

Great Short Works Study Guide

Great Short Works by Fyodor Dostoevsky

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Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 1, Mr. Prohartchin & A Novel in Nine Letters

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 1, Mr. Prohartchin & A Novel in Nine Letters Summary

There are 18 short stories in this collection of fiction works. The first of these is dated as having come from 1846 whereas the last in the group came out in 1877. The series of stories is preambled by a useful introduction. Dostoevsky is admittedly one of the greatest fiction writers the modern world has ever known, and a Russian. This set of stories has been translated into the English for us by Constance Garnett with full permission by the Macmillan Company, Publishers. The edition used for this summary came out in 1961 and is listed as the 6th printing of the book.

The first story is about a man named Semyon Ivanovitch Prohartchin, an elderly man living in shared housing. He is very vocal about the reality that he is a poor man. He shows this in more than one way. He shows this when he selects his food for the dinner. Furthermore, everyone knows that he pays lower rent than the rest of the lodgers. He does not appear to have any relatives, such as spouse or offspring, or grandchildren. He has mentioned a sister-in-law. She is actually quite important. He sends her money on a regular basis. No one living in the boarding house have ever met her. He has been a member of the household in which he is found at the beginning of the story for two decades. The landlady favors him. The men in the story are all gentlemen. She had magnified what she is able to accomplish by buying a larger space and running a rooming house for a larger number of residents. Mr. Prohartchin is so well liked by the landlady that he moves together with her and his prominence is readily discernible to all the others.

Mr. Prohartchin goes from having been ignored and forgotten, to being included a great deal. Thanks to this, when he dies he is not alone, but is surrounded by his housemates. They discover that he had squirreled away a substantial chunk of money into his bed mattress. This forces them to notice that he has been taking unfair advantage of the landlady financially for some time. They themselves choose to neglect his sister-in-law with the money, probably against his and her wishes. Dostoevsky finishes the story by revealing that the lodgers all noticed how they behaved and how the deceased man acted. As a consequence they grow a little suspicious of one another. At the same time, once he gained their attention, Dostoevsky makes it very clear that they were actually sincere in their care of that very same old man. This is somewhat disturbing in its truth, and points up to why nature has imbued even babes with the instinct to cry out and make enough noise to garner the attention of others, which, when they respond properly makes all the difference.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 1, Mr. Prohartchin & A Novel in Nine Letters Analysis

The language used is sophisticated. The translator has been able to preserve only part of the length of the author's sentence structure. Even so the writing is dramatic and expressive. Dostoevsky varies the sentence length as yet another means to add value to his communications. For those who have not already grown accustomed to Dostoevsky's writings, this first story makes an excellent introduction. For those who have already met the author through his literature, his style is immediately recognizable. Literary voice is crucial, and symptomatic of success in a writer or musician. In this first story, the author asserts his identity quite well. The emotional quality of the first story varies and is quite intense. Even those who love Dostoevsky's writings may advise people strongly against reading too much of his work in consecutive order for fear that it will reduce even the sunniest disposition to a state of depression. In the case of the first story it shows how much more important the local connections really are. He goes to extremes: it is suggested that he doesn't want to have to cry out to the others in order to be remembered, but he does. It is the real reason why babies are born knowing how to cry and doing so when help is needed. Later, the others discover that he has been taking unjust advantage of one of his dearest friends - the landlady, by stashing away money. Unless, it was to last him for many more years or to help his sister-in-law. They show how bad they themselves are by indicating that they aren't even going to help his sister-in-law now that he is dead, not even with the money they have discovered.

A Novel in Nine Letters is dated 1847. In this case, the main characters are introduced through these. Pyotr Ivanitch is a married father who has been searching for one of his friends here and there about town without much luck. The letters evidence the reality that men are not unemotional creatures, and in fact are laden with the movement of feelings between two friends. The epistolary exchanges continue. There is some drama about where they meet, and they are somehow arguing about 350 roubles. It is made clear early on that this was not a loan but was based upon some mutual agreement. Pyotr's wife actually writes to Ivan. Ivan shares this letter with Pyotr and reports that he never should have gone into his friend's house. At the end of the story readers are informed that she is marrying, apparently another man, the next day. Well, the woman is going to run off to another man but one friend can somehow insist that this is not his fault. Nevertheless, he feels at least partially responsible due to how she has been affected by his relative intimacy.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 2, The Landlady

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 2, The Landlady Summary

This is a short tale about what happens to a young man in the early throws of sexual maturity. Ordynov has a room, and he goes and rents the little rooms from a German -Schpies. Then the young man heads of to a church. He deviates, and falls into a veritable swoon. He becomes compelled by a romantic possibility and ends up managing to be taken in by Murin and the beautiful Katerina. Because he does this, the older German man with the daughter Tinchen are perplexed because their new lodger, who has paid and promised to return that night, does not come back. Instead, the young man who is also called Vassily Mihalitch, grows ill and is tended to by Katerina. It is not clear whether or not the illness begins as a ruse that turns real, or if it is simply the truth. Either way, he does suffer from an illness during that time.

After he has spent some time there he goes out to a meal with another man, named Yaroslav Ilyitch. The impression is that Yaroslav is his age. Initially, Ordynov simply stated that he had moved when his landlady had left St. Petersburg; but at some point, while he is out with Yaroslav Ilyitch, they delve deeply into a discourse about old Murin and Katerina. During this, it comes to light that Odynov and Katerina develop a strong mutual attraction which is cultivated while she cares for him while he is ill. Murin threatens the much younger man with a rifle because he bursts into Murin's and Katerina's room. Katerina's behavior is a bit peculiar: she cries to Ordynov more than once that she has sold off her soul. It is implied that she means that she has sold it off to old Murin. The dynamic reaches a crescendo when Murin confronts the younger man and shows absolute clarity of what is really going on. He explains that Katerina is a little 'mad.' There being no other readily available legal means of protecting her, he married her. There is somehow acknowledgment that the two do not have sex, as it is not willed. However, as she is a predominantly normal young woman, she has her passions and really wants to have a boyfriend, even a lover. Murin, being her husband and guardian admits that he won't let her go, even though it puts both he and she into this very difficult bind. He is aged and often ill. They need one another.

When the situation has reached this crescendo, the old man makes the younger man move out. Then, Ordynov moves into the small space with Schpies the German and his daughter Tinchen. He had not returned to these people until the deposit money that he paid 3 months ago has run out. Dostoevsky writes that Tinchen is wonderful within the boundaries that propriety allow. Vassily Mihalitch is shown to have changed. He is rather morose, and instead of reading passionately and frequently, he doesn't. The story ends when Vassily meets Yaroslav on the street. The other fellow has changed. This troubles Vassily. Yaroslav ends with a contradiction. Murin and Katerina's place was



taken over by a band of genuine brigands. Yaroslav tells Vassily that Murin was their ring leader.

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 2, The Landlady Analysis

This story is typical Dostoevsky in a few ways. The events are not all happy. The characters are not wealthy. He is able to employ more than one narrative perspective. In this tale he relies more on a third person point-of-view with an orientation towards omniscience with respect to the main character. This is fantastic because readers can have some idea of what's going on the character's mind almost as well as one does with oneself or at least as well as with a close friend. Interpersonal dynamics are at the heart of the story. By the end of the story, the difficulty is largely understandable to the readers thanks again to Dostoevsky's clarity. It is one of those cases where the age and experience of the reader will influence interpretation. The more naive the reader, the more this is edifying. The older and wiser the more the foreshadowing is evident. The final matter of the brigands: this is one of those things where the author has brought to light the way people react in the face of information they don't want to be true. What a shame it would be to doubt the goodness of the people if the bad news is mere slander. What a sorry disaster to have so misread the true character if the bad truth is that they were perfectly adept at being that criminal.

This is a much longer short story, running nearly 100 pages long. It fits nicely with one of the earlier ones. Readers note that Dostoevsky writes frequently about shared housing and events that take place in this type of atmosphere. The age range within the situations varies a great deal. For those readers familiar with this, it will give the tales a sense of realism. For others, this will be an inroad into a strange new realm; a part of Russian society about which nothing is known. This may be caused by the fact that Dostoevsky himself was not a wealthy man during his lifetime, but some times were harder financially than others. As a consequence, he may have been more familiar with shared housing situations. Then again, that is speculation: there may have been another reason for Dostoevsky to write of such living arrangements. Given that as the case, then he was following the dictum "write what you know." Below is some further account, to accentuate different aspects of the same story. There are two Parts to the story, and each is divided into mini-chapters, denoted by roman numerals. The first Part has three sections or mini-chapters, whereas Part 2 also has three divisions.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 3, The Land Lady Cont.

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 3, The Land Lady Cont. Summary

This second begins with Katerina in the young man's arms. This is the fellow her own age, rather than the older man. She has evidently given in to him and he to her. Even so, within the first page Dostoevsky writes of her great exertions to exhibit restraint with him in regard to both her emotions and her sexual feelings. They are also both concerned about the old man. Here they are: they are avoiding him; they are working around him; they respect and fear him. They want to make sure that they help the old man - he is ill and really does need their help and they do honestly care for his welfare. Then the young man Ordynov asks Katerina about her life, in order to better know and love her.

Incredibly important flashback happens. She tells him many things, first and foremost that she is living under a curse put upon her by her mother. She blames herself for her mother's death. She writes of some mysterious man who is not her father who appears when her father is shipwrecked and that ends up attacking this man in a desperate effort to protect her mother from him - he is that terrifying. He gives up his weapon, apparently only aware of the intensity of her fear after her attack. Ordynov wants very much to love this woman; in some sense he already does but in another he has only begun the work of getting to know her so that he can. That strange old man turned out to be her actual father.

