy," a hard-working and superior student with a well-rounded personality and a friendly manner that easily wins friends. Tolstoy describes him as "capable, cheerful, good-natured and sociable" with an ingrained sense of responsibility and duty. Simply by succeeding in the competitive field of the law, Ilych progresses gradually from nice guy to antisocial psychopath and an early death. His life is "most simple and most ordinary, and therefore most terrible."

Immediately upon graduating from law school, Ilych takes a series of provincial court positions as he begins to climb the ladder of jurisprudence. After a brief period of dissolute living, he marries Praskovya Federeovna Mikhel after receiving an important judicial position administering the revised Code of 1864. At first, his married life is pleasant, but after Praskovya becomes pregnant, her disposition changes from agreeable to paranoid and resentful. She blames her husband for every conceivable ill in her life, real or imagined. In response, Ilych retreats more and more from family life and into his work. His ability to live, as it were, in two different worlds continues to serve him as more children arrive into this barren marriage.

As Ilych climbs to higher positions, his wife's nagging progresses to profound unhappiness that neither money nor possessions can remedy. Ilych finds his only pleasure in playing bridge with friends and retreats further into himself. Fights with his wife escalate until one day he notices a pain in his side and foul taste in his mouth. Already suspicious of doctors, Ilych's concern for his health deepens when his doctor cannot come up with a clear diagnosis. He sinks deeper into a pit of despair and hypochondria. His work provides him with his only satisfaction, although putting in hours at his desk becomes increasingly painful. His fears about his health are worsened by the fact no one, especially his wife, seems to understand or care that he is deathly ill.

Iltych becomes resentful, too, of the unreal world that people around him create as if their denial of his illness would comfort him and themselves. He becomes even more isolated and terrified as he becomes bedridden and needs a full-time caretaker. As the illness, whatever it is, progresses Ilych realizes that he hates his wife with a full and happy heart. He finds even being near her repulses him. As his self-torture grows excruciating, Ilych realizes his whole life has been false and useless. As death approaches, Ilych loses his fear and welcomes the end; death has been transmuted into light and he passes in a state of joy at the age of 49.

This may be another cautionary tale in which Tolstoy dramatizes the risks of ambition that leads to an ego-driven and isolated life. One question nags the reader at the end of the story. What would have been the outcome if Ilych were able to connect deeply with his wife, understand her own sufferings and try to offer her spiritual as well as financial sustenance?

The Devil

The Devil Summary

Eugene Irtenev, a 26-year-old well-educated lawyer in a government ministry in Petersburg, inherits with his brothers his father's large estate called the Semenov estate in the country. Once he moves to the estate to care for his mother and to settle his father's many debts, he soon becomes restless for the company of a woman. There are few available women in the village, but "old Daniel," a family friend, offers to introduce him to Stepanida or the wife of a soldier who is always away from home. At first, Eugene finds the idea distasteful but his red-blooded need for sex leads him to Stepanida and they begin meeting each week in the tall grasses of the woods. Eugene's mother wants him to marry someone with money so they can settle their own financial affairs, but Eugene falls in love with Liza Annenskaya and they marry. He breaks off his affair with Stepanida, but later sees her in the village carrying a young child and wonders if it could be his.

Conjugal relations with his new bride are dutiful rather than passionate, but Eugene notices that his life has become easier since his marriage because his wife quietly works behind the scenes to make his life more pleasant. Liza also knows her husband's soul very well and is careful never to offend of hurt his feelings. After a miscarriage, Liza becomes pregnant again and all is well, except for her jealousy that she kept under tight control. Liza decides to have the house cleaned in the spring and one of the two women she hires is Stepanida. Like a man possessed, he puts on his boots and runs outside hoping to see Stepanida but stops on the veranda where his wife is having tea with some friends and decides to join them.

Eugene's sudden recurrence of passion is followed by guilt and his suffering is palpable. One day, walking in the garden, the pregnant Liza falls while crossing a small ditch and is confined to her bed. She does not miscarry and Eugene is always by her side. Eventually, he becomes restless and his wife tells him to go outside and tend to the business of the estate. Still obsessing on Stepanida, Eugene fears that he is going insane. A planned meeting goes awry when Eugene is called inside to help with his wife's medications. Liza asks him often if anything is wrong and he answers no. He decides to confide his situation to his uncle who promises to keep the secret to himself. The uncle asks whether Eugene is really in love with Stepanida. He replies it is not love but obsession that drives him. The uncle recommends that Eugene take his family to the Crimea.

Eugene's love for his wife is rekindled after the birth of a daughter. His obsession with Stepanida continues as they randomly encounter each other in public. Eugene decides he must kill either Eugene or Stepanida or his wife to end his suffering. Instead, he shoots himself.

In an alternative ending. Tolstoy has Eugene and Stepanida running into each other at the barn where corn is being harvested. He resists her at first, then pulls out his revolver and kills her. He is found to be a victim of temporary insanity and ordered to do church penance, followed by confinement in a monastery. The doctors label him a psychopath. He brings to drink alcohol in the monastery and when released, he comes home "an enfeebled, irresponsible drunkard."

The Devil Analysis

Adultery leads to insanity, which leads to suicide or murder, depending on which of two different endings you chose. Tolstoy provides two alternate endings because both are crimes of passion, driven by insanity. Whichever version the reader decides, the story makes sense and fits within the realm of the possible. It is up to the reader to decide whether Eugene Irtinev's desperation is turned against himself or against Stepanida, the peasant wife of an absent military officer with whom he carries on an affair.

Eugene inherits an estate with lots of debts from his father. Eugene works full-time to settle the estate between himself, his mother who lives on the estate, and his brother. Just as he thinks he has affairs settled, some new debt or obligation arises. His attorney even advises him against accepting the estate because of all the debts, and accepting instead only the estate left by his grandmother. Determined to keep his father's estate, he decides to sell off some of it acreage to cure the financial liabilities. Meanwhile, he comforts himself with regular sexual encounters with Stepanida.

Eugene's mother wants him to marry a socially-acceptable woman with money to improve the family's financial standing but Eugene, repelled by the idea, instead falls in love with Liza Annenskaya and marries. He then cuts off his relationship with Stepanida. Although there is little physical passion with his wife, Eugene comes to be quite comfortable with her as she proves her skill at identifying her husband's moods and preferences. Their serenity is threatened by Liza's fits of jealousy, and the ongoing financial struggle. When Liza hires a couple of maids to clean the house, one of them is Stepanida. Seeing her however briefly rekindles his flames and he resolves not to respond.

