**Liza's Truth**

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*Notes for the Underground* is a story written by Dostoevsky using characters the Underground Man - the main character- and Liza, a prostitute, who practically falls in love after several encounters in which the Underground Man pays for Liza's company. The story highlights several themes, some being virtue and truth. Throughout the story, the reader is taken through the life of the Underground Man. As the journey continues his thoughts become their own and it becomes easier to understand and dissect his nature. The Underground Man's vulnerability is tried a lot when he is in the company of Liza but in the end, it can be argued that the change that begins to take place is positive.

Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* discusses the power struggle between humanity and ourselves and humanity against the world. The Underground Man discovers that he is incapable of having control over his emotions and habitual lying because he lacks the ability to love another person. The Underground Man is not capable of loving because he does not understand his virtue or the virtue of others; virtue in this case is defined as good or admirable qualities. The Underground Man's perception of virtue does not allow him to accept other people when they are offensive towards himself or others; therefore, he is unable to love.

Liza, his lover, understands her virtue along with the Underground Man's because she accepts him while being capable of producing love towards the Underground Man. She has power over him mentally, physically, and emotionally, thus making her his heroine.

The Underground Man is aware of Liza's virtue, but in the beginning of their relationship is unfit to accept her virtue or his own. His lack of confidence in himself causes him to form an unhealthy desire to receive love and validation as seen in the Underground Man's violent dreams: "Just in case, supposing, for example, that a public incident should get started, one must be well dressed" (Dostoevsky 53). Based on the preceding quote it can be inferred that the Underground Man believes the only way he can receive positive attention is through violent acts or aggression. However, when the Underground Man meets Liza, his heart and dreams start to soften although his demeanor rebels. Liza is a financially poor young woman who is rich spirited although she is being treated as a slave. The Underground Man in many ways tries to make Liza see herself as less than a lady through his verbal abuse and manipulation. The Underground Man says to her, "[…] but how much is your love now? You are sold, all of you, and there is no need to strive for love because you can have everything without it. And you know there is no greater insult to a girl than that, you understand?" (Dostoevsky 71). The Underground Man says things like this to Liza so he may "save" her and receive credit for a "lofty and beautiful" lifestyle, which proves to him that he has the strength to love her. His manipulation is unsuccessful because she is able to accept her lifestyle as a prostitute and dwell on the good of being financially stable.

Furthermore, the Underground Man believes not only that he cannot love Liza but that he is, “incapable of loving her” (Dostevsky 123-124). However it is proven that he is capable of loving Liza but is not able to recongize that he loves her. Although the Underground Man verbally attacks Liza due to her career as a prostitute, a lot of his speeches involve him being the resolution to her problem. He constantly speaks of them marrying, “[…]God bless it, your husband turns out to be a good man, who loves you, pampers you, never leaves your side!” (Dostoevsky 96). In the Underground Man’s fantasy, he references himself as her husband, convincing her that if she were to give up prostitution he would have the skill to take care of her. This is proven when the Underground Man gets his wish granted and Liza goes to his home; “I stood before her, destroyed, branded, disgustingly embarrassed, and, I think, smiling, trying as hard as I could to wrap myself in my ragged old quilted dressing gown[…]” (Dostoevsky 117). The Underground Man feeling destroyed in this moment is another indication that Liza has more control over him than he does over himself because he loves her and respects her opinion of him, more than he does any other person. The Underground Man is embarrassed because he pretended to be able to help her with money and material things but he too was struggling to live.

The Underground Man believes that Liza does not understand his virtue because she denies his offer to be saved; as a result, he condemns her. This is shown in their conversation after he once again buys her in order to spend time with her. When the two are intimate, it is obvious that she has physical control over him because he chooses to go back to her even though he does not like how he feels when she proves him wrong. He says to her, “At any rate, in a year, you’ll be worth less, I went on, gloatingly. So

