

Demons on the screen

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ABSTRACT

Dostoevsky's *Demons* is arguably his most difficult novel to transpose to the cinema. Yet, in the last thirty years this novel has been adapted for the screen more frequently than any other of Dostoevsky's works. This paper juxtaposes two most prominent Russian transformations of this novel: TV-series *Demons* (2014) by Vladimir's Khotinenko and *Demons: Nikolai Stavrogin* (1992) by Igor and Dmitry Talankin. These films offer distinctive conceptions on adapting the novel and illustrate the major differences in approaches to adaptation of classical literary texts at the beginning of the post-Soviet period and during the so called "restoration turn" of 2000s. For example, whereas the Talankins' film targets a limited audience and engages freely and creatively with the source novel, Khotinenko's *Demons*, addresses the mass audience and adheres closely not only to the "hypotext," but also to Dostoevsky's letters and notebooks, bringing to the forefront the issues, associated with the "fidelity criticism". Both films, however, underscore the ongoing relevance of Dostoevsky's text. But whereas the Talankins' *Demons* engages with Russia's past, affecting its transitional present, Khotinenko draws on Dostoevsky in order to shape a picture of the future. In the end, both films reflect back on the periods of their making, unraveling these periods' social, political and artistic anxieties.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, *Demons*, film, Khotinenko, the Talankins.

In May 2014, numerous billboards in the center of Moscow featured prominent figures of the Russian liberal intelligentsia depicted in the nude. The caption of this provocative image read "Demons in Moscow". This poster, referring unmistakably to Dostoevsky's *Demons*, was in fact advertising an exhibition of works by the Russian-American artist Yuriy Danich. The highlight of the exhibition was the same painting, which claimed the entire surface of a wall in the exhibition hall, as well as the right to bring the weight of Dostoevsky's name into an act of political demonization.

Danich's painting is just one example of recent renewed interest in Dostoevsky and his novel *Demons*, which is particularly apparent in visual arts and theater. Despite the well-known criticism that any transformation of *Demons* is doomed to fail, since the early 1990s several famous theatre and film directors, including Lev Dodin, Igor and Dmitry Talankin, Yuriy Lubimov, Andrzej Wajda, Vladimir Khotinenko and others, have adapted this novel either to the stage or for the screen. In cinema, in the last thirty years, *Demons* has been adapted more frequently than any other novel by Dostoevsky. The interest in *Demons* naturally raises questions: What draws contemporary directors to this novel? Does it allow for a multiple creative readings? How might post-Soviet directors adapt it to address contemporary concerns?

In 1913 Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko produced one of the first and most famous adaptations of *Demons* in Russia on the stage of Moscow Art Theatre. The play won great public acclaim, despite fierce criticism from Maxim Gorky, who famously proclaimed Dostoevsky "an evil genius" and a "cruel talent". So Gorky's strong appeal, that "all people of sound mind [...] [should] protest the production of Dostoevsky's work on the stages

of theaters” (Gorky, 1953, Vol. 24, p.150) seemed to be well observed shortly before and, particularly, after the Bolsheviks came to power. Jakov Protazanov made an attempt to revive the project of Nemirovich-Danchenko in cinema in 1915, but no other serious cinema adaptations of the novel followed before the acclaimed film *The Possessed* by Andrzej Wajda in 1988.⁵⁸ Wajda’s production launched the following succession of Russian transformations of *Demons*: a feature film by Igor and Dmitry Talankin (1992), a TV-series by Adahov and Karyk (2006), another series by Vladimir Khotinenko, (2014), and an art-house production by Roman Shaljapin (2014).

Vladimir’s Khotinenko’s TV-series *Besy* (2014), commissioned by the television channel “Russia-1,” was called “the major television event of the year” (Alperina, 2014) and was distinguished by several prestigious awards. The first post-Soviet Russian adaptation of the novel by the Talankins in 1992, on the other hand, drew only marginal attention, and is virtually forgotten by now. These films, however, are especially worth juxtaposing. Not only do they offer strikingly different interpretations of the novel, but they represent major differences in approaches to adapting classical literary texts at the beginning of the post-Soviet period and during the so-called “restoration turn” of 2000s. This turn, as Tatjana Kruglova (2014) argues, is dominated by a conservative culture, and in contrast to the modernistic taste of the ‘90s, is characterized by an obsessive desire on the part of artists (and their patrons) to make everything as “classical” as possible. (Kruglova, 2014, p. 326). Thus, for example, the Talankins’ film, engaged rather freely and creatively with the source text. Khotinenko’s *Demons*, on the contrary, targeted a mass audience and aimed for “fidelity” to the text and its author by incorporating all the major plotlines and citations of the novel as well as by drawing on Dostoevsky’s letters and notebooks. Both films address the social and political concerns of the periods in which they were made. But whereas the Talankins’ *Demons* engages with Russia’s past – which the filmmakers saw as affecting its transitional, post-Soviet present – Khotinenko, it seems, turned to Dostoevsky’s novel in order to send warnings and to shape a picture of the future. As a result, both films reflect back on the periods of their making, unraveling these periods’ social, political, and artistic anxieties.