When his wife falls and his housebound, Eugene sits with her almost constantly while desiring Stepanida. He makes furtive trips into the woods in hopes they will meet. Twice his wife arks him for a favor which prevents his going to the woods. After a vacation trip to the Crimea, Liza gives birth to a daughter and Eugene convinces himself he loves his wife. He briefly encounters Stepanida in the village and his lust is again fanned. He becomes unhinged and 1) shoots and kills himself, or 2) shoots and kills Stepanida.

Either way, these are the acts of a deranged person. Tolstoy reminds the reader of the thin line between sanity and madness. Once again, we have a story with a moral message to the effect that even committing adultery only "in the heart" unleashes powerful, uncontrollable forces that can produce madness.

The Kreutzer Sonata

The Kreutzer Sonata Summary

On a long train ride, a man named Pozdnyshev tells his seatmate the story of how he murdered his wife in a fit of jealous rage. Believing himself to be "in love," Pozdnyshev marries after a brief courtship based more on carnal rather than spiritual union. But Pozdnyshev tells his companion that he prides himself on his determination to remain faithful to his wife in a monogamous relationship. Whenever left alone together, the couple has difficulty making conversation rather than love. On the third or fourth day after their wedding, Pozdnyshev notices his wife seems depressed. When he asks why, she says she can see that he does not love her. After the satisfaction of their sensuality, he tells his travel companion, they could see themselves in their true relationship "as two egotists quite alien to each other." In the first few weeks of their marriage, Pozdnyshev says, he senses that there is no happiness in marriage, only "a very heavy burden."

Although his wife wants to nurse their first child, doctors tell her she shouldn't, frustrating her natural instincts. An educated woman, his wife balks at the notion that even while pregnant or nursing she must be her husband's seductress. As an estrangement develops, Pozdnyshev imagines that he is living an honest family life if he does not chase orther women, completely unaware of his wife's suffering as mother and wife. She bears five children in eight years. But Pozdnyshev acknowledges that he was jealous of his wife the entire time they were married. He views children as "a torment and nothing else," and says their arrival did not improve their marriage "but poisoned it."

Their estrangement develops into open hostility. Seeking escape, his wife renews her interest in music and resumes playing the piano. At about that time, a "semi-professional" violinist who is a neighbor introduces himself to the couple, a man named Trukhachevski. The wife and visitor quickly discover their mutual interest in music, as well as "an electric current" between themselves. He visits occasionally andf they play together. They decide to rehearse and perform Beethoven's "Kreutzer Sonata." Pozdnyshev is unusually lighthearted, and his wife beams with joy that evening. But when Pozdnyshev must leave for a business trip, "the mad beast of jealousy" overtakes him as he invents scenes of unfaithfulness with his wife and Trukhhachevski. He becomes enraged when he realizes that he has a legal right to her body but can not control that body. Jealousy turns him into "a beast, a cruel and cunning beast," he says.

When he returns, Pozdnyshev hears the two playing music and he grabs a dagger, then rushes into the room. Trukhachevsky grabs his arm and tries to stop him. Despite her protestations of innocence, Pozdnyshev grabs his wife by the throat and throttles her, then drives the dagger into her chest. When he sees her dead face, he realizes for the first time the enormity of his crime and that it is completely irreversible. Pozdnyshev is tried and found not guilty as a "wronged man."

The Kreutzer Sonata Analysis

As in the previous story (The Devil), Tolstoy opens with a quotation from the Bible, "But I say unto you, that everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew v. 28.) Evidently, lust and adultery have been common human conditions for thousands of years as even former President Jimmy Carter admitted that he had "lusted in my heart" for other women. In this story, lust and jealousy lead again to murder in a sad repetition of the consequences of instincts run amok.

Pozdnyshev admits that he killed his wife in a fit of jealousy in a well-publicized and infamous case. He asks his seatmate if he wants to hear the story. The passengers answers yes with enthusiasm. Pozdnyshev says he is a wealthy landowner and university graduate who in his youth led a dissolute life and practiced "debauchery" with a number of women. He says a libertine who has known several women is like a drug addict or alcoholic, in a prescient statement long before the modern identification of sexual addiction. In any event, Pozdnyshev confesses to being a complete libertine.

Ironically, Pozdnyshev says, all the while he was in his debauchery he intended to marry and raise a family. He wanted, in contrast to himself, a woman pure as he was corrupt. He finds just the woman for himself and falls dizzily in love. But he can not tame his lust and marries with the foreknowledge that a monogamous relationship will in all likelihood turn polygamous. Shortly after the wedding, his wife becomes depressed because she believes he does not love her; he feels the marriage as "a heavy burden" devoid of happiness. Although he does not pursue other woman, Pozdnyshev says, he is terribly jealous. His wife makes an unsuccessful attempt at suicide.

Seeking soul nurturing, his wife then takes piano lessons from a man who is in the eyes of Pozdnyshev a lecherous and lubricious seducer of women. His jealousy becomes inflamed like "a mad beast growl[ing] in its kennel, and he rushes into the room during a piano lesson and stabs his wife who dies a few days later. While dying, she shouts that she hates him and will not forgive him. Gradually, as his rage dissipates Pozdnyshev realizes the horror of his actions and their effects on the couple's five children.

Once again, it is the complete loss of control, of sanity, of all proportion that drives someone to an act of extreme violence. Tolstoy has thus demonstrated "the wages of sin" mentioned in the Bible. His tale stands also as a testament to the perverse extremes of behavior driven by fear in the form of murderous jealousy.

Master and Man

Master and Man Summary

Vasili Andreevich, a wealthy innkeeper and church elder in Grishkino, hears of a bidding war for the Goryachkin grove or a splendid piece of land he has long admired. He "borrows" 2,300 rubles from the church till to and adds it to his own 300 rubles to bring his bid to 3,000 rubles for the property, Then he orders his servant Nikita to saddle up the trusty steed Mukhorty to the sled and they take off across the landscape kin a driving snowstorm. Nikita is very fond of the horse, and treats him like a member of his human family. When the horse becomes sweaty from his labors, Nikita usually lets him rest; but this is a fear-driven gallop to get to Goryachkin and make his bid before the land is sold.

Nikita realizes that they have gotten off the path in the deep snow, and he jumps from the sled to see if he can locate the road. When he can't find the road, Vasili decides to continue in a straight line across the Zakharov potato fields in hopes they will come out on the other side. Mukhorty stumbles in a ditch and sits down in the thick snow, covered with sweat and hoarfrost. Vasili wants to pause and give the horse a rest; Nikita favors pressing on. After stumbling along in the snowstorm, they find a road and follow it into the village Grishkino. They stop at a house to ask directions, and the land owner tries to persuade them to spend the night, to get out of the storm.

