


Fyodor Dostoevsky

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Fyodor Dostoevsky



Born: November 11, 1821
 Moscow Russia

Died: January 28, 1881
 Saint Petersburg Russia

Occupation: Novelist

Influences: Writers: Miguel de Cervantes^[1],

Charles Dickens, Nikolai Gogol, E.T.A Hoffman, Mikhail Lermontov, Aleksandr Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy
Philosophers: Mikhail Bakunin, Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Aleksandr Herzen, Konstantin Leontyev, Sergei Nechaev, Mikhail Petrashevsky, Vladimir Solovyov, Tikhon of Zadonsk

Influenced: Charles Bukowski, Albert Camus, Frar Kafka, Yukio Mishima, Friedrich Nietzsche, Marcel Proust, Ayn Rand, Jean-Paul Sartre, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (Russian: Фёдор Михайлович Достоевский, IPA: [ˈfʲodər mʲɪˈxajlɐvʲɪtɕ dɐstʌˈjɛfskʲɪj], sometimes transliterated **Dostoyevsky**, **Dostoievsky**, or **Dostoevski** listen (help·info)) (November 11 [O.S. October 30] 1821–February 9 [O.S. January 28] 1881) is considered one of two greatest prose writers of Russian literature, alongside close contemporary Leo Tolstoy. Dostoevsky's works have had a profound and lasting effect on twentieth-century thought and world literature.

Dostoevsky's primary works, mainly novels,

explore human psychology in the troubled political, social and spiritual context of his 19th-century Russian society. Considered by many as a founder or precursor of 20th-century existentialism, his *Notes from Underground* (1864), written in the embittered voice of the anonymous "underground man", was named by Walter Kaufmann as the "best overture for existentialism ever written."^[2]

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Biography

Early life

Dostoevsky was the second of seven children born to Mikhail and Maria Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky's father was a retired military surgeon and a violent alcoholic, who served as a doctor at the Mariinsky Hospital for the Poor in Moscow. The hospital was situated in one of the worst areas in Moscow.

Local landmarks included a cemetery for criminals, a lunatic asylum, and an orphanage for abandoned infants. This urban landscape made a lasting impression on the young Dostoevsky, whose interests in and compassion for the poor, oppressed and tormented was apparent in him. Though his parents forbade it, Dostoevsky liked to wander out to the hospital garden, where the suffering patients sat to catch a glimpse of sun. The young Dostoevsky loved to spend time with these patients and hear their stories.

There are many stories of Dostoevsky's father's despotic treatment of his children. After returning home from work, he would take a nap while his children, ordered to keep absolutely silent, stood by their slumbering father in shifts and swatted at any flies that came near his head. However, it is the opinion of Joseph Frank, a biographer of

Dostoevsky, that the father figure in *The Brothers Karamazov* is not based on Dostoevsky's own father. Letters and personal accounts demonstrate that they had a fairly loving relationship.

Shortly after his mother died of tuberculosis in 1837, Dostoevsky and his brother were sent to the Military Engineering Academy at St Petersburg. Fyodor's father died in 1839. Though it has never been proven, it is believed by some that he was murdered by his own serfs.^[3] Reportedly, they became enraged during one of his drunken fits of violence, restrained him, and poured vodka into his mouth until he drowned. Another story holds that Mikhail died of natural causes, and a neighboring landowner invented the story of his murder so that he might buy the estate inexpensively. The figure of his domineering father would exert a large effect upon Dostoevsky's work, and is notably seen through the character of Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, the "wicked and sentimental buffoon" father of the four main characters in his 1880 novel *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Dostoevsky was an epileptic and his first seizure occurred when he was 9 years old.^[4] Epileptic seizures recurred sporadically throughout his life, and Dostoevsky's experiences are thought to have

formed the basis for his description of Prince Myshkin's epilepsy in his novel *The Idiot*, among others.

At the St Petersburg Academy of Military Engineering, Dostoevsky was taught mathematics, a subject he despised. However, he also studied literature by Shakespeare, Pascal, Victor Hugo and E.T.A. Hoffmann. Though he focused on areas different from mathematics, he did well on the exams and received a commission in 1841. That year, he is known to have written two romantic plays, influenced by the German Romantic poet/playwright Friedrich Schiller: *Mary Stuart* and *Boris Godunov*. The plays have not been preserved. Though Dostoevsky, a self-described "dreamer" as a young man, at the time revered Schiller, in the years which yielded his great masterpieces he usually poked fun at him.

