



First Love

Ivan Turgenev, Constance Garnett (Translator)

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This vivid, sensitive tale of adolescent love follows a 16-year-old boy who falls in love with a beautiful, older woman and experiences a whirlwind of changing emotions, from exaltation and jealousy to despair and devotion.

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First Love Details

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From Reader Review First Love for online ebook

ana says

kebetulan, saat buku ini baru kubaca setengahnya, aku mendengarkan sebuah presentasi mengenai gender di kelas.

kelompok ini mempresentasikan buku yang diangkat dari tesis dosen mata kuliah ini juga. Buku ini berisi analisis sebuah drama karya Arifin C. Noer yang berjudul *Drama Mega-mega* (ugh, ingatanku begitu buruk). Drama tersebut bercerita tentang seorang perempuan bernama Mae yang menjadi ibu bagi gelandangan-gelandangan di sekitarnya. Mae sendiri merupakan janda yang telah menikah dan ditinggalkan sebanyak 3 kali. Ia mandul sehingga tak akan bisa mempunyai anak biologis dari rahimnya sendiri. Mae (dibaca "ma'e" yang dalam bahasa indonesia bermakna "ibu"), ditinggal pergi oleh suami pertama dan keduanya, ditinggal begitu saja, dan oleh suaminya yang ketiga, ia ditinggal mati ketika meletusnya gunung merapi. Pada drama ini, Arifin C. Noer, dengan pandangan subjektifnya sebagai pengarang, memperlihatkan karakter (stereotipe) perempuan yang mempunyai peran sebagai ibu.

Namun saya tak akan membicarakan masalah gender di sini.

Saya malah tertarik akan masa lalu Ma'e di drama tersebut. Ia menikah 3 kali dan ditinggal 3 kali. Ia mencintai lelaki sebanyak 3 kali dan ia dikhianati 2 kali sedangkan malang di ketiga kalinya.

Saya: mungkinkah seseorang menikah tanpa cinta?

Teman Saya: Mungkin aja, na. Misalnya anak2 rohis yang langsung nikah itu kan cuma tuker2an biodata aja. paling taaruf berapa lama sih? Gue pernah nanya ya ke anak rohisnya gitu, katanya emang cinta itu ga jadi yang utama, tapi kan yang penting mereka menikah itu untuk ibadah.

S: absurd.

TS: ya enggak juga. kan ada ungkapan *cinta datang karena terbiasa (bersama)* ?

S: tetep absurd buat gue. kayak beli kucing dalam karung. mungkin orang yang dinikahin itu ternyata tabiatnya aneh, bosenan, dan selalu menyakiti. Dan akhirnya malah meninggalkan pasangan dan muncul lagi korban kayak si Ma'e itu. Atau jangan-jangan cinta punya tanggal kadaluarsa, sehingga ada kalimat "aku udah ga cinta lagi sama kamu" "aku udah bosen sama kamu, kita putus aja ya".

Dan pertanyaan terus berlanjut.

teman saya itu bercerita, bahwa ia pernah mempunyai teman yang lugu sekali, hingga menyentuh perempuan pun rasanya segan karena takut melukai/dianggap sikap yang tak pantas terhadap seorang perempuan.

Namun suatu ketika ia suka terhadap seorang perempuan dan berniat *menembaknya*. Teman saya ini memberi nasihat, "jangan. kalau pun nanti akhirnya jadian, paling hanya bertahan dua atau tiga bulan". si lelaki ini tak mendengarkan, maka jadianlah si lelaki dengan perempuan yang ditaksirnya. Terjadilah: ramalan teman saya itu. Mereka putus dan si lelaki bilang, "mencintai dia ketika jadian rasanya tidak semenarik ketika saya belum mendapatkannya". ini sebuah kasus, bukan generalisasi.

ada yang mencintai dengan tenang, seperti udara dan langit yang selalu indah, namun tak terhingga luasnya. ada yang ingin dicintai dan mencintai dengan menggebu seperti api yang membakar: berasap (terlihat oleh orang2 sekitar), butuh objek yang bisa dibakar (misalnya uang), dan juga akan tiba waktunya meredup hingga hanya sedikit bara di arang yang tersisa.

ada yang kehilangan rasionalitas saat jatuh cinta. ada yang jadi penyair ketika mendamba. ada yang jadi budak dihadapan cinta.

maka, teman saya muak.

TS: elo kenapa sih na?! lagi jatuh cinta? bosen tau ga!

S: Seperti yang dikatakan Kurnia Effendi di bukunya Damhuri Muhammad, *Darah Daging Sastra Indonesia*, masalah cinta merupakan persoalan yang tidak pernah selesai.

Inilah cinta, penderitaannya tiada akhir.

tabik untuk Zinaida, Vladimir, dan ayahnya.

