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A GENERAL OUTLOOK TO FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOEVSKY

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Summary

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, who was specifically posthumously appreciated as an outstanding thinker, wrote freely, without drawing boundaries to the internal conflicts taking place in human nature. His findings concerning man have been study materials for researchers from a great many fields from his day to these days. The author's own notes, memoirs that are about him, letters, etc. things which make it easier to comprehend the author's true intention and ideas, have provided insight to almost all the readers and researchers of all eras who wanted to seek the echoes of Dostoevsky's life, which was filled with traumas, in his works. In this study, Dostoevsky will be studied in a general outlook in the light of studies conducted about his art and his life.

Key Words: Dostoevsky, Belinsky, internal conflict, Russian people, Russia.

Introduction

Dostoevsky was dealt with by many local and foreign researchers from areas of literature, psychology and philosophy. Each one of these researchers have tried to reveal the mystery that resided in the depths of his soul. Everybody interpreted Dostoevsky in their own way. This was because there are many branches that he had extended and everybody grabs the one that suits them. To illustrate, Russian critical thinker, Berdyayev's 1923 book "Dostoevsky, an interpretation" (Berdyayev, 1988), was a result of his more than ten year long studies on the writer that had interested him since his childhood. He analyzed Dostoevsky in several ways, especially religious and spiritual aspects. Rozanov's 1984 book "Dostoevsky and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" (Rozanov, 1996) was also an important work because of its criticism and his words concerning the

value of Dostoevsky for us. Another Russian thinker and critic Strakhov (Strahov, 1894), mentions that Dostoevsky has a talent of exploring the depths of man and stresses on the qualities of the author himself and the personality traits of his characters. He also supports the ideas of Rozanov, as it can be seen from his positive commentary on Rozanov's book "Dostoevsky and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor". In his 1903 book, titled "Dostoevsky and Nietzsche" (Şestov, 2007: 11), Shestov commentates on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche in a their philosophical aspects in the "Philosophy of Tragedy" subheading.

In his paper, titled "Three speeches in memory of Dostoevsky", which was published between 1881 – 1883, Solovyov (Solovyev, 1988: 290-323) studied not only Dostoevsky's life or his literary criticism, but the idea which inspired all his works. He mentions Dostoevsky's belief in the eternal divine power in the human soul. He also speaks of Dostoevsky, who was subjected to the accusation of being a "New Christian", and his achievement of the same awareness of God or Christ. Merezhkovsky, who analyzed Dostoevsky and Tolstoy together in his paper "L. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky" (Merejkovskiy, 2000), published between 1901 – 1902, says that these two authors are opposite twins and that one can not be understood without understanding the other. In his book "Dostoevsky and Gogol" (Tynyanov, 1921), published in 1921, researcher Tynyanov compares Dostoevsky's art to that of Gogol's. Leontiev (Leontyev, 1912), in his book "Our New Christians", which was written based on Dostoevsky's speech on Pushkin's commemoration and Tolstoy's story "What Men Live By", criticizes the writer's "pinkish melancholic Christianity", whom he defines as a "soft" Christian. Bakhtin's book (Bahtin, 1994) "The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetica" which was written in 1929 had the characteristics of a general outlook on everything that was written until then. Besides local researchers, many foreign researchers like Nietzsche, Freud and the leader of individual psychology ecole Adler, as well, talked about Dostoevsky in different aspects. All the aforementioned studies serve as examples for the studies done on the author and there have been many other studies since the writer's own times up till now. As Terras also says (Terras, 2010: 12), these kinds of studies have brought along new methods of reading Dostoevsky's works. Because a text's meaning can be determined by some criteria including the reader's awareness, his knowledge, his imagination, his worldview and his mood. A reference that is noticed by one reader may not be noticed by the general readers of today. Again, another finding by Terras about Dostoevsky's art criticism is also of importance and true. "The worth of Dostoevsky's fiction was determined by his own contemporaries in 1860s and 1870s, to a great extent with respect to their own ideological stance. This continued until Dostoevsky's death and further during the whole of twentieth century. Ideas about him are still not unconnected to political extentions even in modern day Russia" (Terras, 2010: 10).

