

In a German Pension

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This is juvenilia, and the author was very aware of the fact refusing a reissue at the precipitous time of the outbreak of the First World War. The stories all seem to take place in Germany, many of them, but not all, connected to a stay in a German pension, in which the author herself seems to figure as the narrating character. The stories are short, most of them encompassing only a few pages, and basically independent of each other. As stories they may have been inspired by Chechov, who at the time must have been in vogue, but the traces of such inspiration only goes to highlight their weaknesses. It is all so 'made up' in the words of Tolstoy. The stories become transparent as creative endeavors, meaning that you become quite aware of the struggle the author experiences in trying to make something up along the lines of her inspirations. It is juvenile, meaning stories written just for the sake of trying to write stories, not for being written by themselves. The result is that they are singularly unengaging. You feel no compulsion to read them, in fact you hurry through to come to the next. There is no color no undergrowth, at best you can see them as pencil sketches, possible material for someone more accomplished to fill out and render life-like. Consequently they all have a rather abstract quality, at most at times conveying mild satire, more conventional than startling. It would be pointless to try and describe them one by one, almost no one stands out in memory.

What is the point of publishing them? One can only see it as a gesture of reverence to an author who developed and whose history then became of some interest. It also serves as a remainder of the difficulty of writing, even writing short stories. It is not just enough to make up, there has to be something that powerfully seeks expression. One sees nothing of that, or at least very little, only finger exercises.

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