Beginnings of a literary career

Dostoevsky was made a lieutenant in 1842, and left the Engineering Academy the following year. He completed a translation into Russian of Balzac's novel *Eugénie Grandet* in 1843, but it brought him little or no attention. Dostoevsky started to write

his own fiction in late 1844 after leaving the army. In 1845, his first work, the epistolary short novel, *Poor Folk*, published in the periodical *The Contemporary* (Sovremennik), was met with great acclaim. The editor of the magazine, the poet Nikolai Nekrasov, walked into the office of the liberal critic Vissarion Belinsky, and announced: "A new Gogol has arisen!" Belinsky, his followers and many others agreed and after the novel was fully published in book form at the beginning of the next year, Dostoevsky became a literary celebrity at the age of 24.

In 1846, Belinsky and many others reacted negatively to his novella, *The Double*, a psychological study of a bureaucrat whose alter ego overtakes his life. Dostoevsky's fame began to cool. Much of his work after *Poor Folk* met with mixed reviews and it seemed that Belinsky's prediction that Dostoevsky would be one of the greatest writers of Russia was mistaken.

Exile in Siberia

Dostoevsky was arrested and imprisoned on April 23, 1849 for being a part of the liberal, intellectual group, the Petrashevsky Circle. Tsar Nicholas I

after seeing the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe was harsh on any sort of underground organization which he felt could put *autocracy* into jeopardy. On November 16 that year Dostoevsky, along with the other members of the Petrashevsky Circle, was sentenced to death. After a mock execution, in which he and other members of the group stood outside in freezing weather waiting to be shot by a firing squad, Dostoevsky's sentence was commuted to four years of exile with hard labor at a katorga prison camp in Omsk, Siberia. Dostoevsky described later to his brother the sufferings he went through as the years in which he was "shut up in a coffin." Describing the dilapidated barracks which, as he put in his own words, "should have been torn down years ago", he wrote:

"In summer, intolerable closeness; in winter, unendurable cold. All the floors were rotten. Filth on the floors an inch thick; one could slip and fall...We were packed like herrings in a barrel...There was no room to turn around. From dusk to dawn it was impossible not to behave like pigs...Fleas, lice, and black beetles by the bushel..."^[5]

He was released from prison in 1854, and was required to serve in the Siberian Regiment.

Dostoevsky spent the following five years as a private (and later lieutenant) in the Regiment's Seventh Line Battalion, stationed at the fortress of Semipalatinsk, now in Kazakhstan. While there, he began a relationship with Maria Dmitrievna Isaeva, the wife of an acquaintance in Siberia. They married in February 1857, after her husband's death.

It is popularly believed that Dostoevsky's experiences in prison and the army resulted in major changes in his political and religious convictions, and that after his ordeal he became disillusioned with 'Western' ideas and began to pay greater tribute to traditional Russian values. Perhaps most significantly, he had what his biographer Joseph Frank describes as a conversion experience in prison, which greatly strengthened his Christian, and specifically Orthodox, faith (the experience is depicted by Dostoevsky in *The Peasant Marey* (1876)). While conversion plays a strong role in many of his works, not all his characters arrive at Christianity in a moment of crisis (notably, Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* is converted through the example of the good works and moral teachings of Elder Zosima.) Although we cannot assume with authority that Dostoevsky's prison ordeal was the

sole catalyst for his dramatic shift in views and style, this explanation parallels his own semi-autobiographical description of prison life in *The House of the Dead*.

Whether inspired solely by his prison experiences or for reasons known only to himself, Dostoevsky was a sharp critic of the Nihilist and Socialist movements of his day, and in part dedicated his book *The Possessed* and his *The Diary of a Writer* to espousing conservatism ^[6]and criticizing socialist ideas.^[7] He later formed a friendship with the conservative statesman Konstantin Pobedonostsev embracing some of the tenets of Pochvennichestvo.

While Dostoevsky's post-prison novels abandoned the European-style domestic melodrama and quaint character study which characterized his youthful work, this might also have been the result of his maturation and growing confidence in himself as a writer. Dostoevsky's mature fiction explored themes of existentialism, spiritual torment, religious awakening and the psychological confusion caused by the conflict between traditional Russian culture and the influx of modern, Western philosophy.