Dostoevsky's Artistic Side and The Redeemer Importance of Writing

Kafka says "If I had not written, it would have been really bad" in one of his works which was also mentioned in Dostoevsky's novel "Poor Folk" (Kafka, 1961: 44). Art, pulls you out of the darkness. And writing heals a writer. When studying Dostoevsky's artistic side, it is necessary to take the redeemer importance of writing into consideration as well. Dostoevsky thought that, above all else, the ideas created for a work of art and the effort put into that were precious, even if the end result was bad. About his novel 'Demons', which he had started writing in 1870, he says in a letter to Apollon Maykov: "I sat down at the table for a good idea, I am talking about the idea, not the writing process." This was one of the ideas that was indisputably effective in public. It is an idea similar to 'Crime and Punishment' but closer to reality, more vital and directly related to the most

important modern day issue. I am going to finish it in about autumn, I am not in a rush, it is a slow process. I am trying to get it to print in autumn [...] However, it is a rather fervent subject. I have never worked with such ease and joy.” (Budanova, 1975: 164)

When the author finished his first book ‘Poor Folk’ in 1845, the editor in chief of the magazine *Sovremennik*, Nekrasov liked his book very much and said that he could be the next Gogol. Through Nekrasov, he met the famous literary critic of those times, Belinsky. The book impresses Belinsky much more deeply than it impressed Nekrasov who read it first. (Kirpotin, 1960: 23). Kirpotin says that there is a deeply humane element in this book. Besides this, there are other exciting elements in the book. The combination of these with humour is the basic quality of his skill. He says however, these elements could have been much more successful in his book ‘The Double’. The later books of the author, written after ‘The Double’, made Belinsky have suspicions about how his skill would evolve in future (Kirpotin, 1960: 39).

According to the famous critic Dobrolyubov, the emergence of ‘Poor Folk’ was welcomed enthusiastically by the literary admirers of Gogol. Belinsky announced that although Mr. Dostoevsky was indebted a lot to Gogol, similar to Lermontov and Pushkin, still, he was himself not an imitator of Gogol, but a writer with an original and enormous skill. According to Belinsky, Dostoevsky’s talent belonged to the category of talents that were not quickly realized and that were not quickly famous. (Dobrolyubov, 1970: 1)

After spending four years in the Siberian mines underground, another Dostoevsky came into view. His observations, his pains, and the journey he took to the depths of man enabled many works of art to emerge from underground. As a matter of fact, it is possible to say that Dostoevsky’s art can be divided into two as pre and post of ‘Notes from Underground’ (1864).

Between these two eras, the author experienced a spiritual revolution and after this point there was a new window within him about the mankind. During the time before this, he was still under the influence of Belinsky and there were traces of Western writer’s effects on his art. As stated by Kirpotin, no memoirist, almost no historian can deny the influence of famous critic Belinsky on Dostoevsky during his life before exile. However, a great majority of these writers thought that even during the times when he was closest to Belinsky, Dostoevsky kept his unchangeable faith to the afterlife and Christ (Kirpotin, 1960: 31). It is a known fact that in his childhood Dostoevsky was brought up as a pious person. However, Belinsky, who engaged in arguments with Dostoevsky with the aims of confuting his faith, thought that generally religion crippled his people’s and country’s citizens’ social activities and their earthly affairs. One of the concrete reasons of his arrest with the advocate of Utopian Socialism, Petrashevsky group and being condemned to death along with many other writers, is that Dostoevsky read a letter that Belinsky wrote to Gogol, which criticized the government and the church, out loud at Petrashevsky’s house.

