

**Diary as Fiction: Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and
Turgenev's "Diary of a Superfluous Man"**

by
Jessica M. Natale

ISBN: 1-58112-111-3

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ISBN: 1-58112-111-3

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**Diary as Fiction: Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground and
Turgenev's "Diary of a Superfluous Man"**

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Summer 1999

*FOR MY MOTHER: "BETWEEN THE DARK AND THE DAYLIGHT,
WHEN THE NIGHT IS BEGINNING TO LOWER,
COMES A PAUSE IN THE DAY'S OCCUPATION,
KNOWN AS THE CHILDREN'S HOUR" ~ LONGFELLOW*

Contents

CONTENTS	3
FOREWORD	4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	6
I. INTRODUCTION.....	7
HISTORY OF THE DIARY NOVEL.....	7
THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING A DIARY NOVEL	7
II. DIARY NOVEL	14
FORM.....	14
DIARY NOVEL NARRATOR.....	23
III. DIARY NOVEL - LITERARY TECHNIQUES	29
MIRROR METHOD.....	29
CONFESSION.....	32
NARRATOR/READER RELATIONSHIP.....	35
IV. “DIARY OF A SUPERFLUOUS MAN”.....	39
V. NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND	42
VI. CONCLUSION	45
VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY	47
VIII. ADDENDUM	48

Foreword

During the composition of this paper, I had to discern the definition of a “diary novel.” This genre is loosely defined and hotly debated as to its distinguishing characteristics. During my research at The Fyodor Dostoevsky Literary Memorial Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, I discovered that the “diary novel” is primarily a Western literary term. Indeed, the differences between East and West do not stop here. The ideas concerning the diary format and the associated psychology implicit in such a writing style also differ. In this paper, I have tried to merge both Eastern and Western traditions. Although a majority of my ideas are based upon Western thinking, I have incorporated Eastern literary theory and other nuances, such as the format of this work, i.e., the Russian bibliographic style.

Concerning Dostoevsky’s Notes from Underground, it must be mentioned that sections of the tenth chapter in Part II were censored, thereby hindering our understanding of the Underground Man’s thinking. The author never restored the censored parts. He presumably left the chapter as is, almost as if protesting the censors. In a letter to his brother Mikhail, he refers to these people as “the swinish censors.” Therefore regarding my work and all works about this novella, no one can be certain as to what Dostoevsky wanted to convey. Within this same letter, he writes: “. . . where I mocked everything and sometimes blasphemed *for the sake of the effect* - it was permitted, and where I deduced from all of that the need for faith and Christ - it was prohibited” (*letter to brother Mikhail, 26 March 1864, Moscow*). For the purposes of this thesis I am going to assume, based upon his writings, that Dostoevsky believed that life without Christ as the final goal or truth leads to misery. Berdyaev, in Dostoevsky, also exercised

the same artistic license. In all, I use the two diary-as-fiction works by Dostoevsky and Turgenev to define and explore the genre in Russian literature. These works are essential to the genre as a whole and continue to inspire new diary-as-fiction works.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the faculty of The Department of Slavic and Eastern Languages of Boston College for four years of guidance and learning. I also extend special gratitude to the staff of The Fyodor Dostoevsky Literary Memorial Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. I would like to recognize the following museum staff members for their incredible assistance during my summer research trip: my mentor - Ph.D. Boris Tikhomirov, Assistant Director of Higher Literary Studies, Ph.D. Natalia Ashimbaeva, Director, and Ph.D. Vera Biron, Deputy Director. Last but certainly not least, I greatly appreciate the efforts of Professor M. A. Nicholson of University College, Oxford University, for his materials and correspondence.