But Vasili pushes to get going, and once again they head off into the blinding storm. Once again, they lose the road but continue until they realize they have made a circle and are back at Grishkino. They stop at a house, drink some vodka and eat some food offered generously by the wealthiest man in the village. He also urges them to stay overnight because of the storm. But after some tea, they are led to a hilltop and given directions by a servant named Petrushka. They soldier on until Mukhorty stops short of a ravine. They start again, and are soon stuck in a ravine. Nikita suggests they stop and spend the night in the sled. He removes the horse's bridles and harness and then makes a soft place for him with straw and covers him with a blanket. Then he digs a small trench for himself near the sled where Vasili is to spend the night, covers it with straw, pulls his coat snug over himself and quietly goes to sleep.

Vasili rouses the horse and tries one more time to find the road in the darkness. Mukhorty lets out a blood-curdling cry and falls on his side into a snow drift. Vasili tries to continue on foot, but turns back toward the horse and they return to the sledge. There Nikita moans that he is freezing. Vasili rakes the snow off Nikita, then lies atop him with his fur coats layered on his back. Vasili lies thus for hours and hours, keeping Nikita warm. But Vasili notices he can not move his arms or legs, sleeps, then awakens crying, "I'm coming! I'm coming." Then he freezes and dies.

When the towns people dig the rigid corpse of Vasili and the still breathing Nikita out of the snow the next day, they take Nikita to the hospital where he recovers after having

three of his toes removed. Restored to health, Nikita works for another 20 years as farm laborer and watchman. In his old age, he dies at home near his wife,

Master and Man Analysis

The toughness and simple dignity of the Russian peasant is the central theme of this story in which a wealthy, effete landowner is cast alongside his sturdy servant to face a harrowing winter snowstorm. Their master tries unsuccessfully to use the servant for his survival, as he has used his body for his own comfort for many years. The master dies in the blizzard but the servant, using his peasant wisdom and strength, survives to have a long and productive life.

The wealthy and youthful Vasili Andreevich is the master who is driven by greed to set out in a real blizzard to make a bid on a piece of property. Nikita is the man, a "peasant of about 50 from a neighboring village" who works as a freelance laborer. On the day that Andreevich decides to leave, Nikita is the only laborer around who is sober so Andreevich hires him to accompany him in his sled from the small village where he lives to Goryachkin. Nikita, although "an habitual drunkard," is keen to make the journey and he outfits the sled with his favorite horse, Mukhorty.

Andreevich prizes Nikita for his dedication to work and his "kindly and pleasant temper." About twice a year, however, Nikita goes on a destructive bender that lasts until he has lost everything. Andreevich especially likes Nikita for "his honesty, his kindness to animals, and especially his cheapness." Nikita's accommodating personality is the compensatory part of his character, that feeds on his guilt about drinking.

Wearing two fur-lined coats, Andreevich jumps into the coach, takes the reins and gives the horse a swat with the whip. At first, they follow some tracks in the snow left by a previous sled, but they quickly realize they have veered off the road. They take a turn that they hope will put them on another road marked with stakes but once again are surrounded by snowdrifts and become disoriented. The two men can find no road to either side of the sled. At last, Andreevich stops the sled to allow the sweating, heaving horse to rest. When they resume their journey, they follow the sound of girls singing and approach the village of Grishkino. They pause for vodka and a bite of food, and the generous farm family offers a place to spend the night. Refusing, they leave and promptly get lost in the snowy woods again.

It is dark when they decide to stop for the night. Nikita finds a comfortable spot near the front of the sled to huddle against the snowstorm. Andreevich prances about, sleepless, bemoaning his fate. Finally, he lies on top of the sleeping Nikita and puts his two coats above himself. This scene serves as a dramatic reminder to the reader of the common sense wisdom of the peasant, contrasted with the clueless dithering of the wealthy. When people come to find them the next day, Andreevich is frozen but Nikita is alive, with some frostbite. After surgery for removal of dead tissue and recuperation, Nikita lives for another 20 years. The narrator asks rhetorically whether Nikita was pleased with his life or would have preferred to die in the snow.

Father Sergius

Father Sergius Summary

Prince Stepan Kasatsky is a young man born into a privileged family close to the court of Emperor Nicholas I. When Stepan is 12 his father, an outstanding military officer, dies and his mother enrolls him in military school in Petersburg as her late husband had intended. Steoan is a brilliant student and filled with self-confidence. Whenever he undertakes an activity, it is always to win recognition and approval for himself. He is, however, given to occasional uncontrollable fits of temper that sometimes result in violence. Stepan nurtures a "passionate adoration" for the emperor and envisions his life as a soldier in service to him and his country. In the emperor's court, he meets and falls in love with Countess Korotkova who is a beautiful and charming young woman who is also the tsar's concubine.

They become engaged. On a romantic rendezvous with the countess, Stepan says that through her he has learned that he is better than he realized; she tells him that is why she loves him. As they draw closer in love, she confesses to Stepan that she is the emperor's mistress but loves him more than the tsar. Stepan explodes in a fury, breaks off their engagement and decides to enter a monastery where he works diligently under his spiritual director. As usual, Stepan aspires to be a perfect monk through the subordination of his own will. After seven years, he is ordained a priest and given the name Father Sergius. Four years later, he is assigned to higher duties in a metropolitan monastery. Father Sergius becomes aware of his lust for women and asks to be transferred to a hermitage.

There he leads a solitary life of monasticism, studying, contemplating, and praying. After six years in this position when Sergius is 49, a woman named Makovkina comes knocking on his door during a a religious festival and asks to come into his cell to be saved from the cold. Unsettled, Sergius lets her into his cell and goes back to his work while she undresses to put her clothes near the stove. Although a partition divides them, Sergius becomes aware of his lust and guiltily chops off his index finger. He orders the woman to leave and feels righteous for avoiding sin. A year later, the same woman enters a convent. After seven more years as a recluse, Sergius discovers he has the power to heal by laying on of hands. One spectacular case of healing makes him a celebrity, and people constantly come to the hermitage to be healed. The hermitage promotes and profits from his fame.

A young woman comes to him complaining of pain, and begs him to heal by laying his hands on her. She takes one of his hands and places it on her fully-developed breast. She puts her arm around his waist and they spend the night together. The next day, Sergius decides there is no God and slips away from the hermitage in peasant clothing. When he sleeps in the forest, he dreams of his childhood friend Pashenka who lives as a widow in a town about 200 miles away. He determines to walk to her house. In his dream, Pashenka appears as a means of salvation. He finds her living in poverty with

her daughter, five grandchildren and alcoholic son-in-law. She supports them all by giving music lessons to tradesmen's daughters. At first, she does not recognize Sergius when he comes to her door. She invites him in after he explains who he is.