As of his book ‘Notes from Underground’, came the author of ‘Crime and Punishment’, ‘The Idiot’, ‘Demons’, ‘The Raw Youth’, ‘The Brothers Karamazov’, so to speak, the real Dostoevsky emerged. Dobrolyubov states that Dostoevsky ceased his literary activities in the second half of 1849 (the year when his exile began), and literature was not troubled by this at all. In his ten year silence, he says, even if he was remembered sometimes, it was thanks to his first book. “Nevertheless, he emerged once again two years ago and he published four great works of art in these two years. [...] Now, the duty of the critic was to determine how much the talents of Dostoevsky developed and matured, which aesthetics specialties he proposed compared to the new writers, how these new works of art deviated from others in their lacks and beauty, or where do these new books place Dostoevsky compared to Goncharov, Turgenev, Grigorovich, Tolstoy and many other writers. The critic was face to face with an important artistic problem of our literary

history. But he was getting ready to speak of a topic that was no where near being aesthetic; ‘the suppressed people’ (Dobrolyubov, 1970: 2). On the other hand, according to Kropotkin (Kropotkin, 2003: 91-92-93), ‘The Brothers Karamazov’, the book the author wrote in the final years of his life, was one of the best fictionalized work of the author. In the novel, all the mental illnesses of the author manifest themselves. The philosophy of the novel was based on the idea that faithless Western Europe, pre-revolution, vigorous Russia that liked to drink, cruel (sinner) Russia and Russia that falls into place with the help of religion, each come into existence as one of the four brothers. In no other literary work of art can you find these kinds of mad, half mad, criminally inclined or really guilty people. (A Russian mental health expert says). The characters are portrayed with a rather unusual mixture of realism and a borderless romanticism. Kropotkin stresses that in spite of the critics’ exaggerated glorifications, Dostoevsky’s works’ artistry was much lesser than the other great Russian writers like Tolstoy, Turgenev or Goncharov and that unlike the other writers’ works, his works do not build up interest to read them again.

Starting with his book ‘Notes from Underground’, Dostoevsky’s interest in ‘the suppressed and humiliated’, which Dobrolyubov also did not find aesthetic, sparked some criticism. Some critics claimed that the writer’s reason to deal with this subject was stemmed from his curiosity towards their dark nooks, rather than the mercy felt towards these people (Terras, 2010: 9). Especially Turgenev stated that this curiosity was not a healthy one. Belinsky said that the diseased states of the human mind perversely appealed to him, and Mihailovsky (A Cruel Talent, Mihaylovskiy, 2011) said that he took a sadistic delight in observing people’s suffering. This Cruel Talent meant that he chose to suffer as the theme of his book, so that he ensured that his characters and readers suffered as well. He continues “However, the distinctive feature of our cruel talent will be the inessentiality, arbitrariness and purposelessness of the suffering that it is exposed to.” Alfred Adler (Adler, 1918: 205) said that one must keep in mind that Dostoevsky had a sympathy for the people with no characteristic features and that the protagonist he chooses could be someone who lives in the basements, someone from the underground, someone from the monotonous life, a woman of the street or a kid. All these start to grow swiftly and to a gigantic size until they reach where Dostoevsky wants them; the universal heroism’s limits that are special to humans. This heroism is not an individual heroism, to the contrary, this is a state where this ordinary character is freed of the valuelessness that he is in, so that he dies as a useful hero to his society. Dmitri Karamazov, Prince Myshkin, Raskolnikov and the other heroes who tried to surpass their previous limits. “Who am I – a trembling creature or someone with rights?” Raskolnikov, who made up his mind about surpassing the limits that his past life through a sense of community and life experience, lies in his bed and thinks for months. Adler says that his strict father in his childhood, his illness, his later condemnation to death and his exile all laid out formidable limits in Dostoevsky’s life. This uncertainty of the author’s moral dilemmas – was either an insurgent or an obedient servant- pushed him to the edge of the cliff, caused a great terror and forced him to seek for the convincing truth.