Later literary career

In December 1859, Dostoevsky returned to St. Petersburg, where he ran a series of unsuccessful literary journals, *Vremya* (Time) and *Epokha* (Epoch), with his older brother Mikhail. The latter had to be shut down as a consequence of its coverage of the Polish Uprising of 1863. That year Dostoevsky traveled to Europe and frequented the gambling casinos. There he met Apollinaria Suslova, the model for Dostoevsky's "proud women", such as Katerina Ivanovna in both *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Dostoevsky was devastated by his wife's death in 1864, which was followed shortly thereafter by his brother's death. He was financially crippled by business debts and the need to provide for his wife's son from her earlier marriage and his brother's widow and children. Dostoevsky sank into a deep depression, frequenting gambling parlors and accumulating massive losses at the tables.

Dostoevsky suffered from an acute gambling compulsion as well as from its consequences. By one account *Crime and Punishment*, possibly his

best known novel, was completed in a mad hurry because Dostoevsky was in urgent need of an advance from his publisher. He had been left practically penniless after a gambling spree. Dostoevsky wrote *The Gambler* simultaneously in order to satisfy an agreement with his publisher Stellovsky who, if he did not receive a new work, would have claimed the copyrights to all of Dostoevsky's writings.

Motivated by the dual wish to escape his creditors at home and to visit the casinos abroad, Dostoevsky traveled to Western Europe. There, he attempted to rekindle a love affair with Suslova, but she refused his marriage proposal. Dostoevsky was heartbroken, but soon met Anna Grigorevna Snitkina, a twenty-year-old stenographer. Shortly before marrying her in 1867, he dictated *The Gambler* to her. This period resulted in the writing of what are generally considered to be his greatest books. From 1873 to 1881 he published the *Writer's Diary*, a monthly journal full of short stories, sketches, and articles on current events. The journal was an enormous success.

Dostoevsky is also known to have influenced and been influenced by the philosopher Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov. Solovyov is noted as the

inspiration for the character Alyosha Karamazov.
[8]

In 1877, Dostoevsky gave the keynote eulogy at the funeral of his friend, the poet Nekrasov, to much controversy. In 1880, shortly before he died, he gave his famous Pushkin speech at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow. From that event on, Dostoevsky was acclaimed all over Russia as one of her greatest writers and hailed as a prophet, almost a mystic.

In his later years, Fyodor Dostoevsky lived for a long time at the resort of Staraya Russa, which was closer to St. Petersburg and less expensive than German resorts. He died on February 9 (January 28 O.S.), 1881 of a lung hemorrhage associated with emphysema and an epileptic seizure. He was interred in Tikhvin Cemetery at the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, St Petersburg, Russia. Forty thousand mourners attended his funeral.¹ His tombstone reads "Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." from John 12:24, which is also the epigraph of his final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Works and influence

Despite his death in 1881, Dostoevsky is often considered to have had an immense influence upon the modernist movements in twentieth century philosophy and psychology. Dostoevsky's influence has been acclaimed by a wide variety of writers,

including Marcel Proust, William Faulkner, Charles Bukowski, Albert Camus, Ayn Rand, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henry Miller, Yukio Mishima, Gabriel García Márquez, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan and Joseph Heller. American novelist Ernest Hemingway, in his autobiographic books, cited Dostoevsky as a major



Dostoevsky's tomb at the Alexander Nevsky Monastery.

influence on his work.

In a book of interviews with *Arthur Power* (*Conversations with James Joyce*), James Joyce praised Dostoevsky's influence:

"...he is the man more than any other who has created modern prose, and intensified it to its present-day pitch. It was his explosive power which shattered the Victorian novel with its simpering maidens and ordered commonplaces; books which were without imagination or violence."

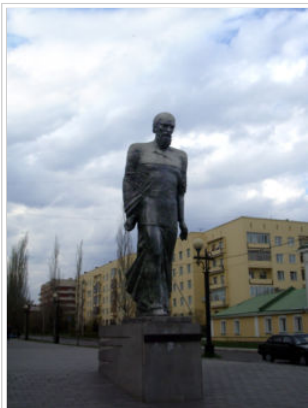
In her essay *The Russian Point of View*, Virginia Woolf stated that,

"The novels of Dostoevsky are seething whirlpools, gyrating sandstorms, waterspouts which hiss and boil and suck us in. They are composed purely and wholly of the stuff of the soul. Against our wills we are drawn in, whirled round, blinded, suffocated, and at the same time filled with a giddy rapture. Out of Shakespeare there is no more exciting reading."^[9]

Though a writer of symbolic tales (and in this respect sometimes compared to Herman Melville), Dostoevsky displayed a nuanced understanding of human psychology in his major works. He created an opus of vitality and almost hypnotic power, characterized by feverishly dramatized scenes where his characters are, frequently in scandalous and explosive atmosphere, passionately engaged in Socratic dialogues *à la Russe*; the quest for God, the problem of Evil and suffering of the innocents haunt the majority of his novels.