Something about his latest visit prompted him to give her a gift as if she were his lover, even though he confessed that he had bought them for another. The dutiful girl tries to give them to her mother, but the mother then weeps and suddenly goes on about how Katerina is actually that man's bastard daughter. The old man and Katerina's stepfather are set against one another and their conflict escalates. The old man returns like a crook, sneaking to her window on a rope and courts her, even though he is her father who has not been in the role of her father during her life. She had met him before, but it hadn't ever become this bad. Her mother and the man who has acted as her father are both adamantly opposed to this idea. This man who has seduced her mother successfully well over a decade earlier has come to seduce her to, now. He offers her the option of calling upon the man who is her father for having acted the role of her father to oppose him - who is courting his own daughter whom he has never treated as his daughter. He has also set the daughter up for what psychologists have called the Electra complex, where she is her mother's greatest rival. Her mother is obviously horrified.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 3, The Land Lady Cont. Analysis

The old man is not a rapist, albeit a willing seducer, and when she refuses him he makes her another proposition. If he won't have sex with her - at least, not against her will, may he then have her? She agrees to this. The old man goes off again, and while he is away she meets a man her own age for the first time, who said that he had been betrothed to her, but that everyone knew that she had run off with a criminal and that this had reduced her reputation. She goes to meet this fellow, but is snatched up by the old brigand - her father. The other man tries to take her from him, but this is only the first example of how this strange older man: her father, her husband keeps her for his own. This really explains why she tells Ordynov that she has sold her soul to the devil, and why the old man often enough simply reads to her but likes to remind her that she has committed the "unpardonable sin." During the time that Ordynov is around Katerina and the old man, he is not exposed to criminals or to crime.

During Section 2 of Part 2 the flagrant nature of the truth that the old man is a professional criminal with incestuous tendencies. Fortunately for Katerina he is a gentleman and certainly no rapist even though he is not averse to committing incest. This makes it all too clear that Ordynov's friend simply tells him the truth: the old man's colleagues have turned up, and their band of crooks have left town together. The young man is still in recovery from this challenge during the early development of his manhood when he reconnects with an old friend. The real problem is that his 'old friend' has also suffered and grew disillusioned and disappointed with life. This is taken to another crescendo when he explains that brigands took over at the very place where Ordynov had had his romance. It is noticeable in retrospect that Ordynov could not simply see that Murin was her father by "family resemblance."



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 3, Polzunkov

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 3, Polzunkov Summary

This story is 20 pages long. It was first written or published in 1848 - the text does not specify which. It is all of one piece, without any internal subdivisions. The setting is Russia. Dostoevsky's fiction takes place in the real world, which adds to its realism without making it true. The story begins with one man observing another. The narrative voice describes the other as kind-hearted, highly mobile and somewhat apprehensive about himself: the narrator writes that this last quality, is in the man's favor. Others are laughing at him. The narrator goes on to explain that the man is 'a rag' meaning that he will do anything for someone else and that this quality somehow keeps him down. The narrator makes it clear that his station in life is quite lowly. This man was also known to borrow money from others frequently. Then, it turns out that he is also a story teller. After several pages, readers are provided with his name: Osip Mihalitch. Osip Mihalitch draws attention to himself by telling a story about another man, named Fedosey Nikolaitch. Osip then begins to tell them a story rooted in his own wish to marry, for there to be a Madame Polzunkov.

Osip snuck out of his lodgings at night. He was hoping for great deeds but tells the audience that at the same time he felt timid as a kitten that's been taken up by the scruff of the neck. He happens into another man in the street who is out at night, and they exchange paper notes. He makes some comments about how they are the suckling babes of their Mother Russia, military service in the Provinces, and explains that he has never taken a bribe; but he once received money from a bribe-taker, and just to accept the money was psychologically painful for him. He went penitent before Fedosey Nikolaitch, who assured him that he might be able to 'bring him back into line.' He is warmly received into a family that has a marriageable daughter. As a jest for the first day of April - April Fool's Day, he requests to be discharged and transferred and denies all affections for the family. He did this believing that it was so obviously false, that the others would in fact laugh. Within a few weeks, to his own horror he learns that his new father-in-law didn't find that funny at all, and his request for a discharge has actually gone through. The father-in-law then actually does fully disengage from Osip with the punitive comment that he shouldn't have messed around with paperwork of that kind. The story ends with Osip crying to his grandmother about this disaster. He had made a serious mistake when he thought that his future in-laws would understand and like his joke. As the final exchange, a caged starling arrives with a note from the older man. It reads 'April 1st' and that's it.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 3, Polzunkov Analysis

The author's writing, through the lens of translation, is excellent. He has selected to describe only some of the defining features of any given moment, circumstance or set of circumstances. This is an unavoidable limitation of writing. Even so, he succeeds in providing enough details for readers to be able to sufficiently visualize what is going on within the context of a given story.

Dostoevsky is adept at a variety of types of writing. He includes extensive use of dialogue in this particular short story. He relies a great deal of indirectness to achieve his aims during this story, and the main aim is to write a good tale. He creates a layered effect in this case because he uses characters including a story telling situation, above the layer of writing a story which is told through events and characters.

This short fiction work includes a love story. It shows how familial dynamics are involved with courtship and marriage dramas. This is a recurrent theme when the generations live close enough together for parents to meet one another, so that they can find out how well or badly their offspring are able to get along. At times, these issues are settled almost shockingly easily. In other cases, it is really a very long, drawn out process. In this case, the other theme for this story is bad humor and the disturbing intensity of its consequences at least in some cases. A young attempts to amuse his potential in-laws and ends up losing his job because of it. The older man was apparently trying to teach him something about healthy boundaries for humor and what is not even remotely funny.



Book 1, The Short Works : Chapter 4, A Faint Heart Another Man's Wife or the Husband Under the Bed

Book 1, The Short Works : Chapter 4, A Faint Heart Another Man's Wife or the Husband Under the Bed Summary

There are two men; they are housemates and work colleagues in military service. One is Arkady Ivanovitch Nefedevitch, and the other is Vasya Shumkov. These two are very loving friends. One of them is engaged; they begin discussing marriage. Arkady admits to Vasya, that now that he knows that Vasya is getting married he has been thinking about this to. Vasya describes a bit how he fell in love - he describes it as having despite himself, but not against his will. There was fear and hesitation surrounding telling the girl's mother about this, but the young men let it fall from his lips to the prospective new mother-in-law. The tender heartedness between the two men is shown again, but this time it is emphasized. Vasya has a nervous disposition. The sense of impending doom grows when, it turns out that Vasya cannot handle what will ensue because his bride-to-be and his best friend are also attracted to one another. Vasya can no longer confide in his best friend Arkady because of this. Vasya has also fallen behind in his work because he has been chasing after Lizanka. Arkady and Lizanka both want all to be well. Arkady finally figures out what his part in the trouble really was, and because of it, he stays away from Lizanka. Lizanka loses the man to whom she is engaged, who she really loved, and a good friend, who she either did or assumed she would also love. Essentially she loses both of them and they lose one another.

Another Man's Wife or The Husband Under the Bed begins with a young man pacing on the street. He is confronted by an older man who is noticeably distraught. Prior to this, the two do not know each other. The young man is waiting for a woman and he is frustrated and impatient about his wait. The older man turns up again and asks the younger fellow about ladies. When he comes back, this time, he more openly discusses the fact that he is spying on a married woman, suspected of extramarital affairs. The young man finds out that the older man is right: his lover is the older man's wife. The young man yields to the husband in part because the wife does nothing to hide her obvious and genuine affection for him once he arrives. Section 2: Ivan Andreyitch goes out intending to catch his wife at an extramarital affair. Ivan Andreyitch finds an address at the theatre. He goes there. Two servants greet him with concern but he boorishly makes his way into the bedroom of some young woman he has never met before. Just as he has discovered that this woman is not his cheating wife, there is more noise and the frightened woman cries out that she hears her husband coming. Ivan Andreyitch hides himself. Stranger still, when Ivan has wriggled his way under the bed, he finds that he is not the only man hiding beneath this woman's bed! There is a dramatic



upsurge in the use of deception. The men get out from under the bed: the real message is an effort to find comic relief in the truth - this whole escapade occurs because Ivan Andreyitch is jealous. "But you will admit that jealousy is an unpardonable passion, and what is more, it is a positive misfortune" (p. 265).

Book 1, The Short Works : Chapter 4, A Faint Heart Another Man's Wife or the Husband Under the Bed Analysis

The story A Faint Heart is very poignant. Fortunately, the circumstances are not usually as extreme as those portrayed in the story. However, it is an unfortunate rite of passage for people to come to terms with tensions caused by two friends being attracted to one and the same other person. Methods for sharing, or competing against one another so aggressively that a friendship is destroyed are not uncommon themes in life and literature. A Faint Heart is a story of two best friends who share a common affection. One of the two actually intends to marry a woman who's affections he has secured. The male friend is secure enough to want to continue to keep his best friend close to him. The woman is initially encouraged about this and she is agreeable to the idea. Then, one male friend learns that the other one is actually also quite attracted to the woman. From that point forward, the tale transforms into one of terrible sorrow. One of the two men won't back down. The man who was going to marry, and who has fallen behind in his work because of it, is now distraught. His mental condition deteriorates throughout the rest of the story. He is overrun by his best friend. Some would say that the simple truth here is that which of the men is dominant becomes clear. Not until after his dear friend has collapsed does the other man see what has happened. This is where Dostoevsky accentuates the youthful innocence of the events that have unfolded. Middle aged readers may find this to be a simple creative twist on a rather common real life theme. Anyone and everyone who has ever been involved in anything like this will readily understand. Readers may cry or they may not, but they will appreciate the drama and will leave the tale with sympathy for all the characters. One final point about A Faint Heart is that there are no villains in this story.

Dostoevsky does a wonderful job of making fun of men during these stories. He uses both sympathy and affectionate humor through both these dramatic tales that involve emotions, desires and attractions, jealousies and the like. Etiquette comes into play, and this is important. Dostoevsky shows how nonplussed people can be when something comes up that they have no idea how to deal with. In this case, it is there being two men under the bed; one just happening into the other under there. This is hilariously funny and readers might well laugh out loud at the idea. The obvious social discomfort under such circumstances is predictable and so understandable. It does bring etiquette to mind since there is no pre-established system for how to politely comfort the husband who's bed you emerge out from under. In fact, there is no well known way to soothe someone who discovers you hiding in their home.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 5, An Honest Thief & A Christmas Tree & A Wedding, White Nights

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 5, An Honest Thief & A Christmas Tree & A Wedding, White Nights Summary

Here, readers are introduced to a small household. There is a man and his servant woman. The woman lets the room to an elderly man. She then suggests to her boss that he make the decision to do what she has already done. The man admits that the new lodger is actually a wonderful addition to his home; it makes it far less lonesome. Amongst other qualities the old soldier turns out to be great at telling stories, which the preceding resident loves. A man bursts in off the street and steals a coat. They chase after him but do not catch him. This leads to another conversation about thieves, about their character and whether or not they can be honest. One of the men tells a story about how he befriended a drunk at a public—house, pub for short. Another man attached himself to Astafy Ivanovitch. This new friend begged leave to stay with him at his place. This was permitted. He was called Emelyanoushka. The request occurred more often and for a time it went on this way. Then one day, seemingly out of the blue, the fellow disappeared. Astafy Ivanovitch wondered: where has his friend Emelyanouska disappeared to, and is he OK? Is he even surviving? Emelyanoushka came back. When he did so, he was enthusiastically taken in. After a short time, it became clear that he had come back only to die - so that he could die with a friend, in a house, rather than alone on a street. Astafy Ivanovitch and his servant woman were quite sad about this. Ultimately, Emelyanoushka confesses that he took something from Astafy, who forgives him instantly and assures him that he is forgiven. The man dies.

