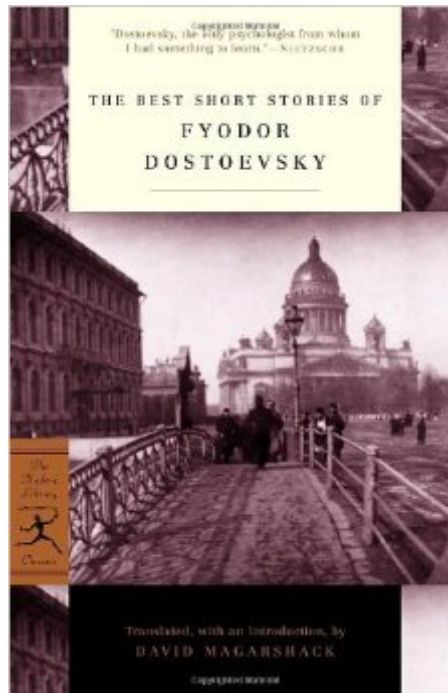


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The Best Short Stories Of Fyodor Dostoevsky (Modern Library)



Synopsis

This collection, unique to the Modern Library, gathers seven of Dostoevsky's key works and shows him to be equally adept at the short story as with the novel. Exploring many of the same themes as in his longer works, these small masterpieces move from the tender and romantic *White Nights*, an archetypal nineteenth-century morality tale of pathos and loss, to the famous *Notes from the Underground*, a story of guilt, ineffectiveness, and uncompromising cynicism, and the first major work of existential literature. Among Dostoevsky's prototypical characters is Yemelyan in *The Honest Thief*, whose tragedy turns on an inability to resist crime. Presented in chronological order, in David Magarshack's celebrated translation, this is the definitive edition of Dostoevsky's best stories.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dostoyevsky is usually regarded as one of the finest novelists who ever lived. Literary modernism, existentialism, and various schools of psychology, theology, and literary criticism have been profoundly shaped by his ideas. His works are often called prophetic because he so accurately predicted how Russia's revolutionaries would behave if they came to power. In his time he was also renowned for his activity as a journalist. In 1876-77 Dostoyevsky devoted his energies to *Dnevnik pisatelya*, which he was now able to bring out in the form he had originally intended. A one-man journal, for which Dostoyevsky served as editor, publisher, and sole contributor, the *Diary* represented an attempt to initiate a new literary genre. Issue by monthly issue, the *Diary* created

complex thematic resonances among diverse kinds of material: short stories, plans for possible stories, autobiographical essays, sketches that seem to lie on the boundary between fiction and journalism, psychological analyses of sensational crimes, literary criticism, and political commentary. The Diary proved immensely popular and financially rewarding, but as an aesthetic experiment it was less successful, probably because Dostoyevsky, after a few intricate issues, seemed unable to maintain his complex design. Instead, he was drawn into expressing his political views, which, during these two years, became increasingly extreme. Specifically, Dostoyevsky came to believe that western Europe was about to collapse, after which Russia and the Russian Orthodox church would create the kingdom of God on earth and so fulfill the promise of the Book of Revelation.

This collection of seven stories presented in chronological order, by David Magarshack, is not only unique to the Modern Library classics series but to all published works. This celebrated translation explores many of the recurring themes in Dostoyevsky's longer works and presents apropos the silhouettes of his characters in novels. The short works accent his creative power and profundities of thought and manifest his tour de force as a raconteur.¹

White Nights (1848) The title refers to the twilight summer nights in Petersburg. A tender and romantic story, this piece to a large extent is autobiographical of the days Dostoyevsky spent alone in Petersburg. The main character is a dreamer who cannot remember what he was dreaming and sometimes had no recollection of how everything had all happened. A sentimental theme develops against the background of Dostoyevsky's own personal impressions during his nocturnal wanderings, filled with gentle humor and delicate touches of genuine feelings. This piece affords vague hint of theme in *Crime and Punishment*. It is a story that odes to a moment of bliss that is sufficient for a whole of a man's life.²

The Honest Thief (1848) The central character of this piece is an anti-hero whose tragedy consists of his helplessness to shun and to resist evil. Like "White Nights", this piece again paves the way for the longer work in the sense of punishment.³

The Christmas Tree and a Wedding (1849) David Magarshack calls this piece the most artistically perfect short story in Dostoyevsky's early days as a fiction writer. It happens to be my personal favorite besides the uncompromisingly cynical "The Notes From Underground." The piece is savagely satiric and ridicules the preposterous, fawning adults in high society.

I've only recently begun to read 19th century Russian literature, lured there by a chance reading of 'Crime and Punishment' which floored me. Upon finishing that book I knew that Dostoevsky was the

real deal and felt a smug assurance that I could go into the bookstore, buy another of his novels/collection of stories, and feel equally floored. So I bought this book. After purchasing it, I bought a cup of coffee, sat down and read 'The Peasant Marey'. I didn't like it. So I flipped to 'The Christmas Tree and a Wedding' and read that one. I didn't like it. I checked the cover. Yes, it still says 'The "Best" Short Stories of Fyodor Dostoevsky'. Hmm...what is going on here? Is this the same guy that penned that brilliant novel that I just finished? The fact is that yes, it is. Beyond those two stories, the rest found in this book are timeless masterpieces of the period of Russian literature. Though Dostoevsky might use very long paragraphs to express something (some of them go on for pages and pages), he is clearly trying to make sure that the character/concept is receiving its due attention, something that many writers do not seem to understand. From the protestations of (strange) love in 'White Nights' to the ravings to try to find justification for one's own behavior in 'A Gentle Creature', Dostoevsky is only taking his time to fully illustrate what he's talking about. It's a true pleasure to read. The real treat in this book is the presentation of the novella 'Notes from the Underground'. The first half of the story presents a sort of philosophical dissertation, one that is less narrative and more pure technical writing (think Plato).

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