His characters fall into a few distinct categories: humble and self-effacing Christians (Prince Myshkin, Sonya Marmeladova, Alyosha Karamazov, Staretz Zosima), self-destructive nihilists (Svidrigailov, Smerdyakov, Stavrogin, the underground man), cynical debauchees (Fyodor Karamazov), and rebellious intellectuals (Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov); also, his characters are driven by ideas rather than by ordinary biological or social imperatives. In comparison with Tolstoy, whose characters are realistic, the characters of Dostoevsky are usually more symbolic of the ideas they represent, thus Dostoevsky is often cited as one of the forerunners of Literary Symbolism in specific Russian

Symbolism (see Alexander Blok).



Statue of Dostoyevsky in Omsk

Dostoevsky's novels are compressed in time (many cover only a few days) and this enables the author to get rid of one of the dominant traits of realist prose, the corrosion of human life in the process of the time flux — his characters primarily embody

spiritual values, and these are, by definition, timeless. Other obsessive themes include suicide, wounded pride, collapsed family values, spiritual regeneration through suffering (the most important motif), rejection of the West and affirmation of Russian Orthodoxy and Tsarism. Literary scholars such as Bakhtin have characterized his work as 'polyphonic': unlike other novelists, Dostoevsky does not appear to aim for a 'single vision', and beyond simply describing situations from various angles, Dostoevsky engendered fully dramatic novels of ideas where conflicting views and characters are left to develop unevenly into unbearable crescendo.

Dostoevsky and the other giant of late 19th century Russian literature, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, never met in person, even though each praised, criticized and influenced each other (Dostoevsky remarked of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* that it was a "flawless work of art"; Tolstoy once denounced *Crime and Punishment* in the account in the Henri Troyat biography where Tolstoy is reported to have remarked loosely that, "Once you read the first few chapters you know pretty much how the novel will end up"). There was, however, a meeting arranged, but there was a confusion about where the meeting place was and they never

rescheduled. Tolstoy reportedly burst into tears when he learnt of Dostoevsky's death. A copy of *The Brothers Karamazov* was found on the nightstand next to Tolstoy's deathbed at the Astapovo railway station. Since their time, the two are considered by the critics and public as two of the greatest novelists produced by their homeland.

Dostoevsky and Existentialism

With the publication of *Crime and Punishment* in 1866, Fyodor Dostoevsky became one of Russia's most prominent authors in the nineteenth century. Dostoevsky has also been labeled one of the founding fathers of the philosophical movement known as existentialism. In particular, his *Notes from Underground*, first published in 1864, has been depicted as a founding work of existentialism. For Dostoevsky, war is the rebellion of the people against the idea that reason guides everything. And thus, reason is the ultimate principle of guidance for neither history nor mankind. Having been exiled to the city of Omsk (Siberia) in 1849, many of Dostoevsky's works entail notions of suffering and despair.

Nietzsche referred to Dostoevsky as "the only

psychologist from whom I have something to learn: he belongs to the happiest windfalls of my life, happier even than the discovery of Stendhal." He said that *Notes from the Underground* "cried truth from the blood." According to Mihajlo Mihajlov's "The great catalyzer: Nietzsche and Russian neo-Idealism", Nietzsche constantly refers to Dostoevsky in his notes and drafts through out the winter of 1886-1887. Nietzsche also wrote abstracts of several of Dostoevsky's works.

Freud wrote an article entitled Dostoevsky and Parricide that asserts that the greatest works in world literature are all about parricide (though he is critical of Dostoevsky's work overall, the inclusion of *The Brothers Karamazov* in a set of the three greatest works of literature is remarkable).

Major works

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Бедные люди

Poor Folk

1846



Записки из мертвого
дома

Пе

***The House of the
Dead***

1860



Преступление и
наказание

***Crime and
Punishment***

1866



Подросток

The Raw Youth

1875

Б

Short stories

- *Белые ночи (White Nights)* (1848)
- *Елка и свадьба (A Christmas Tree and a Wedding)* (1848)
- *Слабое сердце (A Weak Heart)* (1848)
- *Честный вор (An Honest Thief)* (1848)
- *Вечный Муж (The Eternal Husband)* (1870)
- *Мужик Мареу (The Peasant Marey)* (1876)
- *Сон смешного человека (The Dream of a Ridiculous Man)* (1877)

- *Кроткая* (*A Gentle Creature*, sometimes translated as *The Meek Girl*) (1876)

Notes

¹ Dostoevsky, Fyodor; Introduction to *The Idiot*, Wordsworth Ed. Ltd, 1996.