She tells him she has heard of his reputation as a holy man, but he rebuffs her by saying he is neither holy nor even good, but "a loathsome, vile and proud sinner who has gone astray-an adulterer, a murderer, a blasphemer and a deceiver." Sergius and Stepan realizes that Pashenka has lived the sort of life he pretended to live, unselfishly helping others, and that she is therefore closer to God. He departs, determined to seek God as he wanders from village to village, asking for food and a night's lodging. He is arrested as a vagrant and sent to Siberia, where he becomes the hired hand for a peasant farmer, working in the garden, teaching children, and caring for the sick.

Father Sergius Analysis

Father Sergius shows just how profoundly wounded pride can distort, corrupt ,and destroy a human life. It is pride of self and blind loyalty to Emporer Nicholas I that draws Prince Stepan Kasatsky into a brilliant, but brief, military career in the Cuirassier Life Guards, The prince strove doggedly all his life to achieve perfection and success in all his endeavors to bring praise and approval to himself. As an aide-de-camp to the emperor, Kasatsky is in a good position to use both his ability and family connections for a quick trip to the top. But his hopes and dreams are shattered when he learns that his fiancée is the emperor's mistress. His wounded pride and anger lead him directly to a monastery and a new life as Father Sergius.

Once again, pride drives Father Sergius to over-achieve. He becomes a faith healer and hermit, a sort of minor celebrity and profit center for the church. This gratifies his ego up to the point when he succumbs to lust for a woman. Although the woman who visits his cell does not have sex with him, Father Sergius feels compelled to chop one finger as penance. Later, he does actually have relations with another woman and decides he must leave the monastery and "find himself" by wandering about the countryside.

The thought pops into his head to visit an old childhood chum, Pashenka, who has led a difficult but sincere life caring for her children and mother. In her noble poverty and simple spirituality, Father Sergius discovers what it means to be genuine at last. "There is no God for the man who lives, as I did, for human praise," he realizes. Finally at peace, he thanks Psahenka and resumes his wanderings. He eventually settles as a hired hand on a farm in Siberia and lives the rest of his life as a poor, but honest peasant. His journey toward truth and recognition comes by his reconciliation, through humility, with God.

Hadji Murad

Hadji Murad Summary

Hadji Murad is a fierce fighter of Russians in the Chechnya of 1851 who has a conflict with the Chechen leader, Shamil, who orders the capture of Murad and the arrest of his family. On the run, Murad stops at the home of some friendly Chechens who take him overnight, feed and console him. Murad confides to his hosts that he is fleeing Shamil to the Russian fort at Vozvizhensk, where he intends to surrender himself and henchmen to fight on the Russian side. When Murad learns that he has been spotted by someone in the Chechen village, he and his men saddle up and race for the Russian border some 10 miles away. They narrowly escape capture by some Chechens obeying Shamil's orders.

Murad hopes that Russian Prince Vorontsov will place a large force of men at his disposal so he can raid the Chechen stronghold where his family is held and dispatch Shamil and his followers, leading to praise and promotion by Tsar Nicholas. Along the way, Murad and his men get into a shooting skirmish with some Chechen warriors. They make it to the Russian fort where Murad, speaking the Tartar language, announces his surrender. A large reception for the party of defecting Chechens makes Murad suspicious. Vorontsov tells Murad how pleased he is that a major enemy of Russia has come over to their side. Murad asks the prince to arrange an exchange of Chechen prisoners held by the Russians for the release of his family and Vorontsov agrees to consider the request.

Murad explains that he seeks revenge on Shamil for killing his brother, Osman, his father and other relatives. Murad beseeches the Russians to allow him to return surreptitiously to his old Chechen neighborhood to gather news of his family and plan their liberation. Word of Murad's surrender reaches the tsar, who rejects an advisor's suggestion to send Murad to Siberia and agrees with Prince Vorontsov that Murad should be used in by the Russians in the Caucasus. Nicholas also sends word that the Chechens should now be "more actively harassed than ever," and orders a raid on Chechnya. The zealous Russians destroy the village where Hadji Murad spent his youth. Knowing that if Murad had been on his side the Chechens would have defeated the Russians, Shamil sends a letter to him offering the release of his family if he returns and threatening to blind him for being a traitor.

The Russians finally agree to release Murad so he can seek to free his family in Chechnya. On the way, Murad and his men are ambushed by an old enemy, Hadji Aga, and Murad is shot several times in the ensuing battle. Hadji Aga then decapitates Murad and places his head in a sack. When he presents Murad's head to the Russians Marya Dmitrievna, one of Hadji Murad's friends in the Russian enclave, screams, "You're all cutthroats! Cutthroats and nothing else!"

Hadji Murad Analysis

Hadji Murad is a good man and a good soldier who is destroyed in tribal conflicts between Muslims and Christians, Tartars and Chechens along the Russian-Chechen border while trying to save his family from the clutches of a bloodthirsty warlord. Although the story is set in 1851, it is roughly the modern equivalent of the progression from loyalist to terrorist, and a distillation of the axiom that brutality breeds brutality.

At the outset, Hadji Murad is on the run from the Chechen warlord Shamil, who has captured Murad's family and put out a dead-or-alive edit for Murad's capture. The fugitive warrior is famous for the skill and bravery with which he has fought against the occupying Russians, but a personal dispute with Shamil has made him now seek safety at the Russian fort by surrendering and pledging allegiance to the tsar. From that relatively secure position, Murad hopes to enlist other soldiers in a raid to liberate his kidnapped family. When Murad approaches the waiting Russians with several henchmen, the Russians are pleased and welcome him.

At first, Murad is suspicious of the Russians when they give him a grand reception party; the Russians are suspicious of Murad because they don't know whether Shamil can influence him through their shared religion of Islam. With a single-minded purpose, Murad acts as if everything between himself and the Russians is fine for reaching his goal of freeing his family. The Russians finally agree to let him lead a raid against the Chechens. But before they can execute their raid, Murad and his men are ambushed by an old enemy, Khan Mahoma, who is himself a turncoat. In the gunfire, Murad is killed and one of the Khan party cuts off his head.

This story make it plain that tribal rivalries, as well as hostilities with the Russians, have been a fact of life for many generations in the Caucasus which in that respect is much like the Middle East, with its endless cycles of murder, revenge, and religious animosity. In Hadji Murad, the reader sees how these deep-seated patterns of behavior—more than rational thought—drive a type of madness that inevitably draws everyone, good or evil, into its web of destruction.