I. INTRODUCTION

History of the Diary Novel

The model of the “real” or original diary serves as the source for the origins of the diary novel. The appearance of real diaries to the public and their subsequent popularity accounts for the development of diary fiction. The real diary gave rise to the genre of the epistolary novel, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century. Early diary fiction derived directly from actual diaries, but they met with great success in the epistolary novel format, which was already in fashion. The epistolary novel, with its emphasis on the moment, introduced a first-person narrative that did not depend on the notion of the “conversion of the retrospective temporality that distinguished both autobiography and picaresque fiction.”¹

The epistolary novel was the structural ancestor of the diary novel. It initiated a line of development in narrative technique. Obviously, the difference between letters and diaries is that letters are destined for a recipient whereas diaries are private. Plainly put, the epistolary novel, the diary novel, and other genres came into being because authors imitated actually existing forms.²

The Problem of Defining a Diary Novel

The modern understanding of a diary usually involves a private, periodically kept text. The word “diary” is derived from the Latin expressions for “daily,” the two adjectives *diurnus* and *diarius*. This periodic structure of the diary is useful for depicting the change in a

¹ Field, Trevor, Form and Function in the Diary Novel. New Jersey: Barnes & Nobles Books, 1989, p. 56.

² Ibid., p.3.

protagonist's views or psychic condition with maximum immediacy over the course of time. These works contain the intimate details of the author's life and are not intended to be read by the general public. Ironically, private diaries have been quite successful as popular works of fiction, such as the diary of Anne Frank and other famous figures. Such a diary might contain discrepancies, uncertainties and other fluctuations in emotional temperament. The future of the author is unknown. Every entry adds another clue as to the author's fate. The diary writer's style is typically in media res or literally from an unstable point of view, which relays to the reader: a state of turmoil or excitement, an inability to predict the future, and an urge to master and purge overwhelming experiences or emotions.³ On the other hand, a memoir is a diary-like work recorded day to day, often times by someone who lives his or her life confidently and records his or her experiences after the fact. Unsurprisingly, memoirs offer a sanitized vision of the self, which may describe life events with the utmost detail, but never fail to offer a censored version of the author's life.

There is a genre of literature in which the work is purposely written within the diary format; this type of writing is known as diary fiction. Diary fiction has existed for centuries, but its greatest fame was during the late nineteenth century. However, the loose definitions presented thus far, neglect many nebulous areas of the genre. There are other factors to be considered: the presence or absence of a fictive reader or supposed audience, an actual reader and sporadic first person narration. Indeed, the diary novel is a mimetic form because it imitates the system of letters in general. Poor Folk (1846) is a very well known epistolary work and precursor to diary fiction by Dostoevsky; it is a series of letters between a young girl and the

³ Ibid., p.3.

copying clerk who lives across the road. It is a story of poverty and social injustice, as the girl is whisked away by a relatively rich provincial landowner. The epistolary genre before its rise in Russia, had already achieved great popularity and success in England and France. Poor Folk, itself largely based on Richardson and other English and French epistolary works, was Dostoevsky's first published novel and contains the seeds of ideas and later characters. This novel represents the Russian step forward from the firmly established genre. The format of this novel laid the foundation for his later novella, Notes from Underground.

The roots of Dostoevsky's and Turgenev's psychological sketches are found within the first Russian psychological novel: Lermontov's Hero of Our Time (1840). A part of this work is written in diary form as the protagonist's (Pechorin's) diary. Pechorin, "the hero of our time," is a bored, mysterious, superfluous man who acts as a catalyst to the fate of others. As a young officer in the Caucasus, he steals a horse to win a girl, but then loses interest in her and is seemingly indifferent when she is killed for his crime. He wins the heart of a princess and then leaves her. Pechorin then purposely kills a rival in a duel. He says of himself, "I have a restless imagination and an insatiable heart. Nothing satisfies me; I get used to suffering as easily as I do to enjoyment, and my life becomes more empty every day."⁴ Pechorin is presented in many different lights: through the eyes of an old soldier, in contemporary action and through his diary thoughts. If Pechorin keeps a diary, it is because he has, in his own view, one of those split personalities given to cold reflection as well as action that will reappear over and over in Russian

⁴ Lermontov, Mikhail, Hero of Our Time, translated by Andrew Patterson, New York: Penguin Classics, 1990, p. 122.

nineteenth-century literature. He writes, “In me there are two other men: the one lives, in the fullest sense of the word; the other reasons and criticizes him.”⁵