[P] says

Recently I have found myself drawn to novels about looking back to the past, about nostalgia and youth. I guess it is a sign that I am getting older or perhaps it is a consequence of the tough time I have been having in my personal life, where, without going into too many details, death has been on the agenda quite a lot. I find myself currently feeling highly emotional, over sensitive, and sentimental. Just yesterday, in fact, I was flicking through Alain-Fournier's beautiful French novel *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and almost burst into tears [which is certainly very unusual for me] when I came across this passage:

“Weeks went by, then months. I am speaking of a far-away time – a vanished happiness. It fell to me to befriend, to console with whatever words I could find, one who had been the fairy, the princess, the mysterious love-dream of our adolescence.”

The 'fairy,' the 'love-dream of our adolescence,' is Yvonne, a young girl who, in short, comes to signify, both for the central characters and the reader, the magic of youth and the impossibility of recapturing the period of your life when everything was new and an adventure. So, anyway, bearing all that in mind, it seems as though this is both the perfect and the worst time to read Ivan Turgenev's *First Love* [?????? ??????, *Pervaya ljubov*], which deals with very similar ideas and themes.

The novella begins with a group of men, 'not old, but no longer young,' sharing the stories of their own first loves. However, only one of the party has an interesting tale to tell, which took place one summer when he, Vladimir Petrovich, was sixteen. That it was summer is, I believe, significant, because it is of course generally thought to be a season of sunshine and gaiety and positivity, when everything is alive, when the days are longer, the blood is warm, and anything seems possible. Moreover, the age of sixteen is one of the pivotal years of one's life. One is [to paraphrase that wise old bird, Britney Spears] not a child, not yet an adult; one is open-minded, willing to experience, but may not [certainly at the time the novel was written, if not these days] have any real life experience of your own. Indeed, Vladimir describes himself as 'expectant and shy'; and while he wanted to give the impression of maturity admits that he was not yet allowed to wear a frock coat. He also points out that his father was 'indifferent' to him and his mother neglectful, which meant that he had the necessary freedom to chase those new experiences, and all the more reason to look for love and attention from someone else.

“O youth! youth! you go your way heedless, uncaring – as if you owned all the treasures of the world; even grief elates you, even sorrow sits well upon your brow. You are self-confident and insolent and you say, ‘I alone am alive – behold!’ even while your own days fly past and vanish without trace and without number, and everything within you melts away like wax in the sun .. like snow ..”

The object of this love is Zinaida, a 21 one year old, impoverished princess who has just moved to the area with her boorish mother. In Benito Perez Galdos' towering novel *Fortunata and Jacinta*, Juanito first meets the woman who comes to be his lover on a stairway, while she eats a raw egg, the juice running down her fingers. This is not only a fabulous way to introduce a character, but is clearly meant to say something important about the character herself, and Turgenev does something similar here. When Vladimir first spots Zinaida she is in her garden surrounded by a group of men, and so one knows instantly that she is popular with the opposite sex. Moreover, she is, in turn, tapping each of her suitors on the forehead with a flower. What this suggests, and what the rest of the text backs up, is that she is a lively, free-spirited, young girl. In fact, it comes as no surprise in this regard that she was, apparently, much admired by Gustave Flaubert.

[From the German film *Erste Liebe*, which is based on Turgenev's novella]

Vladimir later describes the girl's personality as a mixture of ‘cunning and carelessness, artificiality and simplicity, calmness and vivacity’ and I think this does a fine job of summing her up. She is not wholly one thing or the other; she is mysterious, enigmatic, never transparent, seemingly cruel at times, and yet somehow always charming. For example, she instantly gives the boy a nickname, Voldemar, and deliberately plays on his intensifying feelings, while at the same time showing him tenderness and favouring him over the other men in her life. She is, in short, the kind of girl I have myself lost my fucking mind over more than once. And that is strangely comforting in a way, that, even over one hundred years ago, men were giving their hearts to these beautiful, maddening young women. [*First Love* was, so it is said, based on Turgenev's own experiences].

“She tore herself away, and went out. And I went away. I cannot describe the emotion with which I went away. I should not wish it ever to come again; but I should think myself unfortunate had I never experienced such an emotion.”

Interestingly, the situation in the garden does not only tell us about Zinaida. It also reveals something about the men in her life and hints at the reasons for her betrayal of Vladimir [yeah, she does him wrong]. Her admirers all fawn over her, they are all servile, eager to please. This is made clear by the fact that they allow her to hit them on the head with a flower. Later, one buys her a kitten, when she asks for one, and looks to get her a horse. Vladimir is no different. When Zinaida, not expecting him to comply, asks him to prove his love by jumping off a wall, with a 14 foot drop, he does just that. And yet the girl herself says that she can only love a man who would ‘break her in two’ i.e. who would not be her lapdog. This is one thing that I have never understood about men, or a certain type of man. Take my own brother as an example. He hangs around the women he likes, doing their bidding, buying them presents, in the hope that this will somehow show him to be a lovely, sensitive guy, and yet it never works. He never gets the girl because he comes across as weak and pathetic. And this is exactly what happens in *First Love*. In this way, you have to credit Turgenev with

nailing a still-relevant, seemingly universal aspect of human relationships and psychology.