Alyosha the Pot

Alyosha the Pot Summary

Alyosha is a goodhearted but simple young man who works so hard on his father's farm he can't go to school. Alyosha accepts this, as everything else in his life, with a shrug and a smile. His contemporaries ridicule him for his appearance and ca.ll him "the pot" because when his mother sends him to deliver a pot of milk, he stumbles and drops the ceramic pot, wasting all the milk. When his older brother joins the army, Alyosha's father places the 19-year-old with a merchant in town as a household servant. There Alyosha continues to work like a dog with little consideration for himself. The merchant, offended by the boy's shabby appearance, orders him to get new boots to replace the hand-me-downs from his brother that Alyosha wears. When Alyosha's father comes to collect his son's wages, he gets angry with Alyosha because his employer has deducted the cost of his boots from his wages.

Alyosha becomes infatuated with the cook Ustinja, a young orphan girl and peasant like him. He realizes for the first time that it's possible to have a relationship based on affection and caring instead of simply working to satisfy another's needs and demands. Awkwardly, he proposes to her. Word gets to the merchant and to Alyosha's father that he intends to marry. The merchant declares that, if they marry, he will dismiss them both because he does not want married couples in his employ. Alyosha's father visits and gthrows cold water over his son's plans, demanding that he not get married. With a smile, Alyosha tells his father he will "forget about" betting married. When he tells Ustinja, they both end up weeping. Aylosha no longer talks with Ustinja about marriage.

One day while cleaning snow off the roof, Alyosha loses his footing and falls onto an iron railing covered with snow. He tries bravely to convince Ustinja that his pain is unimportant, and worries that his mnaster will be displeased. A priest comes to pray with him and Alyosha comes to believe that if his heart is right, all will be well. He asks for a drink of water, stetches out in the bed and dies.

Alyosha the Pot Analysis

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven." This biblical promise seems fulfilled in this short story about Alyosha, The poverty-stricken young man who is abused by everyone except his girlfriend goes through his brief life with a smile on his face and no resentments in his soul. In this little fable, Alyosha's soul seems to grow and expand despite the selfishness of people in his life. His father takes the wages of the young man and spends them on himself; his employer gives him more and more work without a raise; the other young people in the village ridicule him for his awkwardness. However, Alyosha seems to get a genuine satisfaction of serving others. When he meets the orphan girl Ustinja, Alyosha discovers for the first time that it's like to have a relationship based on affection instead of exploitation. However, he dies in an

accident, before he can have such an adult relationship. His life, though, demonstrates perhaps more clearly than any sermon what it means to live a spiritual existence.

Characters

Marya Alexandrovnaappears in Family Happiness

Marya Alexandrovna is the well-to-do wife of Sergey Mikhaylych who becomes bored in her marriage and then becomes uncomfortable around her husband. She then decides she is unhappy. She is also the narrator of the story, who confesses towards the end that her happiness increases when she learns to accept her husband and marriage.

Sergey Mikhaylychappears in Family Happiness

Sergey Mikhaylych is described by his wife as "middle-aged, tall, robust, and always in good spirits." When his wife becomes depressed, he takes her to Petersburg to cheer her up. This works for a while, but they both soon fall prey to boredom and jealousy.

Katyaappears in Family Happiness

Katya is an old friend of the Alexandrovna family, and governess to sisters Marya and Sonya.

Sonyaappears in Family Happiness

Sonya is Marya Anexandrovna's younger sister.

Dmitri Olenin appears in The Cossacks

Dmitri Olenin is a late-blooming child of the aristocracy who joins the Caucasian Army and sets out for adventures in Chechniya. He hopes to find a wife and to have big adventures with his fellow soldiers.

Lukashkaappears in The Cossacks

Lukashka is the young Cossack women to whom Olenin becomes attached and hopes to marry. He is called back to Moscow at his request, having neither had his big military adventures nor having won the hand of Lukashka.

Vanyushaappears in The Cossacks

Vanyusha is a tall, handsome Chechen soldier who, unbeknownst to Olenin, is engaged to Lukashka.

Maryankaappears in The Cossacks

Maryanka is an attractive young Cossack woman who works as a maid in her mother's home whenever she takes in paying guests such as Olenin.

Ivan Ilyichappears in The Death of Ivan Ilych

Ivan Ilych is the fastidious attorney and government worker whose hypochondria progresses into a real illness that no doctor can diagnose, and that ultimately causes his death. He hides from an unhappy marriage in his legal work. His is a case of negative thinking literally killing him.

Praskovya Fedorovnaappears in The Death of Ivan Ilych

Praskovya Fedorovna is Ivan Ilych's wife who bears him children and goes with him to various judicial posts throughout Russia as he climbs the ladder of success. She is a chronic malcontent who blames her husband for everything that she thinks is wrong with her life.They become estranged so that by the time he becomes ill, she shows no sympathy or concern for him and he hates her.

Peter Ivanovichappears in The Death of Ivan Ilych

Petere Ivanovich is one of Ivan Ilych's closest friends. At his funeral, he detects a faint whiff of a decomposing body.

Eugene Irtenev appears in The Devil

Eugene Irtinev is the promising young man whose life is undone by a combination of lust and jealousy.

Liza Annenskayaappears in The Devil

Liza Annenskaya is the wife of Eugene Irtenev.

Stepanidaappears in The Devil

Stepanida is the peasant woman that married to an absent army officer and has sex with Eugene Irtenev before his marriage.

Pozdnyshevappears in The Kreutzer Sonata

Pozdnyshev is the narrator who tells the story of how his jealousy caused him to murder his wife.

Trukhachevskiappears in The Kreutzer Sonata

Trukhachevski is the lubricious music teacher whose attentions to Posdnyshev's wife arouse a fierce jealousy.

Vasili Andreevichappears in Master and Man

Vasili Andreevich is a young and wealthyt land owner in rural Russia who enlists his servant Nikita to accompany him on a sled ride during a blizzard to make a bid on a piece of property. His greed causes his death.

Nikita Stepanych appears in Master and Man

Nikita is the peasant laborer who tends to the needs of Vasili Andreevich, even to the extent of accompanying him in a blizzard to make a bid on some property he wants to add to his estate. His peasant common sense enables him to survive being stranded overnight on a highway covered with snow, while his master does not.

Mukhortyappears in Master and Man

Mukhorty is the brave horse who pushes himself to death for his master in a heavy Russian snowstorm.

Prince Stepan Kasatskyappears in Father Sergius

Prince Kasatsky is an idealistic young military officer in the Russian army, dedicated to his Tsar, who is crushed when he learns that his fiancee has had an affair with the Tsar. He resigns from the military and seeks asylum in a monastery.

Father Sergiusappears in Father Sergius

Father Sergius is the name Prince Stepan Kasatsky takes upon entering the monastery where he lives for seven years, praying, doing the everyday chores of the monastery, and healing the sick.