He reached his own truth by combining all the dilemmas that pushed him to the point of splitting, just like it happens to the characters in his books. Therefore, he came to a point where he established the boundaries of selfishness and humanity. He forced his protagonists madly to surpass the limits like ambition, arrogance, egoism which were caused by the communal life. However, later he pushed them back to where they were in harmony with life. Dostoevsky was ambitious but he used his ambition for the good of the community. According to Adler (Adler, 1918: 205) one who hides these kinds of dilemmas inside and has difficulty in overcoming them, just like Dostoevsky, should get to the bottom of these dilemmas in order to find peace. Since he has to find the truth so as to find peace. Yet, this path to seek the truth requires a great deal of effort, an trained (disciplined)

soul and emotions. One has to bear the sufferings of life and battle them. He cannot get through any simple situation unless he adapts it into the formula of life. “An ant knows his own nest’s structure, (although not as much as a human does, but it is enough for them as they do not need to know more) just like a bee knows its own nest’s. Nevertheless, man does not know his own structure (Dostoevsky, 1988: 512). “Raskolnikov’s biggest mistake was to trust in psychology. He was confident that he could deal with the ‘problems’ of a criminal, since he had studied criminal psychology, especially the ways how a criminals mind works while committing a crime and after a crime. Yet, he saw that these psychological problems were the least of his problems and there were totally new dimensions of existence and psychology” (Terras, 2010: 76).

According to Berdyaev (Berdyaev, 1988: 149) Dostoevsky was not only a great artist but also a great philosopher and a psychologist. He was an outstanding dialectician and a great Russian metaphysician. There was a real feast of thought in his art. He reflected the Russian spirit with all his dilemmas. The Russian people, when they show the qualities that are unique to their soul, are apocalyptic and nihilistic. This spirit is composed of two opposite poles; positive and negative. In his own notes, Dostoevsky says “Nihilism grew in us because we are all nihilistic. Again, Berdyaev exemplifies the author’s ‘The Raw Youth’ and says that there is not an organic life in here. Vertilov and his illegitimate son Dolgoruki do not even have significant jobs. However, it feels like they are doing something important. The person who makes it felt is Dostoevsky himself. He makes it look like they are dealing with a divine business. But it is actually just about men. It shows the characters’ human affairs, their dilemmas, and their orientation period to society. Since, as stated above, man and the man inside are the most important things. Dostoevsky aspired to reveal people’s spirits, especially Russian people’s spirits. In the depths of the Russian people’s spirit lies the mixture of Eastern and Western spirits. Even though this polarity is hard, this serves the people a great spiritual wealthiness and he says that this spiritual richness should be revealed.

Conclusion

In many studies, while they discuss the author’s art, they did not overlook the facts that he lived in a seven children home with parents who cared for their education and a rather strict and authoritarian father figure. Some dreadful moments of his life affected the author deeply; his sorrow for his mother’s passing away because of that era’s malady, tuberculosis, his poor student life in Petersburg where he went to a boarding school, his father’s condition, who hit the bottle with the sorrow of his wife’s death and got more and more ill-tempered was murdered by the villagers who were working for him. He felt guilty because of this murder and this was a kind of guilt that only he himself could understand. Freud (Düz, 2001:198) mentions that there is a indisputable similarity between the father figure in *The Brothers Karamazov* and Dostoevsky’s own father being both murdered and stresses that the murder of his father created a trauma in the author. This trauma lead the author’s existing neurosis into a turning point. His epilepsy’s symptoms that started this way were now at his neurosis’ disposal. About the intermittent epilepsy attacks the literary critic Strahov stated that Dostoevsky repeatedly told him that he experienced very exciting minutes before the attacks. “For a short time, I experience such bliss that I never had in my normal, conscious state, I do not think anybody else can understand this feeling. I feel a perfect harmony both in me and in the world and it is such a strong and pleasant feeling that I can give up ten years of my life in return for those a few seconds.” (Strahov, 2006: 145). His arrest with the radical Petrashevsky group, his death penalty was suddenly changed into exile, his first wife’s and his closest brother Mihail’s deaths and in the later years the deaths of his two children created new

traumas in the author's life. He also had a passion for gambling that took a hold of him and put him through financial difficulties for some time.

