

# Contrasting roles: the good and the bad

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Contrasting Roles: The Good and the Bad In Fyodor Dostoyesky's, Notes from the Underground, the relationship between an underground man and a young prostitute, Liza, depicts admirable and harsh qualities. Truly, Liza illustrates a kind-hearted human being while the Underground Man exemplifies a harsh and isolated person. Liza's function in this novel is to show the contrast between the two completing roles that characterize a classic literary illustration of what is good and bad. The altercations that Liza and the Underground Man have significantly portray positive and unsuitable qualities. Upon meeting Liza, the Underground Man harshly ridicules Liza and her lifestyle. He says that she is " a slave from the start. Yes, a slave! You give up everything, your whole freedom. If you want to break your chains afterwards, you will not be able to" (Dostoyevsky p. 64). This quote undoubtedly exposes Underground Man's awful perspective on Liza. He believes that Liza is property, rather than a human being. Also, the quote shows that he is stripping Liza of any hope for the future. He does so by telling Liza that if she ever wanted to stop prostituting, she would not be able to. Despite all of the awful accusations that he makes, Liza patiently listens although it is hurting her tremendously. Furthermore, this emphasizes the contrast in characters. It evident that Liza is truly good and that the Underground Man is relentless. However, this not the only altercation that sheds light on this notion. Moreover, there is also another conflicts that give a defined distinction between what is good and bad. The underground Man goes on to further insult Liza without a will to stop. He states, " I know that I have only to whistle and you have to come with me whether you like it or not. I don't consult your wishes, but you mine" (p. 69). The underground Man

is dehumanizing Liza by comparing her to a dog. He claims that Liza will come to him just as a dog follows a master's command without question. As if that insult were not enough, he proceeds to tell Liza that she must grant his every desire but he does not care for her wishes. Undoubtedly, the quality of being able to hurt Liza in such a manner is horrible. Liza's pain is illustrated when the novel states that " She bit the pillow, bit her hand till it bled (I saw that afterwards), or, thrusting her fingers into her disheveled hair, seemed rigid with the effort of restraint, holding her breath and clenching her teeth" (p. 72). This quote actively portrays how the Underground Man's negative qualities truly affect her. It not only pained her emotionally to hear these things, but also physically. Despite her emotions, Liza put her feelings behind her and forgives him. After he apologizes, he states, " she squeezed my hand in her fingers so tightly that I felt I was saying the wrong thing and stopped"(p. 73). This excerpt truly shows Liza's nobility. Although Liza is so hurt, she makes him feel like he should not have to apologize. She does this by squeezing his hand. However, this is not the only time where Liza puts the Underground Man before herself. Liza's responses in situations with the Under Ground man portray her comforting qualities and expose his poor qualities. Previously, the audience noted that while Liza cries, the Underground Man did not comfort her. However, in later text, the tables turn. When the Under Ground Man began to cry, she did not waste time in asking what was wrong by asking, " What is the matter? What is wrong? " she cried, fussing about me" (p. 83). This quote depicts that Liza is a compassionate person. It also shows the difference between the Underground Man and her. It was her natural instinct to help him yet he did not help Liza in her time of

need. This again shows that Liza is naturally good while the underground man is uncompassionate. The last encounter that the Underground Man has with Liza truly shows her positive characteristics. After some time, Liza believes that he no longer sees her as a prostitute, but as a companion. However, after having relations with the Underground Man, he wants her to leave and gives her money for the relations that they previously had. Although this hurts her beyond belief, she leaves the money. The underground man states “ I saw a crumpled blue five- rouble note, the one I had thrust into her hand a minute before” (p. 89). This shows that Liza is admirable in dignity. Although she had been hurt, she still had her dignity and that was important for the Underground Man to see. Liza is placed in the novel to show that despite negative situations, a person can still possess an admirable personality. Truly, Liza continuously finds herself to be in horrible situations but she never fails in acting graciously. In a sense, Liza is an inspiration to all. She shows the audience that her profession pains her and that she regrets it. Not only can the audience learn from her mistakes, but also from her gracious personality as well.