

Dostoyevsky's film-like novels

Freedom, responsibility, faith and humanity's relation with fate are themes that appear repeatedly in Dostoyevsky's novels. Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov in "Crime and Punishment" and Ivan, Rakitin and Smeryakov in "The Brothers Karamazov" have moral sentiments that tolerate almost anything. While this was considered an intellectual stance in those times, it also prepared the end of these types of characters. The relation between sin and redemption has a purifying effect in Dostoyevsky's literature. His characters, who are sinners but not bad people, seek redemption through pain and remorse. How far can one go in pursuit of desires also appears as one of the main themes of his novels - and Dostoyevsky makes the deepest, darkest secrets of the human soul appear on paper.

Dostoyevsky, a genius of world literature, also caught the eye of the movie world since the beginning of the 20th century, leading to many adaptations of his books. The grand master's "Crime and Punishment" remains his most adapted book into film with the first being the version by expressionist filmmaker Robert Wiene (1923). Wiene, who left his mark on the history of cinema with "Doctor Caligari", failed with this movie despite the interesting, special set designs. Again, one of the leading names in cinema, film director Josef Von Sternberg also adopted "Crime and Punishment", which again was a complete disappointment.

French filmmaker Robert Bresson, who is one of the favorite directors of Turkish director and Palme d'Or-winner Nuri Bilge Ceylan, based his movie the "Pickpocket" (1959) on "Crime and Punishment." Just like the novel's protagonist Raskolnikov, the main character, Michel, is in prison. But this imprisonment has set his soul free. Just like Dostoyevsky's other characters, Michel seeks redemption through pain.



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After many years, "Crime and Punishment" resurfaced in "Raskolnikov" (1983), directed by Finnish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki. This time the protagonist is a worker in Helsinki, Finland. However, in contrast to previous attempts, Kaurismäki reflects Dostoyevsky's style on the screen. "The Idiot" is another novel by Dostoyevsky that the movie world has paid a lot of attention to. While it has been adapted for the screen many times, the most successful version is "Hakuchi" by Akira Kurosawa. The film stands out, as it is Dostoyevsky's universal voice flavored by a local Japanese tale. Moreover, Kurosawa's cinematic genius is also very close to the genius of Dostoyevsky in literature.

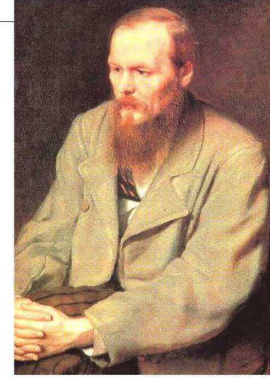
Another director that has shown interest in "The Idiot" was Andrei Tarkovsky. While he strove to adapt the novel into a film for years, he could never achieve this dream. Despite this, Dostoyevsky's voice can be heard in many of his films. For example, the three characters in "Stalker" are based on "The Brothers Karamazov." It is evident how Ivan in "The Brothers Karamazov" resembles and reminds the viewer of the writer and the tracker, Alyosha.

Since we mentioned "The Brothers Karamazov," let's have a look at its movie adaptations. The movie in which Yul Brynner plays Dimitri Karamazov is the most disappointing version. The film, directed by Richard Brooks, does not reach the depths of the novel, as it is very hard to reflect the emotional descriptions that create the tone of the book and the mood of the characters onto the screen. Without these descriptions, the film is just a superficial play-like movie based on dialog. But Dostoyevsky knew how to construct a mood with dialog and analyze the profundness of the human condition. While adapting the book, Brooks made the same mistakes as many other directors - he reflects just the negative side of the charac-

ters while leaving out their passion for beauty and good - which is the weakest link in the relationship between Dostoyevsky and the movie world.

Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov" also inspired Visconti's "Rocco and His Brothers." The film focuses on changes in a family, and the relationship between the brothers is one of the most successful examples of Italian neo-realism. Visconti also adapted Dostoyevsky's "White Nights" for the screen. St. Petersburg's summer nights are visually beautiful, while the finale is one of the best moments, blending cinema and literature together. The result was a critical and commercial success, some of which is owed to the handsome and talented Marcello Mastroianni.

Dostoyevsky has also inspired Turkish directors, including Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz. Although Ceylan is also a fan of Chekhov, the profundity of the souls of Dostoyevsky's characters is also embedded in his characters. Demirkubuz's films close relation to Dostoyevsky is more apparent and striking - for example, in "The Waiting Room," he tells the story of a director who is trying to adapt "Crime and Punishment" for the big screen. Karamazov on the other hand is apparent in "Innocence" and "Fate." Demirkubuz also shot "Underground" based on Dostoyevsky's novel but does not strictly stick to the book. While Dostoyevsky criticized the intelligentsia of the 19th century, Demirkubuz criticizes the rigid, hypocritical intellectuals of today. The protagonist of the film, Cevat, is a man who does not even feel the need to



hide his nastiness and is full of hate. He then evolves into a character that thrives on being nasty and mean. Demirkubuz has said: "I have reflected the remnants of my time in this world in this film. I could go into the depths of the problem and could reflect in a very plain manner something that is complicated in "Underground."

A new Dostoyevsky adaptation is being released soon. "The Double" in which Dostoyevsky created an anti-hero who cannot belong to and who is in constant contradiction and conflict with the society he lives in, excluding him from social life.

Golyadkin, who cannot communicate properly with others due to his mental problems, soon alienates himself from society. Director Richard Ayoadé has taken this theme from the book to create a brand new world. The time and location are ambiguous, which supports the character-based discourse of the film.

The movie, which does not stick with the novel's original story, at the end impresses with dazzling cinematography and dialog that reflect the dissociative identity disorder the character suffers. Jesse Eisenberg, who plays both characters, thrives in these very tough roles. "The Double" stands out as one of the few Dostoyevsky-adaptations that can reach the success of the book in the movie world.

And still, Dostoyevsky remains as one of the best companions on the journey to the depths of the human soul.