

Dostoyevsky and Poe: Two Great Story Tellers

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Abstract

Poe as well as Dostoyevsky has some unique individualistic traits in delineation of their characters; it is observed that Dostoyevsky's characters are made sentimental, struggle of life is felt by them intensely and they think too much which is the inevitable part of their personality, ultimately leads them towards the state of indecision which causes them to surrender before the existing circumstances; on the other hand, Poe's characters are more intellectual than sentimental, although they do feel the fever and frets of life but they manage the equilibrium of mind in an extraordinarily positive manner which enables them to struggle against the oddities of life till the last moment

Key words: Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Edgar Allan Poe, short stories, artificial, real, characters.

Introduction

Short-stories of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Edgar Allan Poe are a psychological account of human nature. Stories about such a broad subject can be made powerful and appealing to our intellectual interests if there is a link between the reader, the action and the characters. They make all these links at the right places. Their short-stories have been hailed as the greatest literary work in the western hemisphere. Poe and Dostoyevsky's writings show insight into the human mind that is at once frightening and frighteningly real.

Circumstances in Dostoyevsky and Poe Stories

Circumstances forced their characters' suffering upon them, as they force suffering upon most of humanity. What is suffering broke down was their egoism and its attendant rationalism. This recapitulates their own horrible experiences in prison. Their short-stories are a brilliant portrait of sin and remorse, guilt and justice, redemption through suffering and sacrifice. They represent a testing of the limits of individual freedom and are gripping metaphysical detective stories.

They are beautiful without falling into stupid melodrama: they are touching without being boring. If we are touched, it happens not only because of tragic situations, but mainly because of the skill used by Dostoyevsky and Poe in creating each character. They are dear to us, because we know them, because they seem real. They have their failures, they are often more evil than good but don't deserve our retaliation, but only our compassion for they are sufferers. Each of these characters are like those we encounter in real life, is a mystery to fathom.

Variability of Story Telling

The reader is invited to guess what the underlying principles are that pull together such apparently contradictory actions; what childhood traumas, what crucial life decisions, what current circumstances have contributed to this or that character acting in such and such a way. Just as each real individual we meet is a moral mystery, so Dostoyevsky and Poe's characters force us to wonder about them as if they were real. Only an artificial construction ... a stereotype- can be completely fathomed. It was their belief that real people are not such neat constructions. Thus, we have moral encounters with their characters.

Dostoyevsky and Poe: Two Great Story Tellers

Dr. Satyendra Sharma

Like real moral encounters, they leave us questioning our own values. This is why Tolstoy could not bear to call Dostoevsky a 'real' artist. Tolstoy felt that a true artist gives answers to the deeper questions of life. Dostoevsky's characters are question mark. The element of mystery - of unfathomableness- is there in just about all of them. So we ponder over the motives of their characters ... and ask ourselves: "What are their principles? What should be their principles? And ultimately, what should ours be?" In their short-stories, Poe and Dostoevsky ask unanswerable questions, but answer them we must? Like it seemed obvious to Poe and Dostoevsky that we need to love one another as Jesus directed.

But it was equally obvious to them that we don't. What is to be done? They refuse to concede that society can be rationalized for our benefit. Society is no more rational than we are. At heart of every person is a mystery and we encountering that mystery through a kind of feeling, such as the feeling we might have in moments of self-transcendence.

They insist on the sacredness of the individual, and bitterly hates any institution which oppresses individuals, but they defend the individual in the name of a sacred mystery shared between the individual and God, not in the name of man's 'higher rational faculties'. And if it is not our essence to be rational, then we cannot be countered upon to be good, either. If man is an irrational animal whose desire to create a big effect in the world is typically a stronger motive than good sense, then any sort of good or evil is potentially lurking in us. We can see these good and evil schemes hatched in the minds of a broad range of their characters.

Here, Dostoevsky and Poe's position as writer, artist, philosopher, lets them off the hook. We don't need to get answer from them. And this is definitely a time when they leave us with an open question. In a world where millions cried for bread and land, and when the Christian religion was increasingly forced to acknowledge that the masses did deserve food, medicine and freedom from tyranny ... Poe and Dostoevsky insisted that bread and land can tempt people away from what is really important which is our freedom to express our individual quirks, our desires, our whims ... the freedom to make our own mistakes ... to create something entirely new.

