

**Кроткая
Фантастический рассказ**

**The Meek One:
A Fantastic Story**

Fyodor Dostoevsky

An Annotated Russian Reader

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Кроткая

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How to Use This Book

This book is designed for intermediate/advanced students of Russian. The extensively annotated text will offer the reader the invaluable rewarding experience of approaching a literary masterpiece in its original and savoring firsthand the unique style of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Only after reading the work in Russian can the reader begin to appreciate Dostoevsky's rich textual allusions; his word choices for describing the main characters; his choice of last names; his use of diminutive suffixes and interjections; and even his "rambling" sentence structure, which reflects the stream of consciousness of the thoughts of the main character, a pawnbroker, as he seeks to reconstruct the past and find a deeper truth.

The glosses in the margins represent the integral part of this book. They do not merely provide the English equivalent for a particular word; they also point out essential grammatical information where appropriate: the verbal aspect is always indicated; the gender is indicated where it is not possible to recognize it from the ending; the number is indicated if the word is used exclusively in the singular or plural. Sometimes examples of usage and case governance are also given.

The student's attention is drawn to fleeting (disappearing) vowels, which are always indicated within slashes. For example, in the word *умыс/е/л*, the vowel /e/ disappears in all forms except the Nominative and Accusative (*Gen.* без *умы́сла*; *Instr.* с *умы́слом*, etc.). In *вдов/е́/ц*, the same rule of disappearing vowels applies (*Gen.* у *вдовца́*; *D.* к *вдови́цу*, etc.). The vowel/zero alternation is also very frequent in Russian verbs, and it is marked in glosses the same way. If the only difference between the Perfective and Imperfective forms of a verb is the prefix, then the verb is given with a slash between the prefix (Perfective) and non-prefixed Imperfective forms; for example, *ото/мстить* – *Impf.* мстить; *Perf.* отомстить.

Since mastery of the vocabulary represents a particular challenge in Russian because of the scarcity of cognates, morphology and root recognition are stressed throughout. A conscientious effort has been made whenever possible to indicate the roots that may be familiar to the student and thus facilitate the retention of a new word through association. The student is also encouraged to look for recurring roots in various parts of speech and observe how a root affects the semantic meaning of a word. For example, in *снисхождение* two morphemes are singled out – *низ* (down) and *ход* (going). The student can see that in Russian the literal meaning of the word "going down" is close in meaning to the English "condescension" and thus hopefully can remember it better. Such an approach will also help the student recognize and remember *однокоренные слова* (words sharing the same root), which occur in Russian very frequently, and it will again assist in vocabulary retention. The exercises for each chapter have a short practice section on root recognition.

The notes at the end of the text contain additional cultural, historical, and linguistic commentary that is essential for a complete understanding of the text. They provide an external reference for the reader who may not be familiar with certain Russian realities mentioned in the story. One can get more information on Russian Orthodoxy in Ernest Benz, *The Eastern*

Orthodox Church, and on the Russian cultural and social environment in Yuri Lotman, *Быт и нравы русского дворянства*.

Finally, there is an extensive section for review and exercises. To help the student with a comprehension of the text, each review chapter starts with an accompanying set of questions that should serve as guides toward important plot developments and salient details. I suggest that the student read the corresponding questions before reading the chapter so that he or she can anticipate what is going to happen and can thus focus attention on a particular event. These reading comprehension questions are used as homework assignments, and the student can prepare answers in writing or orally, incorporating new vocabulary.

An active vocabulary list accompanies each review chapter. Since verbs are usually the most difficult, they are listed first, and conjugations are given for verbs that may be new to the student. An effort has been made to organize the conjugations into groups based on general conjugation patterns (e.g., the *читать* group and the *говорить* group).

Along with the active vocabulary section, each chapter contains a fill-in-the-blanks exercise that summarizes the events in a given chapter. In addition, there is a section on optional homework activities for each chapter such as questions for a reading journal and reading aloud. Given the orality of this particular text, it will be especially helpful for the student to read the key paragraphs out loud since it will not only help with pronunciation but will also make the student focus on correct intonational patterns and draw his/her attention to the main ideas. The student can record the oral reading and e-mail it to the instructor for feedback and/or perform it in class. This type of exercise can be carried out in the final project, where the students can perform the story as a play.

In my course two chapters at a time are typically assigned as homework (the preface and chapter 1; chapter 1 [review] and chapter 2; chapters 3 and 4; etc.) The preface and every two chapters contain a vocabulary quiz so that the student can test his/her retention of new vocabulary and his/her ability to use new words in context by building sentences or finding synonyms. Since certain vocabulary items recur throughout the story, there is some repetition in the exercises and quizzes precisely because these lexical items are so important for the text. Moreover, the repetition will allow the student to truly solidify the new vocabulary through review.

Because this work is so rich in philosophical and ethical themes, the student is encouraged to keep a reading journal or a blog in English (individual or shared with other students in the class) in which he or she can write expository essays on the suggested topics. Depending on the time available, the teacher can choose just one question for each chapter or assign all the questions.

Given the complexity of the text, several illustrations of key moments are offered to facilitate an understanding of the plot. One of the pre-reading activities in class can be to look at the illustrations together and try to figure out what is happening in a given scene by giving a factual description (where is it happening? who is doing what?) or an interpretive one (what is the mood of the scene?, etc.).

In addition to the wrap-up lexical exercise (“Общее повторение”), in my classes students hold a mock trial where the pawnbroker is charged with moral cruelty (the roles in the trial are pre-assigned, and the actor-students practice their statements at home). The students also write a final analytical essay with multiple drafts. Another possible wrap-up group activity is to ask students to rewrite the story as a play and perform a staged version of it as a final project.

The Web site that accompanies this volume (www.yalebooks.com/meeek) contains additional cultural commentary, glosses opening in a separate window on demand, and the audio files. The Web site represents another valuable learning tool that will help the student to fully absorb the new lexical and grammatical materials and practice correct pronunciation and intonation on his/her own by listening to the whole text, individual chapters, or even shorter segments.

Over the years of my working with this text, students have told me that they found the dual format of the paper copy integrated with the Web site very effective in language learning. It helped them greatly to grasp the intricacies of the work and made the process of reading a complex, authentic text much less intimidating and more rewarding. It is my hope that other students of Russian will find this book valuable as well and send them off on the enjoyable and challenging path of reading more Russian literature.