“There is a sweetness in being the sole source, the autocratic and irresponsible cause of the greatest joy and profoundest pain to another, and I was like wax in Zinaïda’s hands; though, indeed, I was not the only one in love with her. All the men who visited the house were crazy over her, and she kept them all in leading-strings at her feet. It amused her to arouse their hopes and then their fears, to turn them round her finger (she used to call it knocking their heads together), while they never dreamed of offering resistance and eagerly submitted to her.”

While *First Love* is increasingly packaged as a single, stand-alone book, and is, more often than not, described as a novella [by me in this review, no less], it is, in fact, not much more than an obese short story. Yet for such a short work, it is admirably sophisticated. For example, in terms of the structure, there is a lot of very satisfying mirroring going on. Both Zinaida and Vladimir are young, both are in a sense abandoned to themselves by their parents, and, more importantly, both experience their first loves during the course of the narrative. I think it is easy to overlook that Zinaida is not only an object of affection, that she too is going through one of the most tumultuous, defining moments of a person’s life, and it is this that gives the text a greater depth and makes her a more rounded and sympathetic character, because, let’s face it, young love is a bitch, and no one ever really handles it very well or emerges from it spotless. Oh, don’t get me wrong, it’s wonderful too; I wholeheartedly recommend it, but, even so, I couldn’t wish it on anyone with an entirely clear conscience.

Nhi Nguy?n says

Mình không thích nhân v?t n? chính trong tác ph?m này l?m, vì mình không hi?u ???c tính cách c?ng nh? nh?ng suy ngh? th?c s? c?a cô ?y. Không bi?t có ?y có yêu nam chính th?c lòng nh? cái cách nam chính yêu cô ?y không, hay cô ?y c?ng ch? ?ang ?ùa gi?n v?i nam chính nh? ?ùa gi?n v?i nh?ng ng??i ?àn ông khác vây xung quanh cô. Ch?a k? ??i t??ng bí m?t mà n? chính ?ang âm th?m say mê n?a... Có l? mình ?ã thích câu chuy?n này h?n n?u bác Ivan Turgenev không tung ra m?t cú twist "c?u huy?t" nh? th?...

Nh?ng dù sao thì ?ây v?n là m?t câu chuy?n tình bu?n ?úng phong cách v?n h?c Nga th? k? 19. Hòa quy?n trong ?ó còn là n?i ti?c nu?i v? m?t th?i tu?i tr? ?ã l? làng, ?ã phung phí nh?ng c? h?i ?? có th? v??n ??n m?t cu?c s?ng khác h?nh phúc và thành công h?n - phong v? mà ??c gi? s? b?t g?p r?t hi?u trong các tác ph?m l?ng m?n có k?t thúc bu?n c?a Nga th?i k? này. ?o?n k?t th? ?úng là bi k?ch kh?i nói r?i, nh?ng ch?ng hi?u sao mình v?n không ??ng lòng ???c nh? khi ??c nh?ng chuy?n tình Nga khác có k?t thúc ?? bi k?ch h?n...

Algernon says

Oh, sweet emotions, gentle harmony, goodness and peace of the softened heart, melting bliss of the first raptures of love, where are they, where are they?

Vladimir Petrovich, "a man of forty, with black hair turning gray." sits on an evening, after a good meal, with a couple of old friends, sipping the port and drawing on a good cigar. They challenge each other to tell

the stories of their first time falling in love. It's a common framing device now, this looking back at the folly of youth with the wisdom of an older age. I don't know which novelist started the trend, but I was thrilled to get confirmation that one of the masters of the after dinner conversation, Joseph Conrad, paid tribute and acknowledged the influence of the great Russian contemporary of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. This novella is my first attempt to read Turgheniev, and suddenly I wonder what took me so long, why did I think that he was somehow inferior to these two giants? He speaks truer to my heart than the volcanic, mystical Fyodor and is more delicate in his dissection of the soul than the monumental Lev.

Returning to the quiet evening of recollections, two out of the three friends turn out to have little to tell, a sad state of affairs that could probably be replicated today in a similar proportion. One is a tad cynical and wonders what is this feeling that poets brag about, the other tells of an arranged marriage and a slow growth of friendship and respect. Only Vladimir Petrovich has a whopper of a tale to tell:

I was sixteen then. It happened in the summer of 1833.

And just like this, I am taken back to my own summer of 198_, marvelling at the accuracy of the descriptions of moods and impulses that have little changed from one generation to another, from one corner of the world to its antipodes. This is Vladimir Petrovich in the last summer of his childhood, this is me before I learned to keep it all bottled up inside and be wary of who I am giving my heart away to:

I knew a great deal of poetry by heart; my blood was in a ferment and my heart ached - so sweetly and absurdly; I was all hope and anticipation, was a little frightened of something, and full of wonder at everything, and was on the tiptoe of expectation; my imagination played continually, fluttering rapidly about the same fancies, like martins about a bell-tower at dawn; I dreamed, was sad, even wept; but through tears and through the sadness, inspired by a musical verse, or the beauty of evening, shot up like grass in spring the delicious sense of youth and effervescent life.