We can distinguish two types of schemes in Poe and Dostoevsky's short stories for securing human happiness. The first is well-known and we may call it 'utilitarian'. What is best is that which produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

What happiness is remains controversial, but given an account of happiness, there will be a rational scheme according to which it is optimally distributed. A well-known objection to utilitarianism is that the production of overall happiness may require immense unhappiness on the part of some unfortunate few.

Poe and Dostoevsky's best tales are about either the human soul or human mind forming a new consciousness underneath. They reveal the human soul through their literary thoughts in search for final knowledge. Their literary thoughts carry much psychological weight.

They picture the conscience, the fear, the capacity of brooding. Through their extraordinary tales, they make their readers live with their characters. Both Dostoevsky and Poe is the master of delineating a guilty soul. To them literary thoughts is an object of psychoanalysis. While their specialization can be observed when they examine the deep-buried and unknown realms of human mind. They are to be considered as the leaders of the cult of the power of literary thoughts. Their tales inspire the scientific and analytical brain to do something significant and new.

I read the short-stories of these two great writers many times and each time these presented a new

Dostoevsky and Poe: Two Great Story Tellers

Dr. Satyendra Sharma

dimension and some new aspects of their humanitarian and existential view which is the need of the hour. The apex goal as far as I can understand of Dostoyevsky and Poe's writing is to make people aware about the fragility of life and worthlessness of the worldly riches and according to them life of a person gains fullness if only it proves of any use to society and fellow human beings. Life is an incessant journey, travels and problems (social, psychological, existential, mental and spiritual) are its companions but according to them, life never comes to at a standstill, it moves on, and on, and on.

Ultimately gives a message:
Awake, arise and achieve the goal.

There is a wide range of existential efforts in Poe's short-stories. His characters are more keen and enthusiastic to exist in this world while Dostoyevsky's characters live in their self-made utopia and in general hesitate to face the stern realities of life, this turns his characters look pathetic on the other hand Poe's characters are always ready to encounter the circumstances with their utmost capabilities; they seem more life-like due to their active participation in whatsoever happening around them, they never try to escape which is their strength. His characters appear more bold although they turn against moral as well as social norms.

Dostoyevsky's characters are made too much sensitive; they show the acuteness of pain most convincingly, they move us, and no doubt, we feel a good deal of sympathy for them but they lead humanity to nowhere. Readers think who is responsible for their downfall rather than having any inspiration from them. Dostoyevsky presents the gloominess of life through his various themes. We may say that as an artist Dostoyevsky stands supreme but as a torch-bearer he could not deliver much for suffering humanity.

Contrarily, Poe always has something positive and interesting for his readers, his characters have certain good reasons to live on this planet; therefore they leave something optimistic for the generations to come, this is a message to exist with a cheerful face. Dostoyevsky has monotonous theme of human sufferings while Poe has a wide range - psychological based stories, detective stories, scientific fantasy based stories and all these are with a message of hope.

Characteristics of Dostoyevsky and Poe Stories

Poe as well as Dostoyevsky has some unique individualistic traits in delineation of their characters; it is observed that Dostoyevsky's characters are made sentimental, struggle of life is felt by them intensely and they think too much which is the inevitable part of their personality, ultimately leads them towards the state of indecision which causes them to surrender before the existing circumstances; on the other hand, Poe's characters are more intellectual than sentimental, although they do feel the fever and frets of life but they manage the equilibrium of mind in an extraordinarily positive manner which enables them to struggle against the oddities of life till the last moment, which is the hallmark of Poe's art of characterisation and made his characters more sustainable.

Conclusion

So we may say that Dostoyevsky's characters have excessively emotional temperament and most of the time guided by their instinct, therefore, they represent the pessimistic side of life in a better way; contrarily Poe's characters endure and resist before the existential aspects of life and try to make it worth-living in their own way which provides them with a positive outlook towards life this is the true message.

Dostoyevsky and Poe: Two Great Story Tellers

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