The fictive editor of Pechorin’s diary says, “As I read the diary I felt convinced of the writer’s sincerity, so mercilessly has he laid bare his own weaknesses and vices.”⁶ Indeed, the diary is not sincere in the sense of its being a true confessional work. Pechorin reveals his unadulterated thoughts through his wicked deeds. He does not analyze himself as the Underground Man or Turgenev’s diarist, but rather recounts the major roles he played in various events in his life. He closely relates the opinions of others of himself and subsequently his opinion of them. Lermontov gives a very intimate portrait of Pechorin, of which the closest lies in his diary. Interestingly, all the recounted dialogue of other characters, Pechorin’s own self-assessment and descriptions of him in action, present a similar sketch of Pechorin but are unable to capture the mystery of his personality. His enigmatic nature resides in his ennui and depravity. His own life is something of a masquerade; therefore the reader never is truly acquainted with the actual Pechorin.

Lermontov breaks with tradition in writing a diary that does not present a privileged point of view. Pechorin’s diary develops the idea of the unstable diarist, a diary that may or may not be honest, reflecting his own ego. “Our hero” is not self-deluding, but he also has no particular truth claim to insights about himself. Pechorin’s empty heart and his hunger for sensations inspire his amoral actions, while a streak of heartless reflectiveness in his character combined with self-fascination, motivates him to keep a diary.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

An interesting and certainly important predecessor for Dostoevsky's and Turgenev's works is a short story by Nikolai Gogol, published in 1835 as "Zapiski Sumasshedshego." "Diary of a Madman," a first-person narrative presented in the form of a diary, is the tale of Poprishchin, a government clerk who gradually descends into madness. At the outset, the narrator records his frustrations and humiliations straightforwardly, rationalizing various affronts to his dignity. However, over time reason gives way to delusion. His intermittent encounters with Sophie, the radiant daughter of his official superior, provoke an obsession that leads to his "overhearing" two dogs discussing his hopelessness. As such hallucinations become more frequent, he finds solace –and his ultimate rationale – in a new identity as the rightful king of Spain, whose enemies have engineered his exile. Throughout the story, interludes of sanity provide striking counterpoint to the deepening psychosis. This work is written in a series of dates that serve as symbols of the degree of the author's developing insanity. Initially, they are a progression but become a regression and eventually nonsensical, i.e., "Madrir, Februarius the thirtieth."⁷

As "Diary of a Madman" demonstrates, the first-person narrative is an excellent format for depicting the reality of an individual mind. The intermittent time structure allows the reader to notice immediate changes in the protagonist's views or state of mind. Usually, the degradation of the narrator's sanity is exploited very well through the diary novel structure. However, the modern Russian diary novel deals more with the development of philosophical ideas than the psychological state of the narrator.

⁷ Gogol, Nikolai, Diary of a Madman, translated by Leon Stilman, New York: Penguin Books, 1960, p. 7.

A modern Russian diary novel which exemplifies this psychological emphasis is Zamyatin's "My" or We. It is told in the format of a first-person narrative diary. This style emphasizes the psychological conflict within the protagonist, D-503, and also allows the reader to view his relationship to the completely rational totalitarian system of One State. He records and confides to the diary his anti-social sentiments and his tortured speculations on the irrational nature of man. Much like the character of the Underground Man in Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground, the reader co-experiences the same subjective sensations that D-503 experiences. We see his colors, smell his smells and feel his fears. This firsthand experience is one of the many advantages afforded to the reader of first person narrative. Through this window the major themes are presented.

The first major theme introduced to the reader is the defense of the irrational or an explanation of the practices of One State's societal rules. On page one, the reader reads an article from the *State Gazette*, stating that it is the duty of One State "to place the beneficent yoke of reason around the necks of unknown beings" (Zamyatin, p.1). The defense of this irrational policy of enslavement has paternal origins. It is done for their benefit "if they will not understand that we are bringing them a mathematically infallible happiness" (Ibid.). They will be forced to be happy. The problems raised are perennial.