Vacationing with his affluent parents in a dasha out in the country, young Vladimir is supposed to learn for his admission to university, but the call of the fields, of the forests and of the peaceful waters of the Don is too strong. One fine morning, his promenade is interrupted by the sound of laughter from a neighboring and slightly rundown mansion.

Suddenly I heard a voice; I looked across the fence, and was thunderstruck ...

There she stands, with the sun in her hair and laughter in her eyes, tall and gracious like a queen, ordering about a group of admirers. Her name is Zinaida, and she is one of the most unforgettable heroines in Russian literature. Poor Vladimir doesn't stand a chance. A lucky turn helps him to get an introduction to the household, but he is, like many youngsters who live more in books than in the real world, tongue tied:

Though, indeed, at the moment, I was scarcely capable of noticing anything; I moved as in a dream and felt all through my being a sort of intense blissfulness that verged on imbecility.

Zinaida is a little older, in her early twenties, and apparently a coquette who likes to surround herself with admirers, toying with them like a cat with mice. In the evening they gather around her like moths to a flame: Count Malevsky, the poet Meidanov, the doctor Lushin, the dragoon Byelovzorov, old Vonifaty the merchant, Nirmatsky the banker. They play society games, riddles and challenges, discuss literature and politics. Zinaida drags the young boy into their unconventional and turbulent circle, a revolutionary change

from the strictures of his own household. It's no wonder he looks at her like to a goddess and that these moments will be engraved on his heart for ever:

I was as happy as a fish in water, and I could have stayed in that room forever. Have never left that place.

A little context is welcome now, as the discussions in the impoverished saloon of Zinaida turns to the preferences of her audience for the Romanticism of the early 19 century, and mentions are made of Pushkin, Goethe, Schiller, Hugo or Byron. The merits of each are analyzed, and a more naturalist approach is suggested as a better alternative to the exaggerated emotions of the Romantic school. A little further research confirms Turgeniev stance and references in the admiration Gustave Flaubert, Henry James and the already mentioned Joseph Conrad held for the Russian writer.

In the meanwhile though, young Vladimir finds out about the reverse of the medal, as his sudden passion for Zinaida is tempered by feelings of inadequacy and by the early onset of jealousy:

I felt at that time, I recollect, something like what a man must feel on entering the service: I had ceased now to be simply a young boy; I was in love. I have said that my passion dated from that day; I might have added that my sufferings, too, dated from the same day.

It is in the nature of a romantic young boy to torment himself with a too vivid imagination:

My fancy set to work. I began picturing to myself how I would save her from the hands of enemies; how, covered with blood I would tear her by force from prison, and expire at her feet.

... but what about Zinaida? what about the slightly older woman? Why is she encouraging Vladimir, and stringing him along with her bevy of admirers? She does seem an epitome of frivolity and irresponsibility, shallow and vain and so proud of her ability to twist the men's will around her little finger. Her portrait is where the artist truly shines and the revelation of her inner nature is both subtle and dramatic. She is not immune herself to the arrows of Cupid, and because this is still a novel of a more moralistic and male dominated epoch, Zinaida will be the one who will suffer the most for the folly of love:

"You needn't think I care for him," she said to me another time. "No; I can't care for people I have to look down upon. I must have some one who can master me ... But, merciful heavens, I hope I may never come across anyone like that! I don't want to be caught in anyone's claws, not for anything."

It's a wonder how well Turgeniev captures the torment of youth, how truly his words ring and how much of what Vladimir goes through echoes the memories of my own summers, now filtered through the burden of the years, yet still as clear and poignant as if they happened only yesterday. I did get curious about the inspiration for the novella, and I found out that in the words of the author this is the most autobiographical of all his works. There's even a name for the real life Zinaida, and a history very close to the events of the fictional Vladimir (view spoiler).

Regardless of the real life inspiration or of some critics who considered the subject trivial, I am grateful for the visit down memory lane that the story inspired, and will echo the words of Turgeniev in saying that I am glad that summer happened, even if it ended in tears.

The tinkle of the bells of the Don monastery floated across to me from time to time, peaceful and dreary; while I sat, gazed, listened, and was filled full of a nameless sensation in which all was contained: sadness and joy and the foretaste of the future, and the desire and dread of life. But at that time I understood nothing

of it, and could have given a name to nothing of all that was passing at random within me, or should have called it all by one name - the name of Zinaida.

... All was at an end. All the fair blossoms of my heart were roughly plucked at once, and lay about me, flung on the ground, and trampled underfoot.

And I went away. I cannot describe the emotion with which I went away. I should not wish it ever to come again; but I should think myself unfortunate had I never experienced such an emotion.

Note: my edition is part of a collection named "The Art of the Novella." I would recommend two other similar stories dealing with the passion of youth:

- Fyodor Dostoevsky - "White Nights"
- Joseph Conrad - "Youth"

Shivam Chaturvedi says

Que suis-je pour elle?

