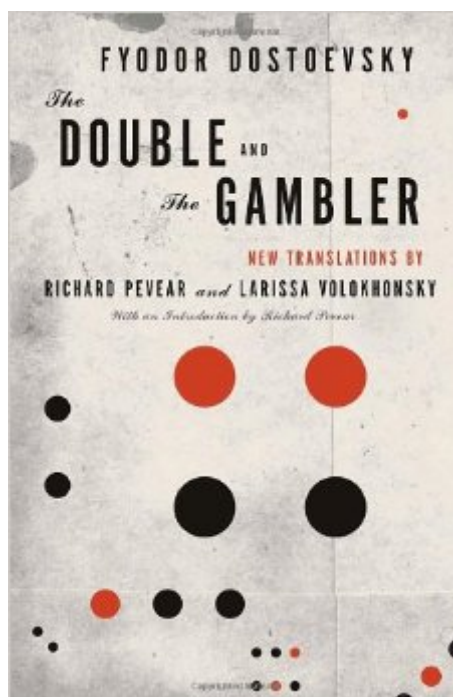


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The Double And The Gambler (Vintage Classics)



Synopsis

The award-winning translators Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky have given us the definitive version of Fyodor Dostoevsky's strikingly original short novels, *The Double* and *The Gambler*. *The Double* is a surprisingly modern hallucinatory nightmare "foreshadowing Kafka and Sartre" in which a minor official named Goliadkin becomes aware of a mysterious doppelganger, a man who has his name and his face and who gradually and relentlessly begins to displace him with his friends and colleagues. *The Gambler* is a stunning psychological portrait of a young man's exhilarating and destructive addiction to gambling, a compulsion that Dostoevsky "who once gambled away his young wife's wedding ring" knew intimately from his own experience. In chronicling the disastrous love affairs and gambling adventures of Alexei Ivanovich, Dostoevsky explores the irresistible temptation to look into the abyss of ultimate risk that he believed was an essential part of the Russian national character.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The perfect little companion piece to two of Dostoevsky's several short stories, and two of his best if not THE best might I add. I have read both these stories before but translated by different authors in the *Great Short Works* compilation by Perennial classics. Before I go on to mention about the Peavear/Volkhonsky translations which are superior I will talk briefly about both stories, not so much what they are about (you can find many of those around here) but of the translations themselves. *The Double* is quite a fascinating short story, but for a lot of people it doesn't have closure, and the ending gives the impression of cheating the reader. I first read the George Bird

translation which is actually okay compared to this one, but nowhere near as colourful. You will really get a kick of Mr. Golyadkin's play into madness, it is quite a wild ride. The Gambler is truly one of those books that literally makes your skin crawl. Also Peavear/Volokhonsky's translation compared to Constance Garnett is FAR superior full of life and what I call Dostoevsky "flow" where as Garnett's comes off as 'flat'. The Gambler isn't just a well written story but also gives a glimpse into a time period that doesn't exist any more, (his comments about Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans and Poles is quite insane) and a depth into the soul of the tortured novelist who suffered the afflictions of the main character. You will also get a serious kick out of the high wheeling grandmother (baboushka) in this book, she is one of the most memorable characters in any story EVER. Both these stories are great page turners you won't be able to stop until you are done. More importantly, the Everyman book looks great on my book shelf as always.

At school our sixth form (equivalent of senior high in the US) was split into maths/science and arts. One day in the library I saw a fellow on the arts side looking at this sentence: "La Vie avec un grand V," which he'd translated as, "Life with a big V." I tapped him on the shoulder. "It's 'Life with a capital L'." But he wasn't having it, especially not from a maths/science man. "It says V, not L, Morris." And that's how I felt about this translation by Peavear and Volokhonsky, who are the premier Russian-to-English translators of the era, according to The New Yorker. Award-winning, it says here. But they had me struggling through The Double, and maybe it's my maths/science background, but I found lines like this confusing: "Announce me, my friend, say, thus and so, to explain. And I'll thank you well, my dear..." Compare that to the Constance Garnett translation: "Announce me, my friend, say something or other to explain. I'll reward you, my good man - • At other times we're told that Mr Goliadkin fled "from the shower of flicks hanging over him". Mrs Garnett's translation may have been less precisely accurate, but it wouldn't leave the brain in palpitations. In spite of that the brilliance of the novelette is undimmed. You might even argue (I'm not) that rendering Goliadkin's experiences in something that is close to but not quite comprehensible English enhances the sense of nightmare. At any rate, right up to the curiously translated final paragraph (for which, in the absence of a footnote, you'll need a degree in Russian social history) it's a completely spellbinding piece of work. I was less captivated by The Gambler.

Though largely famous for long novels, Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote a number of notable novellas, of which The Double is an early example and The Gambler is last. This collection includes both in new translations by Richard Peavear and Larissa Volokhonsky, the Russian to English translators now

most in vogue, as well as an insightful Introduction. This is not only convenient but an excellent value. The stories are not on par with longer works, but fans of those revered pieces will like them, as they have much of the greatness on a small scale. Also, along with Notes from Underground, they are a good place to start for those curious about Dostoevsky but intimidated by his thick masterpieces. Though an early work and not as well-crafted as *The Gambler*, *The Double* is an interesting story that manages to put a new spin on the doppelganger phenomenon. In it, Dostoevsky very skillfully portrays one man's lonely descent into madness - and manages to be screamingly funny while doing so. This is certainly no major work, but some of the themes - namely madness - were worked out in more detail later, and the uncharacteristic humor may appeal those not keen on Dostoevsky's famous dark side. *The Gambler* is quite different and better overall; fans and scholars will have a proverbial field day comparing the stories and why they were put together, but it works quite well on its own. Dostoevsky is world renowned for psychological insight, and *The Gambler* is a consummate example. The first-person narrative gives a fascinating peek into a gambling addict's mind; we learn much about what causes such behavior and, more importantly, what perpetuates it, often against better judgment.

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