"We" address the question of what constitutes ethical behavior; a common theme in diary novels because it can be thoroughly explored and discussed through the first-person narrative format. The diary novel style allows the reader to have an intimate relationship with the themes and ideas of the narrator. In this novella, the question of morality is answered by amorality; a legitimization that resides not in any spectrum of thought or culture, but rather lies in

the realm of mathematics. The ancients unsuccessfully approached the morality problem because, according to D-503, “It never occurred to one of their Kant-like individuals to construct a system of scientific ethics, based on subtraction, addition, division, and multiplication” (Zamyatin, p. 14).

The aforementioned examples of Russian diary novels are unique in their content, zeitgeist and century. However, despite these differences, the diary novel thread ties them together. The diary novel is like any other genre, which lacks strict definition, such as the memoir format. Ironically, by trying to make the definition more precise, the issue of labeling literature becomes more complicated. Four genres that greatly overlap each other are: the memoir novel, epistolary novel, diary and diary novel. However, the primary concern in this paper, is to isolate and describe all the diary novel characteristics in Dostoevsky’s Notes From Underground (1864) and Turgenev’s “Diary of a Superfluous Man” (1850). Both works present attributes pertaining to the memoir genre as well, but this is unsurprising since there is no rigid delineation between the memoir and diary novels. However, these works overwhelmingly show a higher proportion of **diary** novel features as opposed to those of any other genre.

II. DIARY NOVEL

Form

Diary novels traditionally reflect what the authors think real diaries are - either they are imitations of real diaries, incorporate certain real diary aspects, center around the idea of the diary or are written as a parody of the diary as a negative model. The diary novel is distinguished from the memoir novel by the narrator's relation to the subject matter. The memoirist records past events with great care, usually describing events in his own favor. The present moment, the time of writing, is itself of little or no interest. In contrast to the diarist, the memoirist usually describes the past in chronological order, depicting a life in an organized manner. However, the diary novel emphasizes the time of writing rather than the time that it is written about. The progressive sequence of dates on which the diarist concentrates gives the narrative its temporal continuity. This present-tense progression tends to dominate the subject matter, so that the diarist usually writes about events of the immediate past - events that occur between one entry and the next - or records his momentary ideas, reflections, or emotions.

Neither Notes from Underground nor "Diary of a Superfluous Man," are "true" diary novels according to the above definitions. However, this is an unremarkable occurrence, since the area of literary classification is notorious for overlapping definitions. Turgenev's work describes the narrator's, Chulkaturin's, task of writing his memoir before his impending death. However, the narrator writes not only about the past but also the present. He describes himself upon the day he is writing a memoir entry. He describes his nurse, his sickness, his doctor, etc. Also unlike a memoir, Chulkaturin dates his entries, using typical diary format. In other words,

“Diary of a Superfluous Man” represents the marriage of a memoir and a diary, resulting in a work with more contemporaneous content than recounting of memories: a diary novel.

Notes from Underground also presents an interesting variation of the diary novel. This novella is devoid of any dated entries. Instead, it is divided into two parts, of which the first is pure first-person narrative, indeed monologue. The narrator describes his present life and philosophical ideas. In the second half, he recounts the past. Therefore, like Turgenev’s work, Notes from Underground combines aspects of the memoir and diary novel genre. However, the existence of real or present time writing, supports the diary novel classification.

The authors of diary novels choose the diary form consciously because the artistic quality appeals to them. This form expresses a greater sense of immediacy to the reader than other forms of literature. The following example contains the first few lines of Notes from Underground and “Diary of a Superfluous Man”. The dramatic urgency and immediate nature of the Underground Man and Chulkaturin’s voices are heard:

Notes from Underground: “I am a sick man . . . I am a wicked man. An unattractive man. I think my liver hurts. However, I don’t know a fig about my sickness. And am sure not what it is that hurts me” (1:1).

“Diary of a Superfluous Man”: “The doctor has just left me. I finally got it out of him! No matter how he tried to evade the issue, he finally said what he was thinking. Yes, soon, very soon (March 20, 18-).”