As he his own words, he was a realist not a psychologist. However, even in those times he had seen maybe much more than a psychologist would have seen. He did not look for answers in his works, yet, he succeeded in making his characters ask the right questions. According to Shestov (Şestov, 2007: 11), neither Dostoevsky nor Nietzsche teach us anything. There is a great misconception in the Russian public that the writer exists for the readers. On the contrary the reader exists for the writer. Dostoevsky and Nietzsche did not talk in order to spread their beliefs among people or enlighten the people around them. As a matter of fact, they are looking for a light themselves. They do not believe in themselves as to whether the thing that thing they suppose is a light or a reflection of a flame or a hallucination. Thus, they call the readers as the witnesses. Many readers might not want to know this, but Dostoevsky and Nietzsche's writings are not the answers but questions (Şestov, 2007: 11).

As stated by Berdyaev (Berdyaev, 2001: 148-149), much has been written about Dostoevsky. There were many interesting and true findings, many different points of views were applied. For some, above all, he was the representer of all the suppressed and humiliated. For some, he was a 'cruel talent'. For a number of researchers he was the prophet of the new Christianity. For others, he was the exposé of the underground men. For another group of people, he was a real Orthodox and a herald of the idea of a Russian Messiah. However, according to Berdyaev, all these approaches were no where near being enough to comprehend the spirituality of Dostoevsky. He was a real Russian and in order to understand him better, one needed to know the Russian spirit and hence, the mystery of Russia well. Therefore, he was a writer who attracted the interest of the Western Europe as well. Because he had the mystery of the East. As The renowned Russian poet Tyutchev said, one cannot understand Russia through reason nor measure it by paces. Dostoevsky reflected the spirit of Russia with all his contradictions.

In the light of these findings of Berdyaev, and considering the era the author lived in, the social and political polarisations and the Pan Slavists who seeked true salvation in the Russian spirit against the reforms that Peter the Great started (1721 – 1725) should not be overlooked. There was a group who stood against the Tzars who wanted to impose the Western ideology directly as it is on the Russian society. Especially in the final days of his life, it seems that Dostoevsky felt closer to this idea. His life in exile, the ordinary real Russian people he met there and his later travels to Europe contributed to this change. After his life in exile, he started to question his earlier ideas on tendency to the West and utopian socialism. He produced works that responded to the thesis that people can get salvation through the revolutionary spirit in the famous "What to be Done?" novel of Chernyshevsky by proposing the complexity of humans.

These works started with the publication of 'Notes from Underground'. "In this novel, Dostoevsky depicts the inner world and the worries of a person living in that era Russia. The novel addresses the circumstances that human nature is in, rather than how humanity should be. The judgement values of the fictional narrator are the exact opposite of the author's own ideas. The merciless language and the harsh tone that Dostoevsky uses through the narrator are a result of his questioning of his life, European liberalism, materialism and utopian socialism." (Pamir Dietrich, 2009: 187)

Again, as Berdyaev stated, it is not difficult to find artistic faults in his writings. However, there is nothing else in his works but humans and human relations. There is no nature, no cosmic life, no things nor objects, but only humans (Berdyaev, 2001: 148-149). He forces his characters, who lived, became isolated and despised and eventually experienced internal conflicts in the capitalist big

city that symbolizes Petersburg, to the point where they have to step out of their limits. They commit murder and break bad. And his characters feel justified about this overstepping of their boundaries. Because all the society is responsible for a crime that took place in that society. In this way, just like a psychologist, Dostoevsky go into the depths of man and presents all the contradictions, dilemmas and internal conflicts as they are. According to many researchers, this is the way to achieve God, hence absolute love that is hidden in Russian land and Russian people. Stendhal's mirror that is carried along a high road becomes the mirror that reflects the humans in Dostoevsky's art.

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