Pashenkaappears in Father Sergius

Pashenka is an old childhood chum of Father Sergius, who remembers her and seeks her out after he leaves his monastery a broken man.

Hadji Muradappears in Hadji Murad

Hadji Murad is a Chechen warrior and Muslim who fights against Russian colonization. When his warlord kidnaps Murad's family as personal revenge, Murad surrenders to the Russians with the hope he can muster the resources to rescue his family. However, he is captured and beheaded by another enemy, Hadji Agha.

Princess Marya Vasilevnaappears in Hadji Murad

A "large-built, large-eyed, black-browned beauty" and charming seductress who is the wife of Prince Vorontsov, commander of the Kurin Regiment. They live a life of luxury at Vozvizhensk, a fortress outpost in the Caucasus Mountains.

Poltoratskyappears in Hadji Murad

Portoratsky is a "broad, red-faced man" who is a company commander at Vozvizhensk and a righthand man to Prince Vorontsov.

Alyoshaappears in Alyosha the Pot

Alyosha is a younger peasant brother who takes his older brother's place in the family as bread-winner. He is ridiculed and abused by other youngsters in the village because of his poverty and awkwardness, but he remains a good-hearted and kind person.

Objects/Places

Petersburgappears in Family Happiness, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, The Devil, Fathe

Probably the second most important city in Russia, Petersburg is a governmental and cultural hub. It is a nerve center second only to Moscow in importance.

Moscowappears in The Cossacks, Master and Man

As the capitol city of Russia, Moscow represents the ultimate destination of success for Russians of all kinds, in all places throughout the empire.

Crimeaappears in The Devil

Crimea is an area of Russia famous for its resorts.

Goryachkin Forestappears in Master and Man

The Goryachkin Forest is the property that Vasili Andreevich hopes to buy in an auction, in "Master and Man."

Grishkinoappears in Master and Man

Grishkino is the village where Vasili Andreevich and Nikita stop during a blizzard on their way to Goryachkin.

Khan Mahoma appears in Hadji Murad

Khan Mahoma is a warrior of the Chechen hill people who switches allegiance between the Russians and the Chechen warlord Shamil according to how he thinks he will benefit.

Circassian coatappears in Hadji Murad

A Circassian coat is characteristic of the peoples of the Caucasus—fur-lined, rugged and built to withstand the bitter Russian winters.

Vozvizhenskappears in Hadji Murad

Vozvizhensk is the outpost garrison in the Caucassus to which Hadji Murad is assigned by the Caucasian Army.

Temir Khan Shuraappears in Hadji Murad

Temir Khan Shura is a village near the Russian-Chechen border where Hadji Murad is reputed to have plundered the shops in 1849.

The Potappears in Alyosha the Pot

Alyosha isw called "the pot" because he once dropped a pot of milk his mother asked him to carry to a friend.

Terek Riverappears in The Cossacks

The Terek River serves as the dividing line between Russia and Chechniya.

Burkaappears in Hadji Murad

A burka is a long felt cape commonly worm by Muslims.

Aoulappears in Hadji Murad

An aoul is a Tartar village.

Saklyaappears in Hadji Murad

A saklya is an earthen house built by Caucasians.

Pokrovskoe

Pokrovskoe is the family home of Marya Alexandrovna, the narrator and central character in Family Happiness.

Themes

Acceptance and happiness

The first instance where the reader encounters the theme of acceptance and happiness is Family Happiness, where a couple who enter into marriage powered by lust find they begin drifting apart when the fire of desire cool. Although they have a comfortable life of property and leisure or perhaps because they have such a life. Both husband and wife grow restless. Their children evidently do not provide enough incentive for them to deepen their relationship; jealousy on both sides threatens to shipwreck their marriage. It is only when a played-out wife, Marya Alexandrovna, comes to accept her husband, Sergey Mikhaylych, just as he is and their marriage with its flaws but also with its joys and love, that they both experience the real meaning of happiness. Acceptance is the key for both to finding joy in their marriage and in the world.

But this view is contradicted by Marya's earlier state of mind when she is frustrated and restless in her marriage, as well as by other stories in this collection that point to the inherent inequality of women in marriage. Perhaps the satisfaction that she finds at last in her marriage could be viewed by more modern feminists as capitulation, surrender, rather than transcendence.

Likewise, the surface contentment and acceptance by the peasant servant Nikita in Man and Master should be measured against the other side of his life as a despereate, periodic drunkard. The psychic toll on Nikita of being always pleasant and available to serve his master Vasili Andreevich calls intto question whether, in fact, this behavior is merely a survival mechanism rather and a sign of deep satisfaction. Alyosha in Alyosha the Pot also seems unusually serene in the face of constant abuse, exploitation and ridicule. Because Alyosha retains his humanity, he is a noble character in the eyes of his creator, Tolstoy. Alyosha discovers in his brief life that real happiness can be found in a relationship based on mutualk affection rather than abuse.

Status of women

Tolstoy seems quite progressive in his attitude toward the status of women in this collection. On the one hand, he realizes that women too often are passive-aggressive, manipulative instruments of the undoing of men. On the other hand, he acknowledges that it is the inequality of women with men that drives that behavior. Marriage is the most evident form of this inequality and in numerous instances the author's characters demonstrate its effects.

""She [Pozdnyshev's wife] had married and received something of that love, but not nearly what had been promised and expected," the narrator explains in The Kreutzer Sonata. "Even that had been accompanied by many disappointments and sufferings, and then this unexpected torment: children!"

Pozdnyshev, who later murders his wife in a jealous rage, observes that the subordination of women "explains the extraordinary phenomenon that on the one hand woman is reduced to the lowest stage of humiliation, while on the other she dominates. Women, like queens, keep nine-tenths of mankind in bondage to heavy labor. And all because they have been abased and deprived of equal rights with men."

He reflects that women need to be liberated from the notion their highest and best purpose in life is to be wife and mother. "No education, can alter this [inequality] as long as woman's highest ideal remains marriage," Pozdnyshev says. "Till then she will be a slave."

In Family Happiness, Marya Alexandrovna suffers a slow atrophy of the soul because of her empty marriage. "I wanted, not what I had got, but a life of struggle; I wanted feeling to be the guide of life, and not life to guide feeling."

Ivan Ilych's wife Praskovya becomes depressed, ill-tempered, and vengeful in her role as wife and understudy to her husband's meteoric rise through the judicial ranks. As a result, she becomes quarrelsome and unpleasant. She begins "to disturb the pleasure and propriety of their life," according to the narrator. "She began to be jealous without any cause, expected him to devote his whole attention to her, found fault with everything, and made coarse and ill-mannered scenes."