Generally it is assumed that the diarist of a diary novel writes sincerely because he writes secretly and that the self in the diary is the “true” self and stands in contrast to the outward facade presented to the public. However, Turgenev and Dostoevsky chose the diary novel format to emphasize the self-consciousness and thus insincerity in writing about the self. Instead of viewing language and identity as transparent, 20th century criticism, and especially the

Deconstructionists, viewed language and identity as inherently problematic: the signifier suddenly seemed to determine the signified. The eminent Russian literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, although himself not a deconstructionist per se, identified the diary format (and all discourse) as representing the fragmented process inherent in the literary process itself. Bakhtin has analyzed the lack of a privileged voice in Notes from Underground, which enhances the semantic meaning of the text. When reading Notes from Underground, the reader never knows whether to trust the Underground Man or not, and for good reason, e.g., “I was lying when I said just now that I was a spiteful official” (1:I). Similarly while reading “Diary of a Superfluous Man”, the reader is faced with a highly temperamental narrator, e.g., “After reading what I wrote yesterday, I nearly tore up the whole notebook. My narrative style strikes me as too wordy, too sticky-sweet (March 25. *A white winter day*).” However, the unpredictability of the narrators themselves calls attention to aberrations in behavior and speech. Therefore, the reader is compelled to be a close observer of the narrator’s words and all the action in the diary novel.

Indeed, this unadulterated exposure to the diarists of Notes from Underground and Diary of a Superfluous Man, presents the reader with characters who are stripped of all glamour and mystery, yet who try to maintain it by the very complexity of their consciousness. They are dissatisfied, hyperconscious, self-criticizing anti-heroes.

The diary novel displays the gradual development of characters, as well as variations on themes. The narrator of “Diary of a Superfluous Man” is a thirty-year old man named Chulkaturin. He is motivated to write because he thinks he is about to die. He begins to recount his life story but switches his topic, because he judges his life too ordinary and boring for the

fictive reader or his imagined audience. Instead, he chooses to describe his character and immediately describes his superfluity. He defines what “superfluous” means:

Superfluous, superfluous . . . an excellent word I’ve come up with . . . in my case only one word can be used to describe what I am: superfluous - pure and simple. A supernumerary man-that’s all to it (March 23).

To prove his point, he tells of an incident, a three-week fantasy of being in love with the daughter of a high official in the village where he was once stationed. The girl, Liza, neither reciprocated nor was aware of his amorous feelings. Instead, she fell in love with a flashy newcomer to town, a charming prince. Tortured by rage and jealousy, the diarist insults the prince and has a duel with him. Sadly enough, this duel works to the prince’s advantage since he refuses to fire back at the narrator. Thus this confrontation serves to reconfirm the superfluous nature of the narrator and makes him an object of scorn and hatred in the village. After the prince abandons Liza, she marries not the diarist but another mediocre man. Chulkaturin is always on the periphery, even of the major events of his own life. The diarist’s motivations for telling the story of his lost love are unclear. In deciding to write, he may be reacting to the recent news of his impending death:

But, isn’t it ridiculous for me to begin my *diary* perhaps two weeks before my death? . . . How is it that fourteen days are less than fourteen years or fourteen centuries? . . . What tale should I tell? A respectable man does not talk about his ailments (March 20, 18-).

Chulkaturin’s shock about his terminal prognosis motivates him to resist the doctor’s verdict by taking some form of action, i.e., telling his sad love story. He may want to recollect and relive certain parts of his past, in order to construct an apologia for his life before dying. He himself does not understand why he is writing this diary before his swiftly approaching death.

Chulkaturin relives the most painful event in his life as a way, perhaps, to come to terms with old wounds. At the end of his diary he reproaches himself for having wasted his precious last days on earth:

I wanted to write my diary, and what have I done instead? I have related a single incident in my life. I have been babbling; I have written it down without haste, in detail, as though I still had years ahead of me; and now there is not time left. Death, death is on its way (March 31).