References

1. ^ Dostoevsky's other Quixote.(influence of Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote on Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*) Fambrough, Preston
2. ^ Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre Walter Kaufmann ISBN-10: 0452009308 page 12
3. ^ Notes from the Underground Coradella Collegita Bookshelf edition, *About the Author*.
4. ^ epilepsy.com Famous authors with epilepsy.
5. ^ Frank 76. Quoted from *Pisma*, I: 135-137.
6. ^ Dostoevsky the Thinker James P. Scanlan. *Dostoevsky the Thinker*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002. xiii, 251 pp.
7. ^ Dostoevsky's View of Evil Reprinted from *In Communion*, April 1998.

8. ^ Zouboff, Peter, Solovyov on
Godmanhood: Solovyov's Lectures on
Godmanhood Harmon Printing House:
Poughkeepsie, New York, 1944; see
Czeslaw Milosz's introduction to Solovyov's
War, Progress and the End of History.
Lindisfarne Press: Hudson, New York 1990.
9. ^ The Russian Point of View Virginia
Woolf.

See also

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| ■ Cultural depictions of | ■ Aleksandr |
| Fyodor Dostoevsky | Solzhenitsyn |
| ■ History of the Russian | ■ Philokalia |
| Orthodox Church | ■ Hesychasm |
| ■ Anti-Catholicism | ■ Nihilism |
| ■ Ivan Ilyin | ■ Free will |
| ■ entropy | ■ determinism |
| ■ Nikolai Berdyaev | ■ Negative |
| ■ Nikolai Lossky | theology |
| ■ Existentialism | ■ Albert Camus |
| ■ Vladimir Sergeyevich | ■ Jean-Paul |
| Solovyov | Sartre |
| ■ Mikhail Epstein | |
| ■ Nikolay Strakhov | |
| ■ Lev Shestov | |
| ■ Russian Orthodox | |
| Church | |

- Søren Kierkegaard

External links

- [FyodorDostoevsky.com](#) - The definitive Dostoevsky fan site: discussion forum, essays, e-texts, photos, biography, quotes, and links.
- Article on Notes from the Underground "Love and the Underground Man," Conference Journal, Aut. 1998.
- [FedorDostoievsky.com](#) - Dostoevsky fan site
- Fyodor Dostoevsky's brief biography and works
- Works by Fyodor Dostoevsky at Project Gutenberg
- Selected Dostoevsky e-texts from Penn Library's digital library project
- Free audiobook of *Notes from Underground* from LibriVox
- Full texts of some Dostoevsky's works in the original Russian
- Another site with full texts of Dostoevsky's works in Russian
- Fyodor Dostoyevsky - Biography, ebooks, quotations, and other resources
- *Crime and Punishment*, Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa

Volokhonsky. Vintage Classics, 1992, New York.

- *Crime and Punishment*, Fyodor Dostoevsky, translated by Constance Garnett, introduction by Joseph Frank. Bantam Books, 1987, New York.
- Some photos of places and statues that are reminiscent of Dostoevsky and his work
- Dostoevsky Research Station
- ALEXANDER II AND HIS TIMES: A Narrative History of Russia in the Age of Alexander II, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky
- *Dostoevsky*, Joseph Frank. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979-2003 (5 volumes).
- Fyodor Dostoevsky at the Internet Book List
- Dostoyevsky 'Bookweb' on literary website The Ledge, with suggestions for further reading.
- Fyodor Dostoevsky Chronicle by Erik Lindgren

The Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky

Major Works: *Poor Folk* | *The Double: A Petersburg Poem* | *Netochka Nezvanova* | *The Village of Stepanchikovo* | *The Insulted and Humiliated* | *The House of the Dead* | *A Nasty Story* | *Notes from Underground* | *Crime and Punishment* | *The Gambler* | *The Idiot* | *The Possessed* | *The Raw Youth* | *The Brothers*

Karamazov

Short Stories: "White Nights" | "A Christmas Tree and a Wedding" | "An Honest Thief" | "The Peasant Marey" | "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" | "A Gentle Creature" | "A Weak Heart"

Other: "The Grand Inquisitor" | Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov

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