



The Prussian Officer

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The primary characters are a Prussian cavalry officer conducting his men on maneuvers and his young orderly. The officer is a haughty, self-disciplined aristocrat, frustrated both in love and in his career. The orderly, Schoner, is a peasant with an easy, natural grace.

The officer is profoundly affected by the warm animal spirits of the orderly, but his personal code requires that he deny these feelings. Soon he comes to hate Schoner and to harass and arbitrarily restrain him. The orderly himself begins to feel an unaccustomed anger toward the officer.

Eventually the officer becomes so enraged at the orderly that he savagely beats him. This action destroys the young man's sense of wholeness and awakens in him a murderous desire that leads inevitably to the death of both men.

This story portrays the destruction of man's instincts by an overemphasis on his rational, conscious nature. Schoner reacts to life directly, at an instinctual level, while the officer has suppressed all of his emotions in compliance with his aristocratic and military station. As a result, he is an isolated figure with no close ties and stands in contrast to the orderly, who feels a oneness with all things.

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