His writing this diary is a painful process. He relives a painful memory and then chastises himself for writing it in the first place. Chulkaturin suffers from a split between heart and head. He is preoccupied with himself and therefore is hyperconscious of other people's presumed assessment of him; he tends to overreact and misjudge situations, and to read nonexistent aversions into other people's behavior, for example: "Oh well, I'll just relate to myself the story of my life. Excellent idea! It is appropriate in the face of death and shouldn't be offensive to anyone. I begin (March 20, 18-)." He is inclined to impulsive actions, such as his duel with the prince. In his later analysis of himself, however, he is rational and mercilessly self-critiquing. In essence, Chulkaturin is an egoist. He is inspired to write by his impending death. However, he is an egoist with a flair for the dramatic. At the end of the diary, he simulates the facade of an idealistic Romantic hero, when he writes "Farewell, Liza! I wrote those two words and almost laughed aloud. It is as though I were writing a sentimental novel and ending up a despairing letter . . . (March 31)."

"Diary of a Madman" reflects the same conflicting tendencies in his personality. Chulkaturin begins the diary impulsively. Despite his professed nonchalant attitude towards himself, he cares intensely about himself and fears death: "I am terrified." His writing is just like

the Underground Man's: he expresses his self-hatred, loathing of others and as well a defense of how he lived his life. In condemning himself as a superfluous man, he punishes himself. His rhetoric resembles that of one who is writing for an audience. However, in writing what must be the most important piece of his life, Chulkaturin lets himself down. He becomes spiteful of this failure and excuses himself in the end by saying, "What does it matter? Does the story I have told make any difference? The last of earthly vanities disappear in the face of death (March 31)."

Turgenev is said to be the first author to make the connection between diary keeping and tormented self-reflection. Dostoevsky, in Notes from Underground, takes this writing style to the next literary plateau. The Underground Man's mentality and lifestyle comprise the major themes of the novella. The diary novel format perfectly highlights these qualities. The first-person narrative serves as a personal vehicle to convey the subtlest variations of the narrator's ideas. The narrator also tells the entire "real story" or inserted story within the framework of the first person narrated story.⁸ The reader is forced to absorb everything after it has been tainted by the narrator. Objective narration is absent from Notes from Underground and "Diary of a Superfluous Man." Undoubtedly, this kind of first-person narrative causes great ambiguity in regards to the reader's level of trust in the narrator's ability to be partially objective, let alone completely so. The reader is exposed to the intimate details of the progression and regression of the Underground Man's mentality. This aspect of the reader's relationship with the Underground Man, serves as the consummate example of the intimate details to which the reader is exposed.

⁸ Field, op. cit., p. 37.

Notes from Underground is composed of two parts, of which the second part takes place sixteen years before the first. It is an interesting diary novel because it inserts a story, complete with dialogue, into the fictional diary itself. The fictional diary is built upon the inserted story in the form of reported dialogue in the second half of the book. The second Part illustrates the events of the narrator's earlier life. The first Part is largely a monologue, such as: "I believe in this, I will answer for this" (1:VIII). He also addresses an imaginary audience: the actual reader or arguably his alter ego. Dostoevsky brilliantly writes this first part. The Underground Man anticipates every question, doubt or thought that the reader would have at the exact moment of reading or "hearing" a part of the Underground Man's discourse. For example: "I'll bet you think I'm writing this out of a swagger" (1:II), "Well, but it is a profit, after all, you will interrupt me" (1:VII). He appears to be constantly on the defensive, vehemently trying to defend his views to this imaginary panel of men.

The Underground Man says little about his early life in Part I. The only information he gives is of his past career as a collegiate assessor and the pleasure he derived from that job by denying numerous claims. He writes, "I was a wicked official. I was rude, and took pleasure in it" (1:I). His description of the process of deriving pleasure from his job, is a precursor to the later widespread suffering he inflicts on people outside of his career. He also immediately rescinds his earlier statement, setting the pattern of the Underground Man's frenzied thought processes:

I was lying when I said just now that I was a spiteful official. I was lying from spite. I was simply amusing myself with the petitioners and with the officer, and in reality I never could become spiteful. It was not only that I could not become spiteful, I did not know how to become anything: neither spiteful nor kind, neither a rascal nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect (1:I).