you'll go from here to somewhere lower, another house" (Dostoevsky 91). The Underground Man is condemning her for the choices she made and tries to manipulate her into thinking she is the reason why she cannot be loved. Nonetheless, Liza rebuts him, showing that it is not she who does not understand her virtue and as a result can't be loved. The most effective way for her to show him is to demonstrate that it is he who needs to change which Liza does when she presents the Underground Man with a past lover's letter which reveals that he is capable of being vulnerable and in control of his emotions. In response, the Underground Man is filled with jealousy and guilt: "I said nothing, pressed her hand, and walked out. […] the nasty truth!" (Dostoevsky 107). After he reads the letter, Liza has complete control over the Underground Man mentally and emotionally. He begins to obsess over her, "What if she comes? […] Well no matter let her come. Hm" (Dostoevsky 109). He talks down to her and praises her consistently, insinuating that he knows her virtue but doesn't necessarily acknowledge it.

While the Underground Man desires to lower Liza's self-esteem concerning her virtue, it is evident that Liza has more virtue than he because of her self-confidence. Unlike the Underground Man, Liza does not seek attention violently or at all. There are very few accounts of Liza being upset or disappointed in how the Underground Man treats her. Yet, the reader knows that she understands her value because she did not allow him to mistreat her continuously. Once he had his fit of rage and immaturity the last time they were intimate, she leaves him for good, leaving him alone and miserable. Liza says, "But this much I can say with certainty; although I did this cruelty on purpose, it came not from my heart, but from my stupid head" (Dostoevsky 126). Obviously, the Underground Man feels remorse for not respecting Liza the way he promised although

she is not his wife. What the Underground Man failed to understand was that despite Liza's occupation, she was a lady with standards and virtue and because he failed to respect that, he lost her.

Moreover, after losing Liza, the Underground Man recognizes her as his heroine. He tells the reader, "[…]she was now the heroine, and I was the same crushed and humiliated creature as she had been before me that night" (Dostoevsky 124). At this point the Underground Man realizes that Liza has had power over him even though he believed he held the power. This is also a moment where he does not realize he is allowing himself to love her. The Underground Man places her as his heroine because she has influenced him in her own way, to do things that are unlike his nature. Liza influenced positive acts rather than negative actions and thoughts; for example he states, "I am writing the loathsome truth" (Dostoevsky 124), an act the Underground Man had not been able to succeed in throughout the entire story. While the Underground Man says, "loathsome truth," the bigger idea is that he is writing the truth instead of "lying from spite" (Dostoevsky). He also says that his telling the truth is involuntary, the reader can infer that Liza is the reason why so many of his positive acts are subconscious. While the Underground Man is doing things against his nature, it's not necessarily against his will because he is trying to please and love Liza even more after losing her.

Liza's ability to love the Underground Man for who he is causes him to give her control over him mentally, physically, and emotionally. This is seen through his obsession over her visits, through his obsession with marrying her, and through his manipulation. While the Underground Man believed that the manipulation and

dishonesty were the only way for him to gain her love and trust, he was proven wrong many times. One such instance was when she told him, “I love you very much, and torment you out of love, and you ought to feel it” (Dostoevsky 96). Liza saying this to the Underground Man seems to be a warning him that if he falls in love with her, that she would have mental and emotional control over him. This was confirmed when he spent three days going insane awaiting her unknown arrival, “The next day I was again prepared to regard it all as nonsense, frazzled nerves, and, above all-exaggeration” (Dostoevsky 110). The Underground Man spends long hours dreaming of her, confirming her warning to him. In sum, although the fantasy of the Underground Man was to be her hero and to have control over her, Liza saves him through truth, causing him to unwillingly speak it and act upon it. Liza is the Underground Man’s heroine through her virtue.

Based on these examples, one sees that the socio-economic status of a person does not make them more or less emotionally rich. The Underground Man was a middle class man who attempted to use his money in order to make himself happy. He also used his money as a way to buy happiness physically and emotionally. Upon his meeting Liza, his values began to change but it did not happen until he lost his love. It can be assumed that he loved Liza because of his obsessive responses after she left him. Through this journey Dostoevsky wanted to convey the morals that money can’t buy happiness and you can’t judge a book by its cover because often times the assumptions are wrong. Through the Underground Man was lost he was able to gain because he learned both of those lessons which became the foundation of his potentially new lifestyle Liza introduced him to.