The final mark of their estrangement is when Praskovya becomes completely indifferent toward Ilych as he is dying of an undiagnosed illness.

The wages of sin

This collection includes two stories, The Devil and The Kreutzer Sonata, about the destructive power of adultery and jealousy. In both of these stories, jealousy develops into a kind of detachment from reality, which makes violent revenge and murder not only possible, but inevitable as a means to exact revenge. In both stories, it hardly makes any difference whether the jealousy is based in reality or not. Once the "jealous" button has been pushed, there is no turning back. Jealousy generates a kind of madness that generates a desire for revenge in the form of murder.

In Father Sergius, the theme is the corrupting power of pride. Prince Stepan Kasatsky's pride leads him from a promising military and political career to a monastery where he seeks to renounce the world and betrayal by his fiancé. But he brings his pride with him and eventually finds the life of a monk intolerable once he realizes his own insincerity. His quest for spiritual purity leads him then to an old childhood friend, whose pure and simple heart teach him the true meaning of humility.

In Man and Master, the wealthy Vasili Andreevich dies in a blizzard while in the act of exercising his greed. Andreevich presses on through the blinding snowstorm in the dark Russian night so he can make a bid on a piece of property he wants. Despite his attempts to save himself from freezing by lying atop his servant Nikita, Andreevich

freezes to death while the peasant Nikita survives with some injuries but goes on to have another 20 years of life.

In most of these stories, there is either an implicit or explicit message about the consequences of one's actions, whether it is identified as karma, sin or fate.

Style

Point of View

In all of the stories, except for Family Happiness, the author is the omniscient narrator who assumes an ironic outlook about his material. The ironic point oif view enables the author to assume a worldly-wise tone that implies he's seen everything and nothing in human nature can surprise him. With this tone and point of view, the narrator can juxtapose the most depraved human conduct with the sweetest in a somewhat dispassionate manner. The author makes plain his feelings about each of the characters in these stories, just as he presents them with all their strengths and many weaknesses. The author shows compassion towards his broken characters, finding some good in even the most evil among them. However, the author seems to really love Alyosha, the small town simpleton who works himself beyond exhaustion and past reason just to please others and make them happy. Tolstoy's attitude toward Alyosha is that he is an innocent victim of the evil people around him, including his own father.

The author evidences disdain for privileged characters who are fixated on themselves and their own happiness such as Marya Alexandrovna in Family Happiness and Praskovya Federovna in The Death of Ivan Ilych. His compassion and love for Nikita, the peasant laborer for Vasili Andreevich, in Master and Man is also apparent. Tolstoy generally shows a stronger identification with and approval for peasants because of their down-to-earth honesty, devotion to family and duty, and their innate sense of fairness. His point of view toward the wealthy and privileged is one of disapproval and disgust, which is just the opposite for the laborers who plant and harvest the crops and make possible the privileged life of the upper classes. In his identification with the Russian peasant, Tolstoy foreshadows the advent of communism which revolutionized Russian life just a few years after his death.

Setting

All of these tales are set in pre-revolutionary Russia. The Cossacks is set along the Terek River, which is the line that separates Russia from Chechniya. Most of the action takes place in Russia and some in Chechniya. Similarly, Hadji Murad is set in the borderland between Russia and Chechniya, where two cultures, one Christian and the other Muslim collide, which generates hostility and ongoing guerilla warfare. Family Happiness, The Kreutzer Sonata, Father Sergius and Master and Man are all set in the Russian countryside, often in the country estates of the wealthy. The temporal setting for these stories ranges from the mid-1890s to the early 1900s. In many respects, both settings tend to emphasize the isolation of Russia, both geographic and cultural, from the rest of Europe.

Language and Meaning

In translation, Tolstoy's work is rendered in mainstream English without any dialect that may be a part of the original Russian in such stories as Hadji Murad and The Cossacks. The translation is smooth and easily comprehensible to anyone with a good grasp of the English language. Although the text is free of written dialect, the reader can almost "hear" certain idiosyncrasies of speech in peasant characters such as Alyosha and Nikita. Likewise, some of the aloofness and bearing of Russian aristocrats in stories such as The Kreutzer Sonata, Father Sergius and The Death of Ivan Ilych seems almost audible.

Structure

This is a collection of eight long short stories, or novellas, with one short, short story, Alyosha the Pot. The narratives are unrelated although certain themes are repeated. Structurally, this follow the conventional challenge-conflict-crisis-resolution of most prose narratives of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The single exception is The Devil, in which Tolstoy offers his readers two alternate endings. In one, the jealousy-crazed Eugene Irtenev shoots himself with his pistol as his wife, Liza, watches. In the other ending, he shoots his wife and also Stepanida, the peasant woman with whom he had an affair before marriage and who still haunts his mind with desire. This dual ending structure probably qualifies this story as experimental, although it is difficult to tell whether Tolstoy could not resolve which ending fits best, or if he wanted to let the reader decide. As it stands, it is an effective mechanism for the reader to review the events and characters of the story, trying to determine which course of resolution seems most likely.

Quotes

"From that day there was a complete change in our life and our relations to each other. We were no longer as happy when we were alone together as before. When the talk turned on life in the country, or on a ball, we were uneasy and shrank from looking at one another. Both of us knew where the gulf between us lay, and seemed afraid to approach it., We had long ceased to think each other the most perfect people in the world; each now judged the other in secret and measured the offender by the standard of other people" (Family Happiness, pg. 63.)

"That day ended the romance of our marriage; the old feeling became a precious irrecoverable remembrance; but a new feeling of love for my children and the father of my children laid the foundation of a new life and a quite different happiness; and that life and hapiness have lasted to the present time" (Family Happiness, pg. 81.)

"And the traveler went on talking about himself, without noticing that this did not interest the others as much as it did him. A man is never such an egotist as at moments of spiritual ecstasy. At such times it seems to him that there is nothing on earth more splendid and interesting than himself" (The Cossacks, pg. 87.)

"One other vision, the sweetest of them all, mingled with the young man's every thought of the future—the vision of a woman. And there, among the mountains, she appeared to him as a Circassian slave, a fine figure with a long plait of hair and deep submissive eyes. He [Vanyusha] pictured a lonely hut in the mountains, and on the threshold she stands awaiting him when, tired and covered with dust, blood and fame, he returns to her" (The Cossacks, pg. 94.)

"Suddenly it was as though the sun had shone into his [Olenin's] soul. He heard Russian being spoken and also heard the rapid smooth flow of the Terek, and a few steps farther in front of him saw the brown moving surface of the river, the distant steppe, the cordon watchtower outlines above the brambles, and then the mountains opening out before him. The red sun appeared for an instant from under a cloud and its last rays glittered brightly along the river over the reeds" (The Cossacks, pg. 167.)

