

# Dream of a ridiculous [religious] man essay



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Dream of a Ridiculous [Religious] Man The concepts of a utopia, the core of human nature, and questions associated with morality drive the reasoning behind Dostoevsky's Dream of a Ridiculous Man, a classic tale of a 'lost' man who undergoes a complete change in emotion, appearance, and sensitivity as the story progresses to eventually find his 'true path in life'. Dostoevsky uses his created character to express an idea that a mass utopia through social and governmental reform is impossible but perhaps reachable on an individual level through spiritual and rational reform.

This reform is revealed in the story through facing one's transgressions—achieved by love, forgiveness, and acceptance—ultimately of which are all themes that relate back to the Bible. The protagonist of the story knows he is ridiculous and even states “ I have always been ridiculous, and I have known it, perhaps, from the day I was born” (276). He goes on to say that his ridiculousness comes from knowledge obtained throughout his life and was reinforced with a spiritual journey to an alternate “ earth untarnished by the Fall on [which] lived people who had not sinned” (284).

His descriptions are one of a paradise with Eden-like qualities: [T]all, lovely trees... soft caressing rustle... grass glowed with bright and fragrant flowers... darling, fluttering wings... these happy people... lived just in such a paradise as that in which, according to all of the legends of mankind, our first parents lived before they sinned... Their children were the children of all, for they all made up one family;... (285).

This description of this “ new” Eden is very similar to the “ old” Eden from the Book of Genesis: 2: 4 These are the generations of the heavens and of

the earths... 2: 6 There went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground... 2: 9 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil;... The parallels that can be made between Dream of a Ridiculous Man and Genesis strongly display that Dostoevsky was a highly devoted Christian and spiritual person.

However, it was Dostoevsky's experiences with the cruelty of the world that brought about the changed views from social revolution to more spiritual ones. It was only after he was arrested and sent to exile in Siberia that he realized he could not change the past, but may be able to influence the future through writing. His experiences in exile made him convinced that man could only live through suffering and that only through this suffering, could man eventually find love and hope.

Dostoevsky's concerns and deep thoughts are expressed through his protagonist in his short story: On our earth we can only love with suffering and through suffering. We cannot love otherwise, and we know of no other sort of love. I want suffering in order to love. I long, I thirst, this very instant, to kiss with tears the earth that I have left, and I don't want, I won't accept life on any other!... (283) In truth, Dostoevsky did not believe that the world would reach a form of utopia; he believed that man, himself, internally, could reach utopia through spirituality and rationality.

This idea came from the perspective that since mankind has grown up in a world filled with hate and cruelty, a radical change leading to utopia would

be impossible due simply because cruelty has always existed and will continue to exist. Thus, Dostoevsky and his story preach appreciation for life, which is clearly seen when the protagonist discovers that man, can indeed overcome oppression and find meaning and happiness in his surroundings after hardship.

Dostoevsky knew that the only way for man to truly love is to experience great suffering, and that they could not rise beyond themselves until they meet and overcome their greatest challenge. For Dostoevsky it did not matter how great one's euphoria may be at any point in one's life, one can never fully appreciate it until they've experienced the opposite extreme. He even at times in his life 'advocated' that it would be beneficial for people to spend some time in prison! With these opinions, Dostoevsky's philosophy was filled with moral values of unconditional love and forgiveness.

The ridiculous man, although in love with the inhabitants of his new surrounding, is the cause of their ultimate destruction. The protagonist introduces knowledge into the community, "[t]hey learnt to lie, grew fond of lying, and discovered the charm of falsehood" (287); he was what induced the destruction of the whole planet's innocence. The people of the mythical world experienced "corruption, contamination and falsity" (289) all sparked by a lie: "Yes, yes it ended in my corrupting them all!... I was the cause of their sin and downfall... Oh, at first perhaps it began innocently, with a jest, coquetry, with amorous play..." (287).

In a sense, the main character is the personification of the snake in Genesis. His one lie stems forth a flurry of sin and hatred. This lie is similar to the one

it took the serpent of Genesis to cause Eve to commit the sin of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil: 3: 1 Now the serpent was more [subtle] than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made... 3: 4 [T]he serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 3: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil;...

The difference between the snake in Genesis and the protagonist is not just the notion that the snake merely acted upon his natural instinct but that he intentionally did so in order to corrupt that which was meant to be wholesome and true. The ridiculous man, though, sparked corruption unbeknownst of what consequences laid as repercussions. Dream of a Ridiculous Man continues to have underlying symbolic messages, symbols, and parallels as Dostoevsky reinforces his spiritualism. In the Bible, God, Lord, and He are capitalized when referring to the unknown higher being.

Although Dostoevsky never directly quotes from the bible, he chooses to acknowledge the importance of a higher being and capitalizes in a similar fashion as the Bible: " Judge Who will judge us and whose Name we know not" (288). He also did this earlier in the story when referring to " the earth untarnished by the Fall" (284). At the end of the story, the main character connects with his inner self and accepts life and " the truth, for [he has] seen it, [has] seen it with [his] own eyes, [has] seen it in all its glory" (289).

All in all, the dream " revealed to [the narrator] a different life, renewed, grand and full of power! " (281) His original attempt of suicide presented itself as a logical way out of the tedium of his seemingly meaningless life.

The suffering girl he met in the street and the interaction with the beings from the alternate earth instilled compassion and human sympathy into his soul. In his dream, instead of shooting himself in the head as he had originally planned, he resolves to shoot himself in the heart. This implicit acknowledgement can be said to symbolize a spiritual rebirth.

In this way, the main character was given a second chance at life. While living in the other world, he believed he had actually shot himself and been taken to a higher place which he had been brought to by “ some dark and unknown being... a creature not human, of course, but yet living, existing” (282). And yet, he was not indeed dead, but was simply being given the opportunity to see the errors of mankind and come back to preach ‘ Truth’. Upon awakening, the narrator is a changed man, thoroughly thankful for life.

He “ cannot believe that evil is the normal condition of mankind” because he has seen the truth and knows “ that people can be beautiful and happy without losing the power of living on earth” (290). This reasoning and newfound purpose are what propels him back onto the streets in search of the little girl he shooed away at the beginning of the story. His seeking out of the little girl is his first conscious step towards spending his days recapturing, and more importantly, preaching the truth he witnessed in his dream: I lifted up my hands and called upon eternal truth... And since then I have been preaching!...

The chief thing is to love others like yourself... the consciousness of life is higher than life, the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness—that is what one must contend against. And I shall;... (289) In

such ways, Dostoevsky's personal morals and rationalization of real life leak onto the pages of his story and convey the author's inner emotions and thoughts, evoking a strong connection between reader and author.

Dostoevsky's ideology on utopias, corruption of societies, and morals drive this work to its main point: happiness, unconditional love, and the capability of forgiveness can lead to a utopia, not by society as a whole, but by the individual. To be happy " The chief thing is to love others like yourself" (289).

Works Cited: The First Book of Moses, called Genesis. 13 May 2006. 29 Nov. 2011 . Levitsky, Alexander. Worlds Apart An Anthology of Russian Science Fiction and Fantasy. Woodstock: Overlook Hardcover, 2007.