He writes Part I as a bitter older man, twenty years older than the Underground Man in Part II. In the diary-like series of notes in Part I, he begins with a self-description and then discusses his critique of the popular view of utopias of the mid - nineteenth century. He writes, “Now, I am living out my life in my corner, taunting myself . . . I am forty years old now . . . To live longer than forty years is vulgar, immoral. Who does live beyond forty? I will tell you who do: fools and worthless fellows” (1:I). Unsurprisingly here, he looks back on his life like Chulkaturin, reliving various events and analyzing his fragmented life. During this process of self-examination, the reader extrapolates the reason for all of this: it lies in his acute self-consciousness, which incessantly tortures him either with Hamlet-like panic or the burden of knowing too much. In many ways, Part I is a summation in progress. The Underground Man unintentionally tries, ironically, to rationalize his life, to make some sense of it and explain the reasoning behind his philosophies. This is ironical because he unknowingly attempts to apply reason to a senseless life, a life purposely led devoid of reason.

Part I is filled with “mental gymnastics,” one puzzle after another of affirmation, doubt, re-affirmation and then confusion. His writing style is slightly reminiscent of St. Thomas Aquinas’ writing style: the author argues and contradicts himself in order to show a breadth of understanding and lastly to strengthen a point. This is not to say that the Underground Man’s style and Aquinas’ are equal. Rather, it is merely to suggest that our Underground Man may not have a sequential thought process nor a conclusion, nor any stream of consciousness, but he does manage to incorporate a grand scope of arguments. This diarist’s theories are quite persuasive, specifically for his various arguments and different types of support.

The second part is a reminiscence, which the narrator calls a “novella,” about an encounter with a prostitute named Liza; the narrator tells how he senselessly hurt her feelings and destroyed their relationship. Part II serves as another type of support: a type that argues **against** the Underground Man’s theories. In other words, Part II is best understood in terms of revealing the implications of the philosophy in Part I. The reader learns about his life from childhood up to Liza’s departure. The Underground Man’s life is the test case for the execution of his theories and the result of living the life of an “acutely conscious” human. His life proves each time that to live life according to the tenets of underground philosophy is ludicrous.

The actual text in Part II contains fewer mental feats and more physical deeds. His various monologues exist in great abundance but in the second half there is also dialogue from other characters. The Underground Man no longer addresses the imaginary audience directly, but is still aware of its presence while writing Part II. Somehow there is a frustrated sense of hope either expressed by or felt for the Underground Man. The reader cannot help feeling that if he had not been teased and isolated as a child, he would be happy. Similarly, there is the indication that if the Underground Man had not been ridiculed at the dinner, he would have been *saved* from the Underground mentality. Liza appears to be his last hope of salvation: in the form of a prostitute no less!

She understands him, and thus has the skills to pull him out of the dark abyss he has fallen into. However, when he rejects her, there appears a sense of utter hopelessness. The reader senses that his very last chance to be healed by love is lost. The narrators of “Diary of a Superfluous Man,” and Notes from Underground, individually represent different lost causes. Turgenev’s hero regrets ever having lived whereas Dostoevsky’s hero realizes that he cannot

live. These two characters are archetypal diary novel narrators; they are unhappy, superfluous and have regrets.

Diary Novel Narrator

The diary novel narrators in “Diary of a Superfluous Man” and Notes from Underground speak in the first person. They anticipate the reader’s reaction and have a dialogue with a fictive reader or are directly apostrophize us. They recount personal memories interspersed with self-criticism. The Underground Man, unlike Turgenev’s diarist, develops philosophical ideas. The narrators seem to feel obligated to justify their choices in life, their lifestyles. They talk about previous events, almost as a preamble to legitimize their present circumstances.

Turgenev’s diarist and the Underground Man share many personality traits. These two characters have established the prototypical Russian diary novel narrator, against which all other similar narrators are created and compared. Turgenev’s diarist and the Underground Man are both excessively conscious of others’ opinions and are awkward in company. They are impulsive men, full of regrets. Their writings reflect a life of self-accusation and self-justification. Dostoevsky’s hero takes the usual problems of a conflicted character to extremes. If Chulkaturin insults and duels a prince because he imagines the prince ignores him at a ball, Dostoevsky’s hero broods on revenge for years after the fact before taking action. For example, when an officer at a billiard table simply picks the Underground Man up and moves him out of the way, he finally hits on the solution years later, consisting of purposely bumping into the officer on Nevsky Prospect.