Teresa Proença says

"Que resultou de tudo isso... de tudo o que eu esperava? E agora, quando as sombras da noite começam a fechar-se sobre a minha vida, que me resta que seja mais puro, mais querido, que as recordações dessa breve tempestade, que chegou e partiu tão rapidamente, numa manhã de Primavera?"

(Ilustração de Anna e Elena Balbusso)

Mark André says

Sensitive. Romantic. Sincere.
Imaginative story. Cleverly told.

A must for anyone who likes to read.

Mohammed-Makram says

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Duane says

I like Turgenev's style. It's softer, more subtle than some of his fellow 19th century Russian writers. He doesn't beat you over the head with a message. This story, as it's title suggests, is about the first love of 16 year old Vladimir, the son of a wealthy Russian family, who falls in love with the 21 year old daughter of their new neighbors. She is a princess, her family with a noble name but without wealth. She leads Vladimir along, and several other young suitors besides, but she's in love with someone else, and that's the twist that makes this story interesting. It's a short novel, well written, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Florencia says

'That's love,' I said to myself again, as I sat at night before my writing-table, on which books and papers had begun to make their appearance; 'that's passion! . . . To think of not revolting, of bearing a blow from any one whatever . . . even the dearest hand! But it seems one can, if one loves . . . While I . . . I imagined . . .' (Garnett's translation.)

'That's what love is', I told myself again, sitting at night in front of my desk on which books and notebooks had begun to appear. 'That's real passion! Not to object, to bear a blow of any kind, even from someone you love very much – is that possible? It's possible, it seems, if you're in love... But I'd – I'd imagine...' (Freeborn's translation.)

Good grief.

I judged a book by its title; it saddens me to say that my intuition didn't fail me this time. Fortunately, I read *Asha* before this novella – so it's easier to talk about this one first since there was almost no connection. Otherwise, I would have had second thoughts and probably avoided Turgenev's prose until November. Oh, his prose! His absolutely exquisite prose with which he explored the complexity of love, the whirl of emotions, the innocence of youth. His poetic language gave me the strength to keep reading this story.

I have to be honest: if it weren't for the last chapter, I would've given this book a 2-star rating. Maybe my nature was too determined to reject so much mushiness this time, but still, there are many things and concepts to which I couldn't relate. My idea of love doesn't include losing individuality, giving up the right to have personal space nor the blind devotion that makes one lose all perspective. In that sense, I think it's only natural that I can't identify with these stories, since even when I was a teenager, I wasn't prone to such violent outbursts of affection. I end up bored, let alone if I don't find the writing engaging or remotely enjoyable.

On the other hand, I couldn't sympathize with almost any character – perhaps the servants who had to put up with their caprices. I mean, could the female protagonist be any more insufferable? Could the men be any more pathetic? Could this depiction of love be any more different from what I have in mind? Could you stop talking like Chandler?

A story in which an intelligent man (whose amount of wealth we don't know) falls in love with an intelligent woman (whose degree of beauty is not mentioned) just doesn't entice anyone, huh?

Yeah, I know, that was a stupid thing to write. It's late, I think I had too much coffee and fell into a state of rapturous delirium.

Most of my friends on here loved this novella, but I'm done for now (I may relapse, who knows) with the juvenile and pointless phase of feeling bad because I didn't like so much what my friends loved - hello, personality. That being said, my curiosity went as far as using the filter to take a look at the number of people who didn't enjoyed this book so much.

I could have been among those 475 and their two "it was ok" stars. The last chapter made me open another door and join another group. However, I read the "2-star group" reviews. I was a little relieved. And then slightly frightened.

There's an episode in which a poem written in 1825 by Alexander Pushkin is mentioned. I looked for it and wanted to share it.

The intensity of passion and oblivion in small doses.

Beneath the blue sky of her native land
She languished, faded...
Faded finally, and above me surely
The young shade already hovered;
But there is an unapproachable line between us.
In vain I tried to awaken emotion:
From indifferent lips I heard the news of death,
And received it with indifference.
So this is whom my fiery soul loved
With such painful intensity,
With such tender, agonizing heartache,
With such madness and such torment!
Where now the tortures, where the love? Alas!
For the poor, gullible shade,
For the sweet memory of irretrievable days

In my soul I find neither tears no reproaches.

Jan 24, 18

* Note: I read Constance Garnett and Richard Freeborn's translations. I prefer the latter.

** Also on my blog.

Ivana Books Are Magic says

First love. I've been rethinking this title today, wondering does it perhaps apply as much as to the father of our protagonist as much to his love interest. The protagonist of this novel, young Vladimir, quietly adores his father, but is estranged from his (abusive) mother. Our parents are, without a doubt, the first objects of our affection. For a child, his or her parents are the centre of the world. The first women Vladimir falls in love with is a bit older than himself, but is completely unattainable, not so much because of the age difference but because she sees and treats him as a brother. In other words, she seems unresponsive to his romantic feelings. Did Freud ever read and commented on this one? I'm sure he would have loved it. I feel there is a lot of Freudian thinking softly woven into the work, especially as the novella develops. To be honest, I find it hard to talk about First Love without relieving the plot, because it is a very plot driven work, but I will try to do my best. Let's just say that things take from there and evolve to be feel even more Freudian.