The next story is A Christmas Tree & a Wedding, it is dated 1848. This is a strange story about how a man named Yulian Mastakovitch is treated by a family because he is a suitable prospective husband. Apparently, however, his greatest interest is in a member of the family who exhibits two important traits: 1) she is much too young, certainly for anything that would make sense to him, and 2) her more natural fondness is for a little red-haired boy her own age. There is conflict between the older man and the little boy, apparently because the child tries to stick up for the girl, in his own way. The full grown man makes something of a mockery of this, as he is merely a little child and no real match for a grown man. Yulian Mastakovitch turns to warmer waters - the girl's mother. When dealing with another full adult, and a woman, he is not faced with the same problems. The story ends and begins with Yulian Mastakovitch being treated rather reverently by the adults in the family.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 5, An Honest Thief & A Christmas Tree & A Wedding, White Nights Analysis

White Nights is subdivided in more than one way. There are headings, named as Second Night, Third Night. There is at least one alternative subdivision within the story. White Nights begins under intense emotional conditions. The main character is lonely and very frustrated. He feels that everyone else is forsaking him, and that despite living in St. Petersburg for 8 years he has no friends. He also realizes that this must somehow be untrue, and acknowledges that he has numerous acquaintances. While out walking he endeavors to help himself to feel better. Then he sees a woman and he dares to approach her. At first he startles her, but soon enough they are having a conversation and he admits that he was quite shy himself and easily startled by her as well. He speaks rather openly with her, assuring her that although he is 26, he is inexperienced about women and that the women who has met have all been the land lady.

The main character expresses to Nastenka that she had made him very happy. After much passionate expression, there is a section entitled Nastenka's History. Nastenka is only 17 years old according to the narration at this point. She explains that she is an orphan; however, her tragedy has been balanced by a blessing - her grandmother lives and has taken her in. Her grandmother keeps her pinned to her side. There is a deaf servant; one time, the Nastenka escapes grandmother but ends up in trouble as the conclusion to her fun because she is caught in her deceit. For a short while it seems as if she is being courted but she quickly figures out that the man simply feels sorry for her and so takes her out to the theatre twice, to be kind. Then, she develops some other love relationship. This man assures her that they can reunite after close to a year of separation. He shares that he has come back, but has made no efforts to reunite with her. She cries. He develops a very strong affection for Nastenka and transforms into a man too interested in being her lover to survive as her confidante. Fourth Night: her friend now loves her, very much actually. He begins to confess this to Nastenka. Now, Nastenka apologizes for scoffing at her friend's love and for his enduring her preoccupation with being forsaken by another. Soon enough, they turn to making plans together including dwelling together. The young woman is quite passionate and grows expressive. The next section is titled Morning. In this section the main male character ends up crying at home because his dear Nastrenka is truly in the odd position of sincerely loving him, but not only him. He is able to address the woman in his own home Matrona with relative normalcy despite this.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 6, A Little Hero

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 6, A Little Hero Summary

A Little Hero begins with a festive atmosphere. Within two paragraphs it is clear that this is more akin to a lifestyle, than actually being caused by a specific holiday. The main character is an eleven year old child. The narrator is older, but is working from this perspective. The child is a little boy experiencing his first flashes of puberty. Through narration, he explains that he is being raised so that his puberty and adolescent transition is being heavily influenced by the notable reality that he is being teased and tormented by older women. At times they take unjust liberties, gently abusing his tender youth at other times they just tease him so that he often feels tormented and driven to near tears. Later in the tale, the people who are more adult, but quite young within that range, are having social gatherings and parties. Amongst these is a popular and charming young woman. She has several admirers, including one who is 'official.' All too soon, the boy is set up as the rival of a grown man and this is done very openly and everyone laughs about it. The boy becomes very emotional about this. He flees to a room and shuts himself in. He is swarmed by young women - but they are all older women from his view. They implore him to open the door, telling him that they intend to smother him with kisses and things that psychologically threaten his tender youth and vulnerable virginity. He ends up sobbing his way to sleep.

In the morning, he hopes for relief but there is none. The same drama begins to play out yet again. The boy is then urged to ride a pony. There are mixed messages about this. He does so, and the animal takes off quite suddenly, but then, the boy does quite well in the saddle, particularly under the circumstances. Here, he is still just a boy but is somehow passing some kind of rite towards manhood. Then, shortly after that, the boy is out of his depth; other grown men rescue him. To his credit, he is shown to not be the only one who thinks that the situation was somewhat dangerous and that he had been rather daring. Women appear, and they also show great surprise. The boy has in fact impressed a woman; a woman who had been his foe rushes up and kisses him and presses him to her bosom. He has dared and has succeeded. This causes him to somehow overcome a certain amount of female domination. He does not preside, but he has "won his place" and due to it, several older girls - young women, are set aside to make way for him. Next, the boy finds that he wants to be valued and of assistance to a grown woman, a bit more after the manner of a grown man. She is parting from a man her own age. The boy observes. Finally, the boy is able to deliver a letter and to express his affections for a woman more directly. This is a triumphant success for him, and proves to be such a rite of passage that Dostoevsky ends the story explaining that for the boy, his childhood ended right then and there.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 6, A Little Hero Analysis

This is the story of a boy's sensitivities during early adolescence. In fact, he is so young that he has only experienced the very first flushes of puberty. He is the main character. Dostoevsky does an incredibly good job of describing his emotions. Fear, sorrow, anger, and shame all figure prominently in the story. This story could be viewed as a corrective for any mature women who have been involved with or have seen young boys being teased in the ways presented here in the story. Effectively, the point is that it is much worse than such women might think. In this regard, Dostoevsky has provided a compassionate tonic for those who have not been able to see into the minds of boys in general or specifically.

The next part of this story is that the boy impresses a bunch of older women during this tale. In this sense, the child's maturation and increased abilities as a romantic figure are highlighted. Here again, the others are older women, but in this set of circumstances the older women are much younger than the others - these are teenage girls or women in their early-20s rather than the middle aged and even elderly women who had mistakenly believed that their teasing of the boy was gentle and harmless. These girls all turn up to console the boy. He later leaves, and proceeds to show himself in a new light to these girl-women. Here the boy overcomes 'their mockery' for being 'just a boy.' This is an important psychological transition for all growing adolescents, and Dostoevsky in his typical genius makes the very most of his male perspective on life. In this regard, he is following the dictum 'write what you know.' While this may mean that those same girls may grow increasingly hesitant to run to his comfort at the first sign of tears in the future, they are also no longer so easily dominant as they had been before.

This is another true-to-life case of a boy's development. There is an obvious heterosexual presumption running through the whole thing, because that is the norm and because it is the happenstance of the story presented. Doubtless, there are real boys who have experienced some part of this story or who find it exceptionally easy to relate to. There are women who will find this to be quite insightful. Some will have seen such things and will be grateful that they are not so horrid themselves. Others may themselves cry and feel that they stand very much corrected by what Dostoevsky has made clear - namely, that women should take care to show such boys compassion and care to how they treat a pubescent male.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 8, An Unpleasant Predicament

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 8, An Unpleasant Predicament Summary

An Unpleasant Predicament. This story is set during a transition period in Russia. Three generals meet for lunch. Stepan Nikiforovitch Nikiforov was celebrating his 65th birthday. The other two men are the only people he has invited: both have worked for him before as subordinates, although they are generals now. They began drinking and wine, and it was not terribly long before someone did not have his full wits about him and was therefore more vulnerable than usual. He was regarded as a first-rate man. Stepan Nikiforovitch Nikiforov had special plans, particularly towards Semyon Shipulenko. The latter was a devoted married man who liked to stay at home with his family. Like the other, he had persisted towards his ambitions. The drunkenness, however mild, led into a conversation about certain ideas - including views about the latest reforms in Russia. Mr. Pralinsky was most affected. At 43 years old, he was a very young general who had recently taken a civilian post. As the son of a general, Mr. Pralinsky had been granted a fine upbringing. While not well designed for other things; he made a fine soldier and became a general in his own right.

Dostoevsky notes that even mild drunkenness can make mood changes more dramatic. There is some discussion of a wedding. It goes into great detail and includes a remark about the joy of middle-aged Russian women. One of the young men gets rather drunk and ends up getting into a bit of trouble with an older man who is an officer. At this point there is great drama surrounding the drunken interchanges between Pselonimov and Ivan Ilyitch. Ivan Ilyitch then has to be kept, because he has collapsed after the drunken spectacle. The bride and her groom are forced to an undesirable alternative as accommodations are made due to drunkenness. A carriage-driver who rather desperately needs the money shows up. The driver's need influences the dynamics. The story ends with a bit more drama and one character suddenly exhibits a great deal of nervous, anxious behavior.

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 8, An Unpleasant Predicament Analysis

This is a rather peculiar story of how business practices and the personal life run together. The three generals get together. A man has included his immediate and most prominent subordinates for a most personal occasion: his birthday. Here, readers are taught that the personal and professional have been united. The events move. Here, drunkenness is shown to lead to increased risks for the one who is intoxicated. This is viewed as being the cause for an argument. A man who might have normally shown



more restraint really doesn't. Even this slight drop in his inhibitions alters the way in which he expresses his opinions. In this case, there is an older man and a younger man, but the older is in his 60s and the younger man is in his 40s.

One theme of the whole story is the trouble that can be caused by a little drunkenness. It begins with seeming innocence, at an older man's birthday party. Someone dear to him gets just slightly intoxicated and ceases to refrain from his usual decorum. The older man then becomes more cantankerous as well. Nevertheless without terrible trouble they make it to a wedding. By the end of the story, a man's drunkenness has ruined a wedding and the guests are ashamed and enraged. The bride and groom have been cast out from the bridal couch by a drunken man and the majority of the party feel simply cowed and bullied by the relative aggression of the intoxicated one.

