

Title: Freedom in the Sentimental Mode: A Reexamination of Two Early Works by Dostoevsky
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Critical discourse surrounding Dostoevsky's philosophy of freedom tends to focus on his major novels, relating his deep engagement with the theme to his imprisonment, exile, and subsequent liberation (Jackson; Frank). Although debates about freedom rarely arise explicitly in the author's earlier works in the sentimental mode, a complex relationship between narrative form and character agency does emerge through an analysis of *Bednye liudi* (1845) and *Belye noch*i (1847).

Leo Braudy writes of the freedom inherent in the sentimental novel: "In aspiring to a literary open-endedness that will express its thematic ideal of open-endedness for the personality, it searches for the most effective way to mime sincerity and to achieve thereby a form that is innate and individual, unbehaving to the preexisting orders of society, culture, and history" (6). *Bednye liudi* and *Belye noch*i remain true to Braudy's description in their form, presenting fragmented first-person narratives that stylistically and structurally mirror the fictional authors' struggles to escape physical stagnation through genuine creative expressions of personality. Although, as Terras has noted, Dostoevsky in many ways subverts the sentimental novel, he also embraces it for its potential to free characters from both literary and social conventions. This close relationship between form and content presages Dostoevsky's mature novelistic style in which the interplay between narrative and character forges models that test the limits of and argue the necessity for human freedom (Morson).

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