Igor Talankin made his film *Demons: Nikolai Stavrogin* in cooperation with his son Dmitry in 1992, the toughest time for the formerly Soviet film studios, which lost the state support they depended on and lacked new systems of film distribution (Larsen, 1999, p. 195). By 1992, Igor Talankin had already established an international reputation by winning an Oscar nomination in 1969 and a Golden Globe Award in 1972 for his film *Tchaikovsky*. Yet his adaptation of Dostoevsky’s novel did not receive much attention, even though it starred some of the most prominent Soviet actors of the time (Vjatcheslav Tihonov, Armen Dzigarhanian, Fedor Bondarchuk, and others).

The Talankins’ film hardly conceals the challenges that faced filmmakers during the period: it looks low budget, corresponding to the spirit of the so-called “turbulent and hungry” years both in the quality of cinematography and in its style. The genre of the Talankins’ film is reminiscent of the “chernukha” – the popular ‘dark’ films of the early 90s. Attempting to capture the novel’s mood and its sinister atmosphere, the film relies primarily on dark and gloomy colors, and its imagery resembles the paintings of Caravaggio with their sharp

⁵⁸ In 1980s Iuri Kariakin intended to transpose this novel into film, but only managed to publish his ideas on this project in a range of publications. (Lary, 1986, p. 230)

contrasts between light and darkness. These visual contrasts seem to underscore a duality in the universe at large, as well as the struggle between good and evil on the part of the major characters. In general, light rarely peeks through the screen, leaving night, rain and dirt as major visual registers of the movie.

The Talankins' *Demons* approaches Dostoevsky's text in a liberal manner. While following the general plot of the novel (the murder of Shatov by Verkhovensky's cabal and Stavrogin's spiritual crisis), the film disregards several other plotlines, for example those of Stepan Verkhovensky and Gaganov. While cutting, substituting and condensing characters and episodes, the Talankins' film brings to the forefront what seemed to be the most poignant and urgent issues of the period: Russia's confrontation with its Soviet past and its ambivalent stance towards faith and Christianity.

The events of the Talankins' *Demons* unfold in close proximity to a train station, so train noises form the background for some of the most important scenes: an opening conversation between Stavrogin and Petr Verkhovensky, a meeting of "Our own", the conversation at Shatov's apartment, etc. The metaphor of the train station seems to underscore Russia's transitional, borderline state, both at the period during which Dostoyevsky foresaw the rise of radical movements, as well as during the aftermath of the Soviet regime.

The opening scene of the movie depicts Stavrogin riding a train back to Russia and recollecting one of his conversations with Petr Verkhovensky. Verkhovensky's monologue, which articulates his and Shigalev's apocalyptic social utopia ("All are slaves, and equal in their slavery" (*Demons*, 2008, p.463) takes place in Dostoevsky's text much later and in a different setting. The Talankins' introduction of the movie with one of the famous quotes of Verkhovensky – "Well then, finally there's the most important force, the cement that binds everything: the shame of their own opinion" (*Demons*, 2008, p.427) – clearly alludes to Russia's immediate Soviet past and invites the viewer to reflect upon it, as well as on the prophetic nature of Dostoevsky's *Demons*. As some critics have already noticed, Petr Verkhovensky in the Talankins' movie, played by Petr Yurchenkov, even calls to mind the young Lenin (*Turbin*, 1993, p.70).

The Talankins' *Demons* also breaks with one of the major taboos of the Soviet period: the topic of Christianity. The film is full of religious imagery, from a reproduction of Raffael's *Sistine Madonna* that serves as the mise-en-scene of Shatov's conversation with Stavrogin, to a Russian folk choir singing religious songs often audible on the background. The most powerful religious symbol in the film, however, is the image of a semi-dilapidated cathedral, before which the Talankins stage some of the most important events from the novel (Stavrogin's wandering at night, Shatov's murder, and others). This imagery serves as an extended metaphorical link between the past and the present. On the one hand, the portrayal of the church in ruins is a characteristic image of the Soviet period in Russian history, rather than of the 19th century Russia. On the other hand, in the directors' vision, it stands out as a powerful reminder of the roots and consequences of Russia's 'demonic possession'.