To add a final emphasis, there is the point about the social level at which this has occurred. It might be argued that there are working class people who would not even be embarrassed by such behavior, which serves to justify why the upper classes refuse to even attempt to socialize with them. Here, the top of the middle class, or the very upper classes, are rather horrified. Such behavior might cause them to be riddled with scandal. There has been an increase in the likelihood of errors and any other social faux pas.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 7, The Crocodile & Bobok

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 7, The Crocodile & Bobok Summary

This story begins on the 13th of January 1865, with a decision to go to an Arcade to see a live crocodile. The owner was a German, who was very proud to be able to exhibit the only live crocodile in Russia. One of the visitors teases the crocodile and suddenly becomes one of its victims. Despite this, he is able to converse with his friends over the telephone. The guardian, the German, is surprisingly protective of his crocodile. He does not want to lose his precious crocodile. The group, once reassured that for the time being, both the soldier and the crocodile are alive, they begin to look at two aspects of the problem. One, is how to remove the soldier: can this be done without the loss of life or not? What is it going to cost? What are the implications for the crocodile and the German? They next explore whether or not they can help the soldier continue to be paid or not, and if so, how might they do this? During the next section, the old German is moving about in a frock - coat.

It turns out, the crocodile is empty inside. The notion that it is a fake is avoided; in fact the soldier speaks to the others of how he and the devourer - the crocodile, will nourish one another. The German does not wish to part with the crocodile, and rants about this. The story line resumes to be about the spaciousness of the crocodile. The wife of Ivan Matveitch begins to contemplate divorce at the first sign that his salary, and therefore her income, are both in danger. She seeks assurance that she can get out of this trouble by getting a divorce. She is confronted by the opposite, and her opposition suggests that she make her way into the crocodile where she will be able to at least join her husband. She is offended by this. The same woman goes to a masquerade and tells a brief tale of how a man other than her husband has been comforting her and playing cards with her: when she loses, he kisses her hands, but when she wins he does not. She refers to him as a "naughty man" (p. 500). Another man altogether speaks to her again of taking her place in the crocodile. After this, the crocodile is consumed, it is eaten alive by yet another man altogether. This is a local man of the highest society. The devouring of the crocodile leads to further strange rumors that there is going to be a vast increase in the importation of crocodiles to Russia. This is concluded with letters published in the Voice and another local news-sheet. Both of these discuss the events in relation to Russia and to the Enlightened attitudes and efforts of the Europeans. There is some admission by the narrator that they hope that the Russians can become as enlightened as the Europeans.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 7, The Crocodile & Bobok Analysis

Bobok was published in 1873. It begins with a sober man telling a drunk friend about his life of late. One friend asks the other, after advising him to sober up, about what has kept him drunk. Semyon brings up the fact that Ivan is a literary man. There is some discussion of literature and writing as well as a professional artist's portrait. The drunkard has written one novel, but it has not ever been published. For a page he describes his efforts and the disappointments that followed. After this Ivan reports of how he attended a funeral. While there, people working at the funeral were forced to bail out the graves. Ivan noticed that although there was some grieving, the funeral was predominantly a festive occasion. He went so far as to assist in carrying the casket from the church to the graveyard. He observes that this was exceptionally heavy. Ivan expresses that what he does not understand his own behavior in that he remained at the cemetery for some time, perched atop a tombstone. This same character makes the observation that problems that require especial knowledge and education for their solution are often better not even attempted by people having only a general education. He notes, however, that people often love to try and to criticize those who are specialized in such matters. The events of the funeral lead to conversation about a General and about other military officers. A minor public official is called Excellency; it goes with his post and is often performed by someone who has served in the military but doesn't when serving in this civilian capacity.

The level of associates that the characters are involved with at this time is quite noticeable. They are minor public officials; middle-class people who can truthfully be viewed as being what they are. Amongst these is, "Platon Nikolaevitch is our home-grown philosopher, scientist and Master of Arts. He has brought out several philosophical works but..." (p. 521). The story continues to move, on an interpersonal level and ends with a writer determining to repeatedly attempt to submit for publication. He harbors hopes that there is an editor around somewhere who is really interested in his works. "I shall take it to the Citizen; the editor there has had his portrait exhibited too. Maybe he will print it" (p. 525).



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 8, The Peasant Marey & The Heavenly Christmas Tree

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 8, The Peasant Marey & The Heavenly Christmas Tree Summary

This story begins with a narrative first-person point-of-view. The main character is a prisoner. There are holidays in prison. This shows in that they are not forced to work and that their intoxication is tolerated. In fact, the officials go out of their way to ignore it, specifically because it would probably make matters even worse if they came down hard on the prisoners for doing so. He writes that he was sent to prison 15 years ago, and that he has hardly shared with anyone about this. He further describes that he had written a book, a novel in fact, about a fictional character who had been sentenced to prison time for murdering his wife. He writes that although that is not the reason why he himself was imprisoned, he believes there are people who think that he is in jail because of having killed his own wife. This same man returns to memories of childhood, partly in an effort to make himself feel better. He focuses successfully on memories of pleasurable experiences and times of success. He recounts a tale of a day when he heard someone else cried "Wolf!" He ran, in genuine childish terror, to an older man for protection. It worked. The older man was a peasant, and this case, the child writing the story was from a higher class, and due to it, he was called Master. Marey, the full grown peasant soothed the child asking him about the wolf. It turned out to be, as far as any one could tell, purely his imagination, but his fear was genuine. He then forgot all about this incident until, suddenly, over twenty years while in prison, the whole incident came back to him. As a direct consequence, he felt himself able to show improved warm-heartedness towards the other prisoners, and everyone else for that matter.

The Heavenly Christmas Tree begins with, "I am a novelist, and I suppose I have made up this story" (p. 537). Here is a tale about a sad little Christmas tragedy. A boy runs off in fear, and hides himself amongst a pile of wood. The trouble results from his hiding himself too well. In fact, no one searches for him well enough and he is so frightened that he does not escape. As a direct result of this, he dies during the night. However, before dying he has visions of a joyful scene, full of Christmas cheer. He meets his end when imaginary visions of flying angelic figures: the ghosts of other deceased children, primarily ones who have been abandoned by their mothers. The angelic forms of the ghost-babies themselves wipe the tears from the eyes of their sinful mothers.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 8, The Peasant Marey & The Heavenly Christmas Tree Analysis

These two stories are both more about the lives of children than those of adults. In the first case, the author shows how a specific childhood memory could be used to offset problems the main character was facing. The author is colorful in his use of language - and wonderfully expressive. His use of characterization through narrative voice is excellent, giving readers a wonderful feeling of really being 'inside someone else's mind' and 'perspective.' This is so much greater than the altered view of a mask, which can be seen by the person wearing it, but only if viewed in a mirror or artificially generated image as it takes readers in at least as deeply as when he or she plays a role in a theatre production and "gets into the character" that one plays.

One of these stories includes the perspective of a writer. Most creative writing stems from wild distortions of the author's personal experiences combined in new ways, along with elements that are true-to-life but not true, along with still others taken from hearsay and other fictional sources. In this way, the real and the unreal are commingled. Doubtless, the truth that Dostoevsky is a writer and author in real life, is here actually used in one of the stories as part of the fictional account of events. Here, the fictional character shares this quality in common with the actual author.

These stories show the consistency of Dostoevsky's style of writing. There is heavy emotion involved. There are pangs associated with these. In the first story the man is in prison. In reality, Dostoevsky spent some time in jail and often had financial troubles. This shows in that often enough, the characters in his stories are not upper class people. At the same time, he does include people of the higher social classes enough for them to feel included by his works and represented with a rather fair approach: neither villainizing them nor assuming that they are all morally superior in every way to the more common folk. The era in Russian history is also exhibited clearly in these and the preceding stories. There is a major transition between the time when Russia had serfs who were not free, although they were 'above slaves,' into the dawn of the days when such people began to be viewed more towards free men and progressively into being actual citizens. This was a great movement towards 'democracy' which in its original meaning, means governance of a city or nation by its poor people - the majority of the populace, and with the best interests of the financially poor at the heart of the system. This is what Russia was really going through during Dostoevsky's lifetime.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 9, A Gentle Spirit

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 9, A Gentle Spirit Summary

This story is dated 1876. There are 6 sections to Part 1 of this story. First is 'Who I was and who she was.' Here, the main character is a grown man. He runs a pawn shop. He begins to describe how a teenage girl began to turn up in the shop. He writes that at first, he made no special distinction between her and anyone else who came there. She only had cheap things to exchange, but soon enough it became clear to him that what she was parting from she felt was precious. He writes that he then began to 'test her.' He did this intentionally and he succeeded in upsetting her. He learned more about her this way and at times offered helpful advice, but always with the verbal form of a cutting edge. It is all-too-obvious to him that she is suffering from poverty. He finds that he accepts things from her for his pawn shop that no one else would accept, including stones and ikons. After a while more, he has taken to thinking of her in a particular way - that is, specifically, and has determined that she is a gentle soul. He then begins to write about how this can be discerned. He writes of luring her into conversation. He goes so far as to bribe a domestic servant for information. By doing so, he learns out about her past. Due to this, he has the upper hand in that he now knows more about her than she is aware of.

The first section concludes with this character having come to view her as being 'his.' 'The Offer of Marriage' begins. It is explained over the course of two pages how she has been working for her single Aunts and their children. The women do not have a good reputation; she furthers this belief by describing how badly they treat her. Yet, they have enabled her to have a home even after her parents died when she was just 11, much too young to fend for herself. The aunts want to sell her off to an older man - and she at the very dawn of her sexuality is legitimately terrified that he might like to include her after the sexual manner as well as financially. The pawn broker is delighted that he correctly senses that she prefers him - or that she at least feels less repulsed by him. At the same time, he admits to the radical injustice of the situation. Here, she is not really of marriageable age, nor is truthfully interested in either one sexually but meanwhile, is just a tender-hearted 14-year-old furtively, yet desperately, seeking a means of finding her way. The reality is that she is a vulnerable orphan. While some 14-year-old girls may be ready to marry; this one is only fit to be married off to a man who won't have sex with her. Earlier in the book Dostoevsky has shown what happened to another girl, to whom this has happened - only in that case the young woman naturally wants a lover very much but while the good news is the old man never forces himself on her sexually but the bad news is that he also won't let her go to a man who will be a good match now that she has grown up enough for that.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 9, A Gentle Spirit Analysis

This story is a bit odd. On one hand, it shows how a man in his 40s abuses the advantage that he has over an adolescent girl. Abusing here, means that he takes a teenager as a wife knowing that in truth it is just that she needs to be taken in by someone who will provide for her and look after her - she doesn't need a lover for this task at all. Given this, and that the truth of it will show again at the story's end, there is more to the man than this. In fact, he develops an interest in the girl because she comes into his shop when she is fourteen. The man is a mildly successful business owner. He works at the store he owns. He begins to help her. This shows the transformation from how he goes from being ignorant and indifferent to her circumstances into someone who cares for her. It is typical of Dostoevsky to describe this as being 'no longer indifferent,' or 'not indifferent.'

