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Values expressed in Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground

Notes from Underground is a story splitted in two parts. The first one, called *Underground*, is made up of eleven chapters and it consist of the internal thoughts of the main character: an official who used to take pleasure in being rude and who, apparently, talks to an imaginary audience. At the beginning of the story, Dostoevsky introduces his character in a way where the character is introducing himself. In this introduction we see his points of view and we kind of get an explanation of what is going on with him and why we find him in such a deplorable condition:

I am a sick man. ... I am a spiteful man. I am a most unpleasant man. I think my liver is diseased. Then again, I don't know a thing about my illness, I'm not even sure what hurts. I'm not being treated and never have been, though I respect both medicine and doctors.
(1255)

This character, who is known as the Underground Man, is a person who believes to be the center of endless insults and who is dedicated on planning revenge against those who have insulted him, which is why he is buried on his own tragedy and misery. On the first part of the story, there is no narrative of what happened, it is just the main character talking and complaining about his misery and the people around him.

The second part is made up of ten chapters and is called: *A Propos of the Wet Snow*. It includes some memories of the Underground Man where he tells us about events that took place before he got into that poor and miserable stage he is found in part one. These memories give sense to what the Underground Man is expressing in the first part, but these memories are out of order which can confuse us.

UNDERGROUND MAN'S VALUES AND THOUGHTS

On this story we find different subjects on the life of the Underground Man such as: Living in the city, loneliness, anti-hero, a man of action full of jealousy and contempt, and a thinking man of refined conscience. The story develops around the contradictory feelings of the Underground Man. The loneliness of the main character assembles, between his necessity of suffering and make other suffer, the main structure of the story.

As the thoughts from the Underground Man come out, he reveals he has a sick, fragile and suspicious personality, typical of a person who is aware that he is not as great as the others around him but nevertheless wants to seem bigger in his own eyes and above all and everyone. This feeling of inferiority finds its finest in an impression of contempt towards humanity. A contempt forged by the idea that everyone is better than self. This thought focuses mainly on the struggle that divides man between his instincts, his desire to live freely, his reason, and the need to live according to rules that require order. It is human nature that must reject their desire to be satisfied by a competition that promises happiness to oneself.

I repeat, I emphatically repeat: ingenuous people and active figures are all active simply because they are dull and narrow-minded. How to explain it? Here's how: as a consequence of their narrow-mindedness, they take the most immediate and secondary

causes for the primary ones, and thus become convinced more quickly and easily than others that they have found an indisputable basis for their doings, and so they feel at ease; and that, after all, is the main thing. (1263)

In this situation, man must change the need of satisfying his desires at a very early stage of their lives. A not very effective concept if not for the deceitfulness of the civilization that has been polishing that taste of man for centuries, making in him a conscience that watches every one of his movements. The Underground Man says that consciousness is the killer of the vital instinct of man, of his desire to live, and he calls it a sickness: "Nevertheless, I remain firmly convinced that not only is being overly conscious a disease, but so is being conscious at all". (1257)

The Underground Man also makes a call to a brilliant reflection on what seems to be an eternal struggle of the human being, in which reason and instinct dispute the dominance of what we call soul, portrayed with a clear and ironic sense of reality.

Don't you see: reason is a fine thing, gentlemen, there's no doubt about it, but it's only reason, and it satisfies only man's rational faculty, whereas desire is a manifestation of all life, that is of all human life, which includes both reason, as well as all of life's itches and scratches. (1269)

The Underground Man has the idea that will is free and it does not depend on any kind of logic nor reason. But if human kind could come up with a mathematic formula able to define the cause of will in a natural and rational, then will would lose intensity and strength

Well, after all, what if someday they really do discover the formula for all our desires and whims, that is, the thing that governs them, precise laws that produce them, how exactly they're applied, where they lead in each and every case, and so on and so forth[...] (1268)

This is how we come to the endless search for human desire, which at the moment of trying to touch it, vanishes quickly. Because the will is not given by virtuosity nor by what is advantageous for the human being, but by independence, and this is necessary to give satisfaction to the other wills of reason and desire.

"Again, we have to look at the way that the Underground Man defines what it means to be human. He creates a conflict between reason and desire; he refuses to believe that desire has a rational basis" (Shmoop Editorial Team).

CONCLUSION

Notes from Underground sets human kind in front of all its contradictions and questions about its way of living and understanding life. Maybe, after one and a half century this novel was published, there still too much of ideas and concepts about human kind's behavior to get from it.

Work Cited:

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