

Free literature review on the essay on leo tolstoy's short story, "after the ball..."

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“ AND you say that a man cannot, of himself, understand what is good and evil; that it is all environment, that the environment swamps the man. But I believe it is all chance. Take my own case . . .”

A. Leo Tolstoy— the Short Story, “ After the Ball.”

B. Tolstoy wrote this story to reveal to the readers that anyone with a conscience is able to distinguish between good and evil. It may be a chance occurrence that gives one the revelation. One can use the insight thus gained to avoid evil because it brings pain to other human beings.

C. The quote works as the crux of the story. In fact, the entire story is written to prove the point advanced in the quote. The protagonist, Peter Vasilievich, is narrating this story to disprove what his younger audience asserted, that human beings are victims of circumstances and that they have no choice to be good human beings.

He was madly in love with a young aristocratic woman called Varinka, a colonel's daughter. One evening, they met at a dance along with her graceful father. He resolves in his heart to propose to her. Later that night, as he went out for a stroll he witnessed some soldiers brutalizing a Tartar recruit under the direction and supervision of the colonel, Varinka's father! Vasilievich was filled with revulsion at the injustice of the system that necessitated such cruelty. He recognized the colonel to be evil, because he went out of his way to demonstrate to the soldiers how best to torture the poor wretch. He seemed to enjoy inflicting violence on a hapless victim. Vasilievich's earlier admiration for him disappeared, and his love for Varinka too began to wane gradually. Obviously, Vasilievich opted not to have any truck with the evil colonel and his daughter. Here, the hero clearly chooses

the morally right thing to do. This is what he expects his younger audience to emulate. Tolstoy thus succeeds in putting his point, contained in the quotation, strongly across to the readers, through the exemplary action of his hero.

D. In this story we see two sides of the Russian society and its culture of the mid-nineteenth century. When Tolstoy wrote this story in the early years of the twentieth century, the situation would have presumably become even worse because he seems anxious to impart its moral aimed at social reform. As becomes clear from the story, the nobles and high-ranking military officers had a vibrant social life, with frequent dances and banquets, where young noblemen courted graceful, aristocratic ladies. They were all products of the high, courtly culture. On the other hand, in the world of ordinary people, the imperial power and the might of the military often crushed the meek and the defenseless. Even those polished, well-bred nobles like the colonel were inhumanly brutal towards their victims. This kind of repression characterized the Tsarist regime. But there were also upright, diligent people like Peter Vasilievich. Social change for the better would come forth only when such individuals consciously selected good from evil and steadfastly followed it up.

In conclusion, we can see how the great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy uses fiction for spreading the message of social reform. Only a creative writer or artist, who has insight into all the worlds around him, can put together elements from them, to create an aesthetic experience, with a worthy message for the reader. In paragraph B above, the author's possible goal in writing this story has been projected. In paragraph C above, I have described

how the author realizes this goal of proving that man gets a chance revelation as to the nature of good and evil, and one should choose the good and the morally correct way, through the narration of the story. The whole story is in a way, an explanation of the quoted lines. In paragraph D above I have described how the story reflects the culture of the times, and what message it gives to those times.

Works Cited

Tolstoy, Leo. "After the Ball." (trans. anonymous).