To his credit, the man does take her in with the idea that she would rather end up forced to be with him over at least one known alternative - the grocer, who is more successful as a business man and even older and fat. She has had to stall to get her abusive aunts to continue to permit her to stay with them. Also to his credit, he actually loves her. It may be that he grows into this feeling about her, but he most certainly does. Thanks to this, he is a rather devoted husband, however imperfect. It is also thanks to this that he is devastated at the end of the story when she commits suicide right after he has endeavored to reconcile with her.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 12, Gentle Spirit Cont.

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 12, Gentle Spirit Cont. Summary

Whereas, in this story, the pawnbroker goes to bed wondering how this will play out while suffering from a headache. Section 3 'The Noblest of Men, though I Don't Believe it Myself': He brought her into the house - sternly. He was very much older than she - he is 41 and she is just 16 years old. By the time she enters his home she does so with what he calls an evil smile and an ability to listen. There are four sections to Part 2. Section 4: 'Plans and Plans.' He takes her into the house. She is openly quite affectionate to him. He took her in before he married her. He is trying to teach her about life, and to be her guardian and protector. He teaches her to be frugal. He is stern with her, but lightens up a little after she moves in. He doesn't take her to the theatre very often, but a few times in the first year he does. When he does go, he does bring her along. He has a goal to save up 30,000 kopeks and he explains to her about their budget. He writes of the purity of the innocence of youth, of how their ideals are so fantastic except that they are worthless if they would just make everyone homeless, or revert society back to the state of nature- even then, decisions would be forced.

Section 5: A Gentle Spirit in Revolt. Despite the silence he feels she is growing rebellious and he feels strongly that she should be subordinate. It is part his age, and in part his gender bias - what readers would call sexism. Some readers will view this as the very mark of evil, whereas others will think it is proper. She begins making a few more of her own decisions, many of which her much older husband disagrees with. Even though he is far younger than the grocer he is still well 'old enough to be her father.' The pawnbroker ends up going to her aunts, with a different perspective of what she's like. He now feels that she has become a rebellious trouble-maker. She has begun flirting with a lieutenant - which is the same rank that her husband had before he was removed due to cowardice. The lieutenant is much closer to her age. She has also made a trade with the widow of a colonel, an older woman, in direct disagreement with her husband's wishes. Because of this, as punishment he tells her that she cannot work at his business. He bribes his way into being able to spy on her meeting with the lieutenant. Fortunately, he finds that her better nature erupts during the interchange and that her main goal seems to have been more to offend her husband and his pride rather than to run off with another man. Only after this incident does she sleep by herself in her husband's home for the first time. She nearly kills him with a revolver, but perhaps not. He discovers this, but does not struggle against her and she in fact abandons the attempt altogether.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 12, Gentle Spirit Cont. Analysis

Dostoevsky shows both the bright and darker sides of circumstances and of the nature in this case. Even when the man admits that this is somehow taking an unfair of the young woman - to make her be his wife, he is also able to show how well he is protecting her from other trouble and danger by doing so. He also recounts the very hard times that he himself sometimes had after he had grown up but before he had set up his pawnshop and managed to make it successful. He felt both beaten down and raised up himself, in terms of what this did to him. He is now a successful pawn broker, and for him this is quite good. He has managed to become a husband. He has attempted to provide her with discipline but absolutely ruined his relationship with her by doing so. He did not find this out until much too late, but that is because he did not even realize how serious of a problem it was until after she committed suicide. Here, the brutality of man against of woman is shown to be at times intentional and in other ways it has all been a terribly sad accident of his lack of understanding and her inability or difficulty in communicating this or in otherwise changing the conditions. This is a story that will leave many readers feeling released to look upon their own daily real life, as it has made current culture more palatable in many cases.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 13, A Gentle Spirit Cont.

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 13, A Gentle Spirit Cont. Summary

Part 2, section 1 'The Dream of Pride.' The incident with the revolver forces the wife to reflect upon her own gentleness and the accusations the husband suffered for being labeled a coward by his comrades- which was why he had left the regiment. He recounts his own past, remarks that the incident with the revolver changed everything for him and he repeatedly reveals that he loves his wife and that all the difficulty he issues to his wife is for the sake of cultivating her with discipline - in effect, to help finish raising her seeing as she really is quite young. He recounts how much he has been beaten down as part of the process of becoming a successful grown man. He finally talks her to, after having enforced years of near silence, followed by a few months of letting her live in the house but both allowing her to sleep apart and forcing her to go without sex - as this was not in era of ready and rapid respectable alternatives. His wife commits suicide within days of his concerted efforts at reconciliation. The next section is entitled: I was only five minutes too late. This causes him to cling to the servant woman Lukerya: repeatedly he writes that he will never let her go, now! He is gut-wrenchingly heart-broken at his wife's sudden demise and to his horror believes that if he had just come home five minutes sooner she would still be alive. He regrets whatever his part was that led to her death by suicide, and observes that he would strongly prefer that she lived even if he lost her to another man or to some other future that she would have preferred. He regretted the length of his silence towards her; the silence he had instigated with their marriage.

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 13, A Gentle Spirit Cont. Analysis

Here, another aspect of the same story is handled. In this case, the concern is infidelity. This is not the only story in this collection of short stories in which Dostoevsky writes on this topic. In this case, it is the woman's chastity and her threat of infidelity. After the teenager has grown up into his sixteen-year-old bride one of her life experiences is that she works in business. She did not have to fight for this, but it is extremely important in that it has created an opportunity for her to acquire real work experience. There are women who have this in 19th century Russia but the way it is done and the opportunities for it are different. He does help to raise her, which in truth she needs, especially as she is so young when she enters the marriage. In this case, she begins to flirt with one of the customers who is closer to her own age. He is a man of the same rank as her husband was in the military: a lieutenant. While that is the bottom of the officers, it is actually an officer's position. There is a great deal of drama surrounding



this: her husband bribe's someone else to gather more information about their relationship. He finds a way to secretly spy on their private liaison. He brings a pistol to this meeting, in case he needs it. Then he finds out that she was apparently doing this more just to annoy her husband than to have an actual affair. Her husband is somehow greatly relieved and yet also he is troubled by the various implications of the events.



Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 10, The Dream of a Ridiculous Man

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 10, The Dream of a Ridiculous Man Summary

This story came out in 1878. The narrative begins from the first person fictional perspective. The man discusses the reality of his being "ridiculous." He explains that everyone has known this for a long time. People have been known to laugh at him openly for this. He explains however, that the real truth, the kernel of it that everyone needs to know but doesn't, is that he knows this better than all of the others. After informing the readers of his ridiculous condition, he then proceeds to describe his suicide plot and how he has left off from following through on this plan for two months. Were it plans for most other proceedings, readers, one would view it negatively. However, this is Dostoevsky showing his true colors as a literary genius who courts the depressing and is able to work even the cheeriest of people into a melancholia in 15 pages or less. This story is no exception. The main character is tugged at by a desperate little girl. He refrains from assisting her but encourages her to find the police. He makes his way home and spends some time with a revolver on the table for the purpose of killing himself. He blames - if that is the way to describe it - the little girl for his refusal or delay to commit suicide yet another day.

This story is also sectioned. Section 2 begins: He is trying to decide whether or not feel ashamed of himself about something. Because of this, he once again puts off his suicide for one more day. He still can feel pain and emotions of this kind even though nothing matters to him anymore. Section 3: he dozed off at the table. Then it ceases to be clear whether he is dreaming or awake. Section 4: the author digresses into observations about a large group of people; he moves into commenting on their cheerful church going, singing ways and concludes the section having introduced corruption. Section 5 starts with the main character accepting blame for their corruption. Here he writes of politics and relationship of crime and law. Then after a lengthy description of a complex dream that he had, he awoke, no longer suicidal but compelled to preach. The remainder of the story is about the main character's vision of faith, along with it how this has saved his life. He goes on to describe, very briefly, that he has corrupted others and has been corrected and is now able to correct others.

Book 1, The Short Stories : Chapter 10, The Dream of a Ridiculous Man Analysis

This final story of Dostoevsky's in the book The Short Stories is typical Dostoevsky in a number of ways. One of these is that intense emotion is included. The main character is suicidal at the beginning of the story. The manner of description is typical of the author.



Dostoevsky provides partial accounts: given that the word is not directly visual in terms of the images presented it is clear that Dostoevsky takes prose and poetic abilities and mixes them. There are times when his selection of details leaves so much to the imagination that every reader will be apt to see it differently within his or her own mind. One typical example is 'the revolver on the table with the little candle.' This tells us a lot, while at the same time leaving out a tremendous amount of information.. As such, readers will visualize accordingly.

This last story is one of the lightest in that, like the one about The Husband Under the Bed, it ends on a rather joyful note. In this regard it is much more akin to what happens in typical American dramas. This is not always the case with Dostoevsky, who can leave people feeling worse than the woman servant Agrafena in the story 'An Honest Thief.' She, recall, was renowned to her boss as making it so horribly obvious whenever he insisted on anything she didn't like, that he no longer dared to deny her. She is lucky that his sense of loyalty entirely prevented him from firing her for her shows of anger: this sense of personal commitment between the man of the house and his servant is part of what characterizes Dostoevsky's stories. She brings in a lodger, and while she asks his permission she has given him no real choice with dirty floors for him if he tries to 'say no' and giving in to her will if he 'says yes.'