"Very soon, within a year of his wedding, Ivan Ilych has erealized that marriage, though it may add some comforts to life, is in fact a very intricate and difficult affair towards which in order to perform one's duty, that is, to lead a decorous life approved of by society, one must adopt a definite attitude just as towards one's official duties" (The Death of Ivan Ilych, pg. 261.)

"What tormented Ivan Ilych most was the deception, the lie, which for some reason they all accepted, that he was not dying but was simply ill and that he only need keep quiet and undergo a treatment and then something very good would result. This deception tortured him—their not wishing to admit what they all knew and what he knew, but wanting to lie to him concerning his terrible condition, and wishing and forcing him to participate in that lie" (The Death of Ivan Ilych, pg. 285.)

"She [Liza Annenskaya] had the gift which furnishes the chief delight of intercourse with a loving woman: thanks to her love of her husband she penetrated into his soulo. She knew his eveery state and his every shade of feeling—better it seemed to him than he himself—and she behaved correspondingly and therefore never hurt his feelings, but always lessened his distresses and strengthened his joys" (The Devil, pg. 321.)

"They did not believe what the doctors said, namely that he [Eugene Irtenev] was mentally deranged—a psychopath. They could not accept that, for they knew that he was saner than hundreds of their acquaintances. And indeed, if Eugene Irtenev was mentally deranged when he committed this crime, then everyone is similarly insane. The most mentally deranged people are certainly those who see in others indications of insanity they do not notice in themselves" (The Devil, pg. 351.)

"She had married and received something of that love, but not nearly what had been promised and was expected. Even that had been accompanied by many disappointments and sufferings, and then this unexpected torment: so many children!" (The Kreutrzer Sonata, pg. 396.)

"She gave less attention to the children, and less frenziedly than before, but gave more and more attention to herself, to her appearance (though she tried to conceal this), and to her pleasures, even to her accomplishments. She again enthusiastically took to the piano, which she had quite abandoned, and it all began from that" (The Kreutzer Snata, pg. 397.)

"Music makes me forget myself, my real position; it transports me to some other position not mhy own. Music carries me immediately amd directly into the mental condition in which the man was who composed it." (The Kreutzer Sonata, pg. 411.)

"The mad beast of jealousy began to growl in its kennel and wanted to leap out" (The Kreutzer Sonata, pg. 413.)

"I entered into that condition when an animal or a man, under the influence of physical excitement at a time of danger, acts with precision and deliberation but without losing a moment and always with a single definite aim in view" (The Kreuitzer Sonata, pg. 421.)

"Vasili Abndreevich stood silent and motionless for half a minute. Then suddenly, with the same resolution with which he used to strike hands when making a good purchase, he took a step back and turning up his sleeves began raking the snow off Nikita and out of the sledge. Having done his he hurriedly undid his girdle, opened out his fur coat, and having pushed Nikita down, lay down on top of him, covering him not only with his fur coat but with the whole of his body, which glowed with warmth" (Master and Man, pg. 495.)

"Vasili Andreevich was stiff as a frozen carcass, and when they rolled him off Nikita his legs remained apart and his arms stretched out as they had been. His bulging hawk eyes were frozen and his open mouth under his clipped moustache was full of snow. But Nikita, though chilled through, was still alive. Nikita lay in hospital for two months. They cut off three of his toes, but the others recovered so that he was still able to work

and went on living for another 20 years, first as a farm laborer, then in his old age as a watchman" (Master and Man, pg. 500.)

"Had his fiancee's lover been a private person he [Stepan Kasatsky] would have killed him, but it was his beloved Tsar. Next day he applied both for furlough and his discharge and, professing to be ill so as to see no one, he went away to the country. He spent the summer at his village arranging his affairs. When summer was over he did not return to Petersburg, but entered a monastery and there became a monk" (Father Sergius, pg. 509.)

"There was also in him [Kasatsky] something else—a sincere religious feeling which intertwined itself with the feeling of pride and preeminence and guided him. His disillusionment with Mary, whom he had thought of angelic purity, and his sense of injury, were so strong that they brought him to despair, and the despair led him—to what? To God, to his childhood's faith which had never been destroyed in him" (Father Sergius, pg. 509.)

"Unkindly relations between people caused her [Pashenka] actual physical suffering. It was so clear to her that bitter feelings do not make anything better, but only make everything worse. She did not in fact think about this: she simply suffered at the sight of anger as she would from a bad smell, a harsh noise, or from blows on her body" (Father Sergius, pg. 539.)

"Hadji Murad always had great faith in his own fortune. When planning anything he always felt in advance firmly convinced of success, and fate smiled on him. It had been so, with a few rare exceptions, during the whole course of his stormy military life; and so he hoped it would be now" (Hadji Murad, pg. 569.)

"No one spoke of hatred of the Russians. The feeling experienced byt all of the Chechens, from the youngest to the oldest, was stronger than hate. It was not hatred, for they did not regard those Russian dogs as human beings, but it was such repulsion, disgust and perplexity at the senseless cruelty of these creatures that the desire to exterminate them—like the desire to exterminate rats, poisonous spiders or wolves—was as natural an instinct as self-preservation" (Hadji Murad, pg. 629.)

"Ustinja was an orphan, a young girl yet, and as hard a worker as Alyosha, She began to feel sorry for Alyosha, and Alyosha for the first time in his life felt that he himself, not his services, but he himself was needed by another person. When his mother had been kind to him or had felt sorry for him, he took no notice of it, because it seemed so natural a thing, just the same as if he felt sorry for himself. But suddenly he realized that Ustinja, though completely a stranger, felt sorry for him too" (Alyosha the Pot, pg. 674.)

Topics for Discussion

What is Tolstoy's attitude toward the wealthy and privileged and toward the peasants in this collection of stories?

What do Marya Alexandrovna in Family Happiness, Liza Annenskaya in The Devil, Praskovya Fedorovna in The Death of Ivan Ilych and Pozdnyshev's wife in The Kreutzer Sonata all have in common?

How is Dmitri Olenin disappointed by his expedition to the Caucasus?

What is the illness that kills Ivan Ilych and why are doctors unsuccessful in diagnosing it?

Why is Eugene Irtenev unable to free himself of his obsession with Stepanida in The Devil?

Which of the two alternative endings to The Devil do you prefer and why?

Why did Tolstoy write two different endings to The Devil?

How does diet affect lust and jealousy, according to Pozdnyshev in The Kreutzer Sonata?

What role does music play in the relationship between the music teacher and Pozdnyshev's wife in The Kreutzer Sonata?

What drives Vasili Andreevich to ignore common sense and leave during a blizzard for Goryachkin?