First Love is a novella tells a story of a sixteen year old (Vladimir) falling in love with a popular twenty one year old girl. From the first time our protagonist's beholds her, Zinaida is surrounded by men. Zinaida is a noble young lady and a pretty one too, so her poor material status seems of little importance. Is it so irrelevant, though? Maybe it is in the eyes of the man who want to marry her, but does it play a part in the way she sees herself? I can't forget, for example, the way Zinaida behaved at dinner at Vladimir's place. She was as silent as a mouse. This was a stark contrast with the way her personality shines through while she is with her suitors. From all I saw, it seemed to me that Zinaida is not only aware of her poor material status, but it also has a negative effect on her self-esteem.

Zinaida is such a fascinating female protagonist. In some ways, she reminded me of the femme fatale of another Turgenev's story (Maria Nikolaevna in *Torrents of Spring*). Maria and Zinaida are about the same age, beautiful young ladies who seem capable of charming any men in sight. Surrounded by their suitors they both appear so playful, charming, carefree and full of live, it is easy to understand their magnetic appeal. Nevertheless, Maria is in many ways different than Zinaida. Without a doubt, Maria is more diabolic and cunning. Turgenev even named Maria she-devil in one of his letters. Maria is married, while Zinaida is single, but still it seems that Maria is the free one, since Maria lives in a sort of an open marriage. Zinaida longs for love, and finds it hard to fall in love with any of her potential suitors. Zinaida's material position makes her more vulnerable. Zinaida's only 'way out' is a marriage, but as she admits to Vladimir, she wants a man who will control her, and not the other way around.

What does Zinaida truly want? I think she wants true love. She wants a man she can admire. She detests her suitors, and while this might make her seem cruel, I think I can actually understand where she is coming from. After all, do they all really love her? If she was ugly, would they be desperate to be next to her? I don't think so. Do they truly know her or is it a sort of a competition? Men, in general, like to compete over a woman. It is not uncommon for them to all focus on one woman. Moreover, Zinaida is very young. What change does she have to prove herself? Her material status makes her low in the eyes of others, and it is only true the admiration of men, she is able to gain some self-respect. In addition, perhaps Zinaida can't really understand her suitors, not until she falls in love herself.

As long as I'm contrasting the protagonist of Spring Torrents with those of First Love, I might add that Maria and Sanin are actually about the same age, but there is a great difference between them as Sanin is absolutely innocent when he meets Maria. In contrast, there is an age difference between Zinaida and Vladimir. Their relationship is quite different as well. Zinaida behaves with tenderness towards Vladimir, going as far as making him privy into her secrets. In contrast, Maria is a wealthy married woman with many lovers who made all the choices in her life and only wants to take advantage of Sanin. I don't think that Zinaida wants to do the same to Vladimir. Sure, she is flattered by his love, but does she plot against him. Really, Zinaida is not that bad. Zinaida is not very experienced herself, and despite acting like an older sister to Vladimir, she doesn't seem that much older than him. Sanin desired Maria, but at the same time she disgusts him. Vladimir loves Zinaida and even feels sorry for her. Ultimately, Zinaida is very lonely and craves love desperately. Maria is a huntress (not to call her a she-devil) who craves only power and money. They are quite different, although they might be equally bewitching. Fantastic female characters, both of them. It is so interesting to contrast them, and see the difference. I think it proves that there is not a single femme fatale type, but thousands of them.

I really have to hand it down to Turgenev. He portrays the dynamics of love and desire with such care. His psychological portrayal of characters is exquisite. I can certainly understand why this novella is so popular. All the characters are very memorable, but the protagonists are really masterfully portrayed. There are so many layers to Zinaida and I found it easy to sympathize with Vladimir as well. The fact he is caught between childhood and adults doesn't take anything away from his perception. Finally, this novella is (like Spring Torrents) a framed story. I do think that makes First Love even more potent. The fact that Turgenev admitted that First Love (like Spring Torrents) is in many ways autobiographical, certainly makes me see the characters in a more human light. We humans are fragile creatures, aren't we? Forever tormented and feed by a silly little thing called love. Perhaps because love is not a silly little thing at all....and First Love is often the last.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

?????? ?????? (Pervaya ljubov) = First Love, Ivan Turgenev

First Love (Russian: ?????? ??????, Pervaya ljubov) is a novella by Ivan Turgenev, first published in 1860. It is one of his most popular pieces of short fiction. It tells the love story between a 21-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy.

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Dolors says

This short story explores the complexity of love, its raptures and tormenting effects on the heart of an inexperienced young man of sixteen, Vladimir, who spends the summer of 1833 in a cottage nearby the Neskuchni gardens in the outskirts of Moscow.