Characters

Semyon Ivanovitch Prohartchin appears in Mr. Prohartchin

This is one of the main characters of the first stories. In the story he is an old man. The story is about his final days. He is ill during this time. He has been 'retired' or otherwise badly disposed towards many people. He was in the military, but it is pointed out that he was of low rank. What his rank was is not specified. He suffers alone for some time, then behaves rather strangely and desperately. Once he does a number of others surround him and show that they care. Essentially, they had forgotten all about him when he had not asserted his needs, but they not really intentionally neglected him; it was closer to the truth to observe that they not even realized he had need of them.

Semyon is a rather disgruntled figure. He is typically very quiet, except when he is rather harsh towards young people, including young men. The majority of his social contact occurs by being at home: he lives in a boarding house - one well known form of shared housing there in Russia in the 1800s. He likes to call the young men 'puppies' as part of his reactions and corrections of them.

Semyon is known to be on excellent terms with the landlady and to pay far less rent than the others. He is very vocal about the fact that he is financially poor. It also shows in his eating habits.

Semyon is known to have one friend who is a drunkard.

Semyon dies during the story after a fierce fever and while suffering from delusions and even hallucinations. After he has died it turns out that he had somehow managed to save up over 2,000 roubles. Within the context of that environment, this is viewed as a lot of money although in other contexts it would not be.

Ustinya Fyodorovna appears in Mr. Prohartchin

This is the landlady in the story. She is a very important figure. She runs a boarding house. She harbors a number of male lodgers. Nowhere in the story is it written that she only takes in male lodgers, but it is suggested that she does. It is made clear that as the boarders are also respectable gentlemen she is entirely safe and everyone behaves with proper decorum and propriety. More bluntly stated, she is not romantically involved with any of them nor do they harass her in any effort to make it so that she is.

That being clear, the lady is also known to have favorites. Mr. Prohartchin is one of her favorites. This is shown in two major ways during the story. She lets him stay for less than what she charges the others. The other is that they actually move together. When she expands her business to a larger house with more numerous lodgers, Mr.



Prohartchin is one of the tenants at both locations even though he is far from the best paying. Dostoevsky makes it clear that those whom she does not strongly favor she would not permit to be around if they did not help her with money.

The position of women in Russian society has quite a history, and its current state shows in Dostoevsky's work. The landlady works in one of those fields that is open to women in Russia during the 1800s. She is not married. Everyone views her with respect.

Drunken cadger appears in Mr. Prohartchin

This man appears multiple times in the story. He is a strange friend of Mr. Prohartchin's, and is obviously socially defined by his all-too frequent drunken condition. He seems to have had some role in something that isn't entirely ethical in the story but the details of this remain hidden. When it is realized that Mr. Prohartchin is actually dying, the drunken cadger is one of the people who is found and brought to him. He is permitted to spend the night as a guest because of his intimacy with the protagonist.

Ordynov appears in The Landlady

Ordynov is the young man who is the main character in the story *The Landlady*. He is a Russian man in St. Petersburg. He does not have much money, and is single, so he opts for shared housing. He kept the same address for some time, but when his landlady leaves St. Petersburg he moves. He moves into a very small place that already has: an old German, a young woman - apparently his daughter, and an aged Russian lady who is surviving as a cheap servant to the old German.

Yaroslav Ilyitch appears in The Landlady

This is an important second character in the story. He is a young man who knows both Murin, and Ordynov. He spends time with all of these characters in the story.

Murin appears in The Landlady

This is Katerina's father and husband. It is quite strange because while he is actually her father, he never held the social role of father in her life as she had remained with her mother and mother's husband. Until she was a young woman, she had believed that her stepfather was her real father. As such, she did not relate to Murin after the manner of a father, ever.

Murin was a Tatar and a professional crook. He was apparently both a thief and a murderer. Fortunately, he was no rapist, but he was also a seducer, with no aversion to incest, even with his own daughter. In fact, he comes into custody of his daughter when she has blossomed into young womanhood, and he cuts a deal with her. He accepts



that they won't have sexual relations because he isn't willing to force himself on her, but he wants her anyways and offers to take her away with him. She chooses to run off with him, instead of getting her father to get rid of him.

He learns that his young wife, who is his mostly grown daughter is tempted to run off with or to have romances with other men - usually respectable gentlemen her own age. He is adept at thwarting these attempts, and tolerant of these tendencies up to a point. He is often absent from her but also often with her.

When he grows old, he is ever more reliant upon her loving care, despite the lack of sex life. He is very set upon keeping her. He makes this clear to the St. Petersburg Russian Ordynov, who is yet another of these young men her own age with whom she has some kind of affair. As has become his custom, Murin tolerates this up to a point, from love and understanding of his daughter-wife Katerina, and then gets rid of the young man.

His brigand colleagues appear repeatedly but are not ever present. They lie to explain his financial situation when they are amongst perfectly respectable people; people who are not professional criminals.

Ordynov aka Vassily Mihalitchappears in The Landlady

This young man is the main character in The Landlady. The story is not written entirely nor exclusively from his point of view, but it does follow him as the main character. He is characterized mainly as young and heterosexual and rather poor, at least in the beginning part of the story. At the same time, it is presumed that there is nothing 'wrong' with him.

Osip Mihalitchappears in Polzunkov

This man is a story teller. The narrator also calls him 'a rag,' meaning that he will do for others, anything that is needed rather indiscriminately.

Arkady Ivanovitch Nefedevitchappears in A Faint Heart

This is one of the main protagonists in this story. He is a young Russian man, with a low rank in the military. He has a best friend and there is a woman who he falls in love with during the story.

Vasya Shumkovappears in A Faint Heart

This is a main character in the story A Faint Heart. He has Arkady Ivanovitch Nefedevitch for a best friend of the same gender kind. He is a Russian, and a young man. He suffers disillusionment over the course of this story.



Madame Leroux appears in A Faint Heart

This is a lady who runs a shop and sells the young men a cap. She is treated with respect, admiration and affection. She is a bit doting, and kisses on of the young men, but in a manner that is viewed as being within reason for their relationship.

Lizanka appears in A Faint Heart

This is a young woman who has the affections of two men. The challenge is caused by the fact that the two men are best friends to one another. One of them is called Vasya. He has been welcomed into the family and accepted as a suitor. She has gone so far as to agree to marry him. He invites her to meet his best friend, Arkady. Arkady is smitten and falls for her immediately. She is central in an indirect way to the story. The dismay that results from the efforts of all three to come to terms with this reality leads her to be forced to marry another, which, by the end of the story, she has done.

Stepan Nikoforovitch appears in An Unpleasant Predicament

This is a general; he is the man throwing a party in the story. He is a Russian who has been involved in creating and implementing some government reforms. These reforms are discussed within the context of a small group of close friends.

Akim Petrovich appears in An Unpleasant Predicament

Akim Petrovich is a "Petersburg Russian" rather than a "regular Russian." This means that he is very focused on what he can buy from the local shops as a benefit of his pay and his job. He refers to the newspaper as the "Academic News" and harbors virtually no interest in what is going on in Russia at large. He also uses the German word *Fruhstuck* rather than the Russian term for breakfast. These qualities distinguish him from regular Russians whether they are in St. Petersburg or not. The St. Petersburg Russian is not interested in events outside of St. Petersburg.

Semyon Ardalyonovitch appears in Bobok

This is the first character introduced into this story. He engages in conversation with a friend of his, who he wishes would sober up. They begin to converse about professional writing. Semyon tells his friend a great deal.



Ivan Ivanovitch appears in Bobok

This man is a drunkard. He is also a friend of Semyon Ardalyonovitch. His name is used by Dostoevsky more than once. It is not clear whether this is ever the same man or not, or if Dostoevsky has created a kind of stereotype for the purposes of Russian 19th century literature.

Patron Nikolaevitch appears in Bobok

This man is a philosopher, local to St. Petersburg. He appears in the story during a funeral celebration of a distant relative that Ivan Ivanovitch has found and attended in order to be socially included by others.

Lukerya appears in A Gentle Spirit

This is the household servant of the pawnbroker and his wife. She has a very minor but steadily important role in the story. At the end of it, after the pawnbroker loses his wife he asserts repeatedly that he will not let Lukerya go. This is more a testament to his acknowledgment of the importance of the personal connection over and above her functional role as his servant.

Mephistopholes appears in A Gentle Spirit

Though God goes without much of a mention on this occasion, his highest level subordinate and rival is directly mentioned. He comes up along with a discussion of Faust. The question of ethics in relation to the belief in God or in atheism is mutely brought up.

Platon Nikolaevitch appears in Bobok

This man is described as being a philosopher and a scientist in the story. He is rather socially prominent. He is an example of some of the best that St. Petersburg Russia has to offer in the 19th century.

Nastenka appears in White Nights

This is a main character in the story. She is in her late teens when the story begins. Part of her background is that she is an orphan. She has something of a romance of some kind with another character in the story but it is on the border of something. One day they do press one another's hands, but another day they don't. In this sense, they are as furtive as very young or otherwise extremely inexperienced people in the art of love.



Matrona appears in White Nights

This is another of the important female characters in the story. She is cited as receiving admonitions in some cases, and endearing encouragements at other times. She is the household servant of the main male character.

Elena Ivanovna appears in The Crocodile

This is one of the main characters in this story. She is married to the man who ends up inside the crocodile. This was actually a provoked attack by the crocodile. She is noted as being legitimately concerned about the security of her husband's salary, as this is the main source of her income. She is viewed as being an attractive woman. She is not particularly pleased when another character suggests that she go ahead and climb into the crocodile in order to be together with her husband while he goes through this. She does not care, but she is evidently not completely 'mad for him.' If she were, she would probably cast aside common sense and willingly climb into the crocodile so that they would be united in meeting their fate. Still, she is portrayed as having genuine compassion for him although she has her own interests well in mind.

Ivan Matveitch appears in The Crocodile

This is the name of the man who ends up inside the crocodile. Apparently, he teased the creature and then was suddenly grabbed and eaten. However, he has strangely survived and is in fact able to chat with the others from inside the beast. He assures them that his digestion will come slowly as it has a hollow interior and that there is room for another person or two in there with him including his wife and one of his best friends.

God appears in Another Man's Wife, or the Husband Under the Bed

This being is most famed for being the Creator of the Universe, which is why there is some hope that this is not simply 'the Big Bang' of the physicists, although that would explain a lot. Most loved for being benevolent to mankind and most feared for being angry and regretful towards humanity, this entity is referred to manly as an exclamatory during the chapter, as in "Oh my God!" (p. 255).

