

Analysis of the bet



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

"The Bet" is a short story that explores a moral theme regarding the value of human life as seen through two perspectives. However, the story is constructed with an important, ironic twist that brings the reader back to the original context of the bet (if the lawyer could endure solitary confinement for fifteen years), and presents an unexpected result. One can ultimately see that Anton Chekhov presents the readers with two different paths in the story.

One path is that of an old banker who refuses to face his own morality and the other is the lawyer (prisoner) who is a younger man in his mid-twenties facing his own morality, but falls into despair because he is so disconnected from the outside world even after gaining extensive amounts of knowledge during his fifteen years in solitary confinement. These two characters may thrive on change, but they both alter their own human values in several significant ways. The banker, a spoiled and pampered man, is very nervous and becomes carried away by excitement at the time he makes a bet with the lawyer.

This is shown when he says, "Fifteen! Done... Gentlemen, I stake two millions"(412). Chekhov shows the reader that this is an impulsive act one would expect of someone youthful since he describes it as excitability, which he could not get over even in the advancing years. Later in the story, Chekhov paints the portrait of a cowardly man who lacks the courage to endure the reality of his situation. One day before the lawyer is to be granted his freedom, the banker becomes irritated and highly anxious, "The only escape from bankruptcy and disgrace--is that the man should die"(414).

At this point, the reader can trace the banker's path from boastfully making a foolish bet to being the one to give up all that he had staked, and conclude that his personal values have reached an all-time low. On the other hand, the lawyer, an older and wiser man in the end, shows his dynamic characteristics as he changes drastically in the course of the 15-year bet. The lawyer's character completely transforms from being an arrogant young man, to a feeble, cynical, yet more intelligent man. In the beginning of the story, he is presented to the reader by his boastful comments.

The lawyer is staunchly unwilling to back down from his opinion of the death penalty and boldly bets fifteen years of his life on it. This is discovered when he says, " If you mean it seriously, then I bet I'll stay not five but fifteen"(412). This shows how strong this character really is. He not only says what he believes, but backs it up with action. The continuing characteristic of the lawyer's strength is shown towards the end of the story when he decides not to accept the two million and escape from his imprisonment moments just five hours before he's free to go.

This resolution is presented when the lawyer says, " That I may deprive myself of my right to them [two million dollars], I shall come out from here five minutes before the stipulated term, and thus shall violate the agreement"(416). Therefore, the lawyer's value of human life increases due to the fact that he realizes he resents the world and all its materialism, and the knowledge he acquired over the years has made him a more intelligent man.

The fifteen-year bet gave him a whole new perspective of the value of freedom and life. Chekhov's extensive uses of conflict and detailed descriptions of the characters' emotions are essential to the portrayal of a powerful theme. The characters learn a great deal and their lives are forever changed. In this story, Chekhov is able to create a great conflict between two men, the banker and the lawyer, which extremely tests each man's true moral values in their own lives.