Who doesn't remember falling in love for the first time? Trying to put into words the rush of contradictory emotions, the awakening of desire tangled with the insecurities of youth and the loss of the innocence of childhood is like trying to describe the immeasurable vastness of the universe, of which we cannot even start scratching the surface. And yet Turgenev masters his art and delivers a tale so rich in nuance, detail and realism that it's impossible not to relive the inexpressible state of intoxication that is linked to first love.

There is a distinctive European taste to Turgenev's approach without it resembling the contemporary Romantic authors of the time. Vladimir will enter the adult world of deceitfulness, guilt, jealousy and suffering that so is intrinsically woven into the human psyche and will become painfully aware of the treacherous nature of emotions. Princess Zaskeyin, the object of his fervent adoration, will change the meaning of the young man's life in ways he cannot predict that will also affect the apparent balance of his family of noble descend, which reflects the ongoing profound change the Russian society was submitted to at the onset of the nineteenth century.

Turgenev's character portrayal is not only delicately accurate but also revealing of gender and class disparities. Princess Zaskeyin may appear capricious and flirtatious at first glance, but her condition is one attached to her deplorable role as a mere object of beauty to be possessed, a trophy to be exhibited to attract suitors and a steady source of income for her impoverished mother. On the other hand, the masculine dominance is but a farce when passion is unleashed and threatens to shatter all superficial decorum, leaving all the characters equally exposed to the turmoil of unrequited or, and forbidden love.

Shrouded in melancholic prose that taunts the reader with passages of lush descriptions of inner and outer landscapes, this tale is an affirmation of life as a continuous process that is partially revealed in stages but never fully disclosed.

Mind and heart might become one in Turgenev's crystalline storytelling, where the interior world of the characters flows unhindered to the shores of the reader's conscience, sending the warning that love is a dangerous weapon that can inflict wounds impossible to heal... but what a catastrophe to never suffer from its vicious bite!

Alejandro says

Not my kind of "love" story.

UNUSUAL FIRST RUSSIAN LOVE

Ivan Turgenev was the first Russian writer to become popular and successful in Europe, even way way WAY before of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy,, thanks to that Turgenev left Russia and he was living several years in different countries of Europe, but still, it's undeniable that due the impact of his novels and short stories, that European and American readers became interested to read other authors from Russia, getting better the chances to Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and others.

First Love is one of his most known and popular works, along with one of the most autobiographicals about Turgenev...

...and with that in mind...

...Yikes! If Turgenev's adulthood wasn't an usual one, his childhood neither was!

I guess that due the title of the story and the basic premise, I was expecting a little cute love story between two young persons in the Russia of the 19th Century, but while in the basic thought, that was it...

...also it wasn't that...

...at all...

A 16-years-old boy falls in love with a 21-years-old girl, in the Russia of the 19th Century. The boy is from a family with a lot of money, and while the girl is from a family with royalty background, it doesn't have money. He's quite infatuated by her, however while she got aware since the very first moment that he was in love of her, she keeps teasing him, sometimes even cruel.

However, this isn't a regular love story, even I questioned myself if it is a love story at all, at least between the two main characters.

There are developments, unexpected twists in this tale that I just couldn't cope about it, they're not just right, in the first twist, and when you think that the worse is over, you meet with yet another twist that it's just too sad.

I can't detailed more, because I fear to spoil the key angles of the story, that I found awful but still if someone else want to try the book (it's quite quick to read), well, I won't be the one to spoil the relevant

moments of this hard to digest tale, but I can't deny that it's a bold tale, well written.

Dosvedanya, folks!

Chrissie says

Oh, I do like how Turgenev writes. He gets to the core of characters. You understand who they are, why each one acts as they do. He also has great ability to draw a place so it comes alive and you see it, feel it and almost smell it. Like a park at night..... and what Vladimir discovered that night!

Back track: this is about a sixteen year-old's first love. (Do you recall yours?!) He falls head over heels for a self-centered, manipulative, pretty girl. She knows she is pretty and she has her own agenda. He is not the only one who is charmed by her wiles. In this very short novella you get to know several people and come to understand their choices. Each character has a unique personality. That is what I liked best! Still, I would have given it more stars if it had been longer. I have a definite preference for long books. You will love this if you happen to prefer short books.

The audiobook's narration by David Troughton was excellent. You have no trouble with the Russian names. You know who is who, and I didn't even have to make a list to keep track of them.

Alex says

When you're young you think you're the Romeo of every story, but sometimes it turns out you're barely Paris. Turgenev's novella captures not only the ecstatic shamelessness of first love, but the fogginess of being young in general - that feeling of not understanding the action you're taking part in. 16-year-old Vladimir believes he's competing with other suitors for the affection of his beautiful 21-year-old neighbor Zinaida. Turgenev slowly unveils the real affair.

This was my first Turgenev; I thought it was great. And this Melville House series, "The Art of the Novella," is very nicely done.