Glafira Petrovna appears in Another Man's Wife or the Husband Under the Bed

This is the main wife having the extramarital affairs in this short story. There is another wife who is having an affair but Glafira only meets her when he bursts into her home in a passionate search for Glafira and ends up tucked under a bed along with the other



woman's other lover hiding - on the basis of some bizarre instinct, from the other woman's husband. She does actually have extramarital affairs, but is somehow also able to remain at least reasonably sincerely devoted to her husband. It is not clear whether his and her jealousies drive the relentless affairs or whether it is more caused by her naivete about the true nature of men. At one point some man, one of her lovers, exclaims, "Glafira! Where are your vows?"



Objects/Places

St. Petersburg appears in Multiple Stories

St. Petersburg is a major city in Russia, and is often the background location of Dostoevsky stories. It is the setting for every single story in this collection. It is such a well known location that the author often takes it as granted that the readers will have at least some familiarity with the city. As such, there is no over arching description provided.

Revolver appears in The Dream of a Ridiculous Man

This is the revolver that [insert name of main character here] buys as part of his plan to commit suicide in the final short story of the collection.

Murin's gun appears in The Landlady

This is a rifle that the old German man keeps. He takes it from the wall and threatens Ordynov with it in the first Part of the 2 Part story. It becomes clear that neither he nor Katerina are in danger, and old Murin falls into an epileptic seizure.

Bobynitsin's flat appears in Another Man's Wife, or the Husband Under the Bed

This is a location in St. Petersburg where a man goes in search of his wife. He is suffering from extreme anxiety and suspicion that his wife is having at least one extramarital affair. He meets his wife's younger lover - another man, out on the street in front of Bobynitsin's flat.

Letters appears in A Novel in Nine Letters

There are a number of these that are used to actually assemble the entire story. This is in fact very creative of Dostoevsky and shows some innovation. Here, he has used the letters as a specific device to create and to tell a short fiction story.

Rental house appears in The Landlady

There are two of these in this story. These are the homes that the Landlady either owns or is purchasing with the assistance of all of her lodgers. Unlike some form of shared housing, the landlady presides. In this particular story she runs one boarding house for



men and then a larger one. It is more implied than explicitly stated that she runs her boarding houses for male tenants. The only lodgers mentioned are adult males.

bundle appears in The Landlady & elsewhere

This item is referred to when, "So night came on, I tied up a bundle and my soul ached and worked within me" (p. 113).

ikon appears in A Gentle Spirit

The young woman lead character in this story has Christian religious ikons. The one of the Mother of God - Mary is one item that she tries to sell to the pawnbroker while she still lives with her aunts. She holds this same object when she commits suicide. Obviously, she died because of the way she was 'caught in a bind' by the totality of her needs including financial ones.

pen and paper appears in A Faint Heart

These two items turn up at various points throughout the story collection. However, in A Faint Heart they are especially prominent. The reason is that Vasya's income depends upon this. There is nothing spoken about whether or not Arkady is financially dependent upon Vasya's writing or not. He is really transcribing. Then he runs into some problem that he cannot cope with very well. When this happens, the way that he relates to his work changes. He hides from the problem in the work, and yet his productivity has suffered. The entire thing is about some love triangle type of drama, because of the dual nature of his intimacy with his best friend and with a woman he had intended to marry; but then he learns that his best friend is also attracted to her and won't back off.

water appears in A Faint Heart and elsewhere

Vasya cries out to Arkady for water during this story. It turns up elsewhere, but for such a precious and commonplace item, water is not mentioned very much.

Town Clock appears in Another Man's Wife or the Husband Under the Bed

This item is mentioned once during this chapter. It does not come up in other chapters.



raccoon coat appears in Another Man's Wife or the Husband Under the Bed

This is used as a means for one man to describe another when he has no name available to be able to do so. It turns out to be the overcoat of a man who's character is partially determined by being 'the husband' of the story. He actually turns out to be one of two husbands who figure prominently in the collection.

Scented love-letter appears in Another Man's Wife or the Husband Under the Bed

This appears in this one story. It falls on Ivan Andreyitch's head while he is out at the theatre. He is consumed by it, quite rapidly and this colors his perception of the entire rest of the scene. This carefully folded beautiful item incites and inflames Ivan. He manages to make it out of the public theater, but he tromps on the feet of others on the way. This love letter that fell from, quite possibly other peoples' love affairs onto Ivan's head caused him to end up under the bed of a married couple he didn't know. Under that bed he found that wife's other lover - the one other than her husband who breathed and coughed up top muttering about how loud the cats were.

Bed appears in Another Man's Wife or the Husband Under the Bed

This item occurs in multiple stories. It is normally a 'marriage bed;' that is, the bed of a married couple. There are other beds in the collection of short stories presented here. In the story labeling this item, there are four people overtly involved in the bed. There is the married couple on top of the bed and then there are the other two men beneath it. One of the two is the lover of the married woman who is on top of the bed. The other is Glafirya's zealous and jealous husband, Ivan Andreyitch.

Coffin appears in An Unpleasant Predicament

When a man attends the funeral of a relative he comes across a coffin. He even helps to carry a coffin during his experience.

Pink satin quilt appears in An Unpleasant Predicament

This is part of the bridal couch, in the bridal chamber. It has been set into place as part of the ceremony for after the wedding but it is destroyed by the multiple disasters that ensue because of the conduct of someone who is too drunk.



Attic salt appears in Bobok

This comes up as a retort to something else. Part of an editor's rejection indicated that the author - who is the fictional main character in Bobok, is that the author needs more salt. He replies, "Attic salt?"

Vodka appears in An Unpleasant Predicament

This alcoholic beverage comes up frequently. It is especial to Russia, probably because they grow potatoes well there and in greater quantities than rice and wheat and anything else that the rest of the alcohols are based on. It is the cause of the trouble in An Unpleasant Predicament because it is over done -abused, rather than used.

Long neck appears in An Unpleasant Predicament

In this case, this simply refers to Pseldonimov's neck.

Bottle appears in An Unpleasant Predicament

This refers to a bottle of vodka that is wielded in this story.



Themes

Sexuality

This theme asserts itself in different ways during the stories. In some stories the main character is a young single man, who might be a bit naive. For some, the intention is to get married. In one of the stories the drama is about a few facets of human sexuality. One is the challenges involved in what is often times a change over, from same gender best friendship pairings, into the condition of being part of a couple. While there are exceptions of diverse kinds, this trend is common. There are emotional pains and pangs associated with it. The potential for rivalry amongst the very best of friends occurs in one story. A young Russian man falls in love with a woman. He also has a best friend with whom he has lived for about five years and they freely and openly express their affection for each other. They love each other so intensely that one expresses to the other that he loves the woman he is going to marry as much as he loves this other man who is his very best friend. Two of the three decide to try to make it a blissful threesome but one of the three foresees doom: Vasya cannot take it when he learns from Arkady, that Arkady is also strongly attracted to his bride to be. He loses his mind during the story because he cannot take the wedge this drives between he and Arkady. Arkady does not figure out what the problem really was until after he has lost his friend. When he does, he figures it out. He is so sad about what happened to his beloved friend Vasya that he keeps away from the woman forever after. She loses her groom-to-be and ends up having to marry another other man altogether because of the dismay between the best men friends.

Another two of the stories are all about men's sexual jealousies. The theme here is exploration of women and their extramarital affairs, and husbands and what their anxiety about their wife's sexual fidelity or infidelity drives them to. Dostoevsky clearly seeks to find better humour in this truth during *Another Man's Wife*. Here, one husband is driven frantic by his wife's affairs. Later in the story, the same husband runs into bizarre trouble because he is so suspicious that his wife is having one or more affairs. The idea that a woman is innocent is included in the story, but so is guilt. Then, the author explores the implications of infidelity. His conclusion is that jealousy is the real root of the trouble. This observation, written in the midst of the nineteenth-century in Russia, suggests to readers that either this was during a less restrictive cultural phase and it implies an unspoken underlying feeling of transcultural unity with the Russian people - if only because there are some similar attitudes and behaviors in the English speaking people of the Americas. Whether that is the whole truth or not, Dostoevsky has further explored sexuality within marriage, when the other lover is most often characterized as a relatively innocent yet terribly guilty younger man.

These are just two of the major examples from the first half of the book that provide some insight into some of how Dostoevsky views human sexuality.



The Human Condition - Difficult Feelings

Dostoevsky has a reputation for being able to bring readers to a state of melancholia or even emotional depression. This is so well known that readers are strongly advised against trying to take in too much of the energy of his written works in too short of a time span, and that one really must avoid reading more than two of his novels or collections of stories at once. This being the case, the short stories are fantastic for smaller doses. There are two or more reasons for this. One of these is that Dostoevsky's writings include a lot of tragic elements and times of 'tragi-comedy.' The other is that he is an excellent writer, and there fore is adept at bringing numerous emotions to the surface at once. Many times, Dostoevsky's stories are no sadder than the news, and much less so because they are fictional but perhaps more so if readers were hoping for 'light relief' by reading.

Dostoevsky explores many of the more intense emotions found in human life. During the tales in this book, he has shown how a boy suffers from feeling sexually harassed by older women not so much physically but on more of an emotional and psychological level. He writes of a boy, despite the pain of this, and it does drive him to tears more than once, manages to make progress in this area of his life. This is actually one of the author's lighter stories. So to are those covered mainly during Dostoevsky's short fiction about the affairs in *Another Man's Wife* or *a Husband Under the Bed*.

Human tragedy is a specialty of Dostoevsky's. The stories that he writes do not come with any 'guaranteed happy ending' as is the norm for contemporary American fiction. It might be fair to write that the author's gift is located in a similar area. Literature is often saddled with the burden of dealing with things that might otherwise go unaddressed. In this case, Dostoevsky's stories can vary in their impact. Some will assuredly find them depressing. Others can relate in one place or another, to what is going on here. There are people who have some very challenging experiences who may find that by reading Dostoevsky they are able to experience some type of catharsis. Many would cry and laugh over at least one item in the course of story collection.

Human Development

The stories include characters in various stages of life development. There are some that are children. In one story, a boy is a minor character and is regularly met with the vigorous affection of grown men. In these cases, the older men have no abusive intentions but they are very hands-on. Dostoevsky writes that it is okay for grown men to grab a ten year old boy with whom they are acquainted, to pick him up, to hug him warmly and to kiss him repeatedly. All this is simply to be viewed as a perfectly normal level of safe human affection. Some will feel at ease with this, others will feel the overwhelming sense of Russian culture. Russians are like the Spaniards in that they grab and kiss adults as a means of greeting. This is great for people who like this sort of thing but might make other people like they are being accosted, especially if their own cultural norms are quite different.