Edward says

Introduction

Further Reading

Translator's Note

--First Love

Mohammad Ali says

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K.D. Absolutely says

"I? Believe me, Zinaida Alexandrovna, whatever you did, however you tormented me, I should love and adore you to the end of my days."

This novella is about a 16-y/o Russian boy, **Vladimir Petrovich** of a rich family falling in love for the first time. The object of his affection is a 21-y/o princess, **Zinaida Alexandrovna** who has just moved to Vladimir's neighborhood. Zinaida's family used to be rich but her father squandered everything because of his vices. Zinaida is beautiful so she has many suitors that she entertains and flirts with all of them. Zinaida thinks that Vladimir is still a boy and so she does not reciprocate his feelings for her.

The story is narrated by the 40-y/o graying Vladimir to his two male friends inside the dinner room of one of his friends' house. Turgenev did not explain why the three middle-aged men are telling the stories of their first loves. It is clear that they are not drunk because the old Vladimir even refuses to orally deliver his story. He chooses to write it first and they reconvene after two weeks for him to read what he has wrote to the two eager listeners. I liked the use of the frame story but I thought that middle-aged men who are not drunk would not normally discuss about their past loves. Past sex partners maybe because we normally boast about our sexual escapades but not unrequited sad love stories. Or maybe they are latent homosexuals? There is also no explanation where are their wives and I got the impression that they dine regularly. Dine? Men normally drink and not dine together. Or maybe dine and drink but not dine only unless they talk about business and one of them does not drink for health or religious reason. Oh no, but the homosexual angle is a bit pushing too far. My point is that Turgenev should have explained more the circumstances why the three stooges are talking about their first loves. Or maybe it was Valentine's Day and they'd like to reminisce their first loves? But not when they are not drunk, right? Otherwise, it is too cheesy and mushy for men to talk after dinner.

But this book is still okay with me. I liked Turgenev's prose. Very appropriate for Valentine's Day (today, Feb 14, 2013). I also liked the twist in the end. I saw *that* coming because of the way Zinaida first looked at (view spoiler) but I did not see the possibility that Zinaida is a (view spoiler). That scene really made the ending very interesting for me.

It's a good book especially as an introduction to Ivan Turgenev. I have three of his other books: two full-

length novels, Spring Torrents and A Lear of the Steppes and one memoir, Fathers and Sons and I look forward to reading them soon.

Happy Valentine's Day everyone!

Andrei Tama? says

Pretextul literar al romanului este deja bine întip?rit în con?tiin?a colectiv? a cititorului: dup? o petrecere copioas?, la ora 12 noaptea, mai r?mân trei "drojdieri" ?i propun s?-?i istoriseasc? fiecare povestea primei iubiri. Primii doi o relateaz? succint. Pentru unul prima lui iubire e actual? lui so?ie, iar pentru cel?lalt, fusese doica lui. Aceast? prima scen? -prologul- constituie cadrul viitoarei povestiri. Vladimir Petrovici are o poveste de iubire "mai altfel", dar simte c? nu o poate reda oral, c?ci ar pierde multe detalii, a?a c? le propune celorlalor doi comeseni s? o scrie ?i s? o istoriseasc? ulterior...

"Prima iubire" este o prin?es? s?rac?, în mrejele mizeriei, având cinci pretenden?i, printre care ?i personajul-narator, Vladimir Petrovici. Prima parte a romanului prezint? cinci b?rba?i care, de?i aristocra?i ?i relativ educa?i, cad în copil?riile pasiunii din pricina unei femei care, de?i f?r? inten?ii rele, îi joac? pe degete cum vrea.

Am surprins un pasaj al violentei pasiuni ruse?ti, ceea ce aduce a tipologia personajului-reper Dimitri Karamazov:

"-... poveste?te-ne cum ?i-ai petrece timpul cu so?ia. Ai închide-o în cas?, probabil?"

-Da, a? închide-o.

-?i ai sta cu dânsa?

-Da, a? sta negre?it cu dânsa.

-Frumos. dar dac? te-ar plăcisi ?i te-ar în?ela?

-A? ucide-o.

-?i dac? ar fugi?

-A? caut?-o ?i a? omorî-o.

-A?a. Dar închipuieste-?i c? sunt eu so?ia dumnitale...

-... m-a? sinucide."

De asemenea, am surprins conflictul dintre superficialul manierism nobiliar ?i pasiunea devoratoare a fiin?ei: *"Asta înseamn? iubire, asta înseamn? pasiune! Cum a putut ea s? nu se revolte când a fost lovit?...fie ?i de o mân? iubit?! Se vede c? se poate r?bdă a?a ceva dac? iube?ti..."*

Tonul elegiac ?i moral? romanului se contureaz? în ultimul capitol: **"O, tinere?e, tinere?e! Nu ?ii seama de nimic, ca ?i cum ai st?pâni toate comorile lumii! ?i în durere te complaci, chiar ?i triste?ea î?i ?ade bine."**

Finalul dezv?luie adev?ratul conflict care a stat la baza operei - ceva mai pu?in "comun"...