The stage of development into young adulthood is covered and explored in a number of the short stories. Courting and marriage are topics that loom large in several of them. He writes a lot about 'love disasters.' This is not necessarily to undermine anyone's confidence about the love life, but it isn't clear whether Dostoevsky writes these to alleviate the distresses of anyone who has suffered in love or whether he simply uses these kinds of dynamics because they make great story material. Certainly he was enough of a genius to have acted from either reason.

Middle and old age are also covered in these stories, albeit not to the same degree. There are cases where the older person is middle aged. For example, in the case of Murin, Katerina and Ordynov, it is not certain whether Murin is a man in his 40s or a fellow in his 60s or even 70s. There is the story *An Unpleasant Predicament*, in which the middle aged men in their 40s are turned about in their roles back into being the younger men. Here, the dynamics of their stages of life are again made plain. The old man still needs these younger men, but now he has them for his birthday for their company. Yet, once someone gets a bit drunk and stops acting like a subordinate the older man acts up in retaliation at the affront; he gets like that even though he is going into retirement. Wounded pride, the waning of power, and the continuing custom of seniority having the highest rank are all pointed out. The middle aged men are supporting their mentor; they are fully mature and of high ranks themselves and yet they still cower and struggle instinctively and by training with their senior. They are happy and they are sad if at last they are able to overcome him. They want to, but once they do, they have toppled their own leadership and have foreseen their own ends when the vigor of youth and middle age wane in the saga of life.



Style

Point of View

The general point of view is nineteenth century Russian adult male. Within this perspective, each of Dostoyevsky's works has one or more individualized variations on this same basic point-of-view. The English speaking woman translator has made herself as invisible as possible so as to not mar the original work with her presence. The Russian adult male is assumed to be an emotional creature although the way that feelings are expressed and felt may not be identical to those of females. Russian men are assumed to have faced 'feminism' or the flagrant and outspoken desire on the part of the Russian women to be treated equally to men, although women remain different from men.

Dostoevsky's men are also typically not wealthy: often enough they are financially poor, but he does also have writings that include wealthier men. There seems to be more than one reason for people to live in shared lodgings. At times, it seems to be about the money - this is a method for the poorer classes of people, and for the young of the more educated people. In other cases it is clearly shown to be a means of alleviating or preventing social isolation.

Setting

The setting is Russia in the nineteenth century. Within this general context, the stories do not all have the same setting. The environment in general is an urban residential area. Much of the activity takes place in homes. The economics of the area influence the size of the homes and the space between them and the like. How fancy they are also indicates the economic conditions, but only to an extent. There are people who will spend all their extra money on decor whereas another might devote the same funds to activities, whether to belong to a sports club or something else along those lines.

Another sizable portion of the events in the stories take place on the street. It is not as though most activity takes place there, but, given the urban environment, this is one natural place for interactions to occur. In some cases people go out for a stroll to calm down after a dramatic event; this is the case in one of the stories in the first half. In another story two men meet on the street when one of them is an anxious husband afraid his wife is cheating on him. He rightly concludes that the younger man he meets on the street is his wife's lover. The young man did not even necessarily know that she was married, and this is the first time he meets her husband. Initially he resisted this idea as being true, but in the end of the fiction story it turns out it is. The younger man learns this while outdoors on a street in a nice neighborhood in St. Petersburg. Later, in a different story, one man is brought safely off the street by being taken in as a lodger by a servant who then gets her boss to give in to this idea. Everyone is happy with it, once it gets going.



Language and Meaning

The author is known to be capable of great complexity. The translator has done what can be done. It should be assumed that something has been lost in the translation, but that the vast majority of the meaning and flow of the stories have been preserved. An English form of the author's original style has been created, which allows for the closest thing to a match that is possible given the circumstances.

Given the limitations caused by the translation, the writing is very powerful. Dostoevsky uses both intricate grammar and profound simplicity. These are interspersed and interchanged at will.

Dostoevsky uses very limited imagery and this is done very intentionally. There are writers who use more words to describe the visual attributes of a situation. Dostoevsky is sparing in regard to which details he supplies. What he really excels at is giving just enough information about the external facts in any situation to emotionally arouse the readers. He puts an equal or greater emphasis on the inner workings of his characters than he does on the plot. The plot is entirely relevant, but he is such a master of creative writing because he takes readers through the entire experience 'with feeling' - really, with quite intense emotional engagement. This may have been that Russians are like this, or that he did not downplay emotions artificially. It may also have been that the author himself had exceptionally intense emotions: current studies show this is common amongst the especially gifted people, and the verdict on Dostoevsky is that he was a brilliant man.

Structure

The structure of this book is that it is a collection of short fiction stories. They are all by the one author and they have been translated by one woman. There is a continuity to these. There is no introduction to explain what proportion of the author's works are contained by this book. There are 17 short fiction stories contained in this one book. One of them is long enough to make up a novella. The others are, in the main, much shorter.

The stories have been presented in chronological order. The range in time of publication from the 1840s to the 1870s. They may have been grouped somewhat by theme. They are really for a general readership in that they are mainly relationship stories. The plots are about the relationships between people in them.

The events are traditionally hardships. From such a foreign perspective there is no immediate way to know how much this is because it is Dostoevsky and how much Dostoevsky somehow embodied a kind of 'Zeitgeist' for the Russia of his lifetime. One would have to know Russian culture, history and literature to make a proper determination about this.



Quotes

"In the darkest and humblest corner of Ustinya Fyodorovna's flat lived Semyon Ivanovitch Prohartchin, a well-meaning elderly man, who did not drink" (p. 3). [Mr. Prohartchin]

"Hearing such insults, Mark Invanovitch fired up, but realizing that he had to deal with a sick man, magnanimously overcame his resentment and tried to shame him out of his humor, but was cut short in that too; for Semyon Ivanovitch observed at once that he would not allow people to play with him for all that Mark Ivanovitch wrote poetry" (p. 22). [Mr. Prohartchin]

"Ordynov accepted his inheritance unconcernedly, took leave for ever of his guardian, and went out into the street" (p. 60). [The Landlady]

"He began to feel dejected and miserable, he began to be full of dread for his whole life, for his work, and even for the future" (p. 63). [The Landlady]

"His continual mobility, his turning and twisting, made him look strikingly like a dancing doll" (p. 147). [Polzunkov]

"Meanwhile, Shumkov had lighted a candle, and Arkady Ivanovitch guessed immediately that his friend was intending to wake him accidentally" (p. 167). [A Faint Heart]

"Towards six o'clock on New Year's Eve Shumakov returned home" (p.167). [A Faint Heart]

"Why, to your thinking, every deceived husband is a noodle!" (p. 232). [Another Man's Wife, or the Husband Under the Bed]

"A fool! A jealous idiot! He doesn't look after his wife! That's what he is, if you like to know!" (p. 234) [Another Man's Wife, or the Husband Under the Bed]

"'Well, Emelyanoushka,' said I, 'I am glad you've come back. Had you been away much longer I should have gone to look for you in the taverns again to-day. Are you hungry?'" (p. 284) [An Honest Thief]

"He was the son of a poor widow, the governess of the children of the house, an oppressed and scared little boy" (p. 293). [A Christmas Tree and a Wedding]

"But to imagine that I should bear you a grudge, Nastenka!" (p. 356). [White Nights]

"That was the beginning of our acquaintance, and from that evening she would never let me alone. She persecuted me without consideration or conscience, she became my tyrant and tormentor. The whole absurdity of her jokes with me lay in the fact that she



pretended to be head over heels in love with me, and teased me before everyone" (p. 364). [A Little Hero]

"I am human, consequently I am loved" (p. 407). [An Unpleasant Predicament]

"And he showed signs of a desire to get up. But Pseldominov ran full speed to the drawing-room. The bride, however, was standing close by at the door, but as soon as she heard herself mentioned, she hid" (p. 423). [An Unpleasant Predicament]

"The venerable Timofey Semyonitch met me rather nervously, as though somewhat embarrassed. He led me to his tiny study and shut the door carefully" (p.475). [The Crocodile]

"...I may have been mistaken and mixed it up with some excavated monster" (p. 491). [The Crocodile]

"What's the meaning of this bobok? I must divert my mind" (p. 509). [Bobok]

"I am only a scoundrel of the psuedo-aristocratic society" (p. 519). [Bobok]

"I am a novelist, and I suppose I have made up this stor," (p.537) [The Heavenly Christmas Tree]

"He was ready to cry again but he was afraid, and ran on and on and blew his fingers. And he was miserable because he felt so lonely and terrified, and all at once, mercy on us! What was this again? People were standing in a crowd admiring" (p. 539). [The Heavenly Christmas Tree]

"That was because the star gave me an idea: I decided to kill myself that night. I had firmly determined to do so two months before, and poor as I was, I bought a splendid revolver that very day, and loaded it. But two months had passed and it was still lying in my drawer; I was so utterly indifferent that I wanted to seize a moment when I would not be so indifferent-why, I don't know. And so for two months every night that I came home I thought I would shoot myself" (p. 595). [The Dream of a Ridiculous Man]

"And I tracked out that little girl...and I shall go on and on!" (p. 614). [The Dream of a Ridiculous Man]



Topics for Discussion

Which of these stories is your favorite?

Do you think it is possible to accurately judge Dostoevsky as an author when reading his works in translated forms? Why or why not?

Do you think the women were wrong to treat the boy in the story a Little Hero the way they did? Describe what happened; explain why it was wrong. Also tell what was good about it.

Ethically evaluate the pawnbroker in A Gentle Spirit.

Evaluate the morality and development of the young wife in A Gentle Spirit.

Do you think Ivan Andreyitch was really just 'crazy from jealousy'?

Do you think the scented love-letter that fell from the other guests at the theatre which fell upon Ivan Andreyitch's head had anything to do with his wife Glafira?

What are the clearest messages that Dostoevsky seems to be making regarding marital fidelity and infidelity issues?

How do you feel about what happened to Vassily and to his wife? Do you believe that the trouble between the trio could have been eradicated or overcome? Was Vasya just paranoid, or did he just foresee correctly.