Like Dostoevsky's novel, the Talankins' film accentuates the process of contamination, rather than redemption; but the filmmakers emphasize the theme perhaps even more than the novelist. For example, the film literalizes the second epigraph of *Demons* – Saint Luke's story of the Gadarene swine and the exorcism of a possessed man performed by Jesus – by turning this central metaphor of the novel into a scene in the action of the movie. Right after

the meeting of “Our own,” (which serves as the stage for the most important sociological and political discussion of both the novel and the movie) a herd of swine charges through the street toward Stavrogin and Verkhovensky, drowning out with squealing their attempt at reconciliation. The windows of the house in the scene’s background are lit blood red, and this scene curiously omits the hint of redemption in its Biblical parallel, in which Jesus ultimately cures the possessed man.

The Talankins’ film also seems to personify the meaning of the first epigraph of the novel – a poem by Pushkin called *Demons* (1830) – in the central character Nikolai Stavrogin. Pushkin’s poem implies that Russia, misguided and afflicted by disorders, as if possessed, has long been wandering from its proper path:

Strike me dead – can’t see the way,
It’s lost we are, what can we do?
Could be a demon’s leading us through fields
In circles, and we’ve gone astray.

Stavrogin, in the Talankins’ interpretation, appears as one of the misguided wanderers. From the very beginning of the film this character is drawn as weak and lost, rather than as the charismatic tempter of the novel. In the opening scene of the film, for example, Stavrogin gives Verkhovensky his famous advice on how to unite the circle with blood. Yet, immediately afterwards, he demonstrates his disgust with Verkhovensky’s proposals by throwing him off the train. The duality of Stavrogin’s character, inscribed in his name (“stavros” means “cross” in Greek, and “rog” means “horn” in Russian), is captured in a scene in which Dasha finds Stavrogin lying on the floor with his body stretched in the form of a cross. The pose seems to align the character’s suffering with those of Jesus; yet Stavrogin is lying face down, so that his body almost alludes to the cross as the instrument of Christ’s torture rather than to Christ’s sacrifice. Similarly, while professing himself an atheist, Stavrogin nevertheless wears a large cross; shortly before his suicide, we observe him taking off the cross and kissing it. The ambivalence of Stavrogin towards faith echoes the confused religiosity of the Russian folk itself – the folk, who lightly forsook Christianity and replaced it with substitute Soviet values, and who now struggle to reclaim faith, while wandering between the ruins of churches and communist ideology.

Demons, as it seems, are thoroughly external in the Talankins’ scheme. The absence of the figure of Stepan Verkhovensky – the apparent and symbolical father of the possessed in the novel – elides the question of whether the earlier generations of Russians bear any responsibility for Russia’s misfortunes. In leaving out Stepan Verkhovensky, the film also omits his famous interpretation of Luke’s story, namely his observation that “all the demons [...] [have] accumulated in our [...] beloved sick man, our Russian, over the course of centuries!” (*Demons*, 2008, p. 724) This citation, as well as Dostoevsky’s novel in general, seem to suggest that the demons, associated with the radicals, are in fact not the source but rather the symptom of Russia’s longstanding disease, rooted deeply in its culture and society. As Sergei Bulgakov famously stated, “*Demons* is not about Russian revolution, but about the malady of the Russia’s soul” (Bulgakov, 1993, p. 523). On the contrary, all responsibility in the film is shifted to the deviousness of the Bolsheviks, who arrived from abroad and “[took] advantage of the weakness and gullibility of the Russian folk” (Sirivlja, 1993, p. 43).

The Talankins' film assaults Bolshevism relentlessly for its destructive impulses and godless ideology. Drawing a link between Russia's past and present, the directors also endeavor to reestablish Dostoyevsky's *Demons*, which had languished in oblivion during the Soviet period, as an integral part of the Russian literary cannon. But the film concerns itself more with rendering the mood and the spirit of the novel than with developing its philosophical ideas, which, unfortunately, the film curtails to focus on the concerns of the immediate post-Soviet period. Yet the Talankin's project succeeds in recreating with its visual imagery the atmosphere of ambiguity, instability and liminality, typical of transitional times, such as that of the film's making and the novel's composition.

Vladimir Khotinenko's *Demons*, produced twenty-two years after the Talankins' film, pursues quite different goals. In an interview with *Rossijskaya Gazeta*, Khotinenko described his approach to Dostoyevsky's work:

It is impossible to adapt *Demons*! For anyone, regardless of his talent. [...] Yet, a retelling of the novel is possible. [...] But that does not mean that the result is a transformed Dostoyevsky. That was my first condition when I decided to take upon this task. While adapting, I'll adhere strictly to the novel – no actualization, no transformation into the current period, etc. (Alperina, 2014)

Khotinenko's conception of adapting the novel differs significantly from the Talankins'. Unlike the earlier film, Khotinenko's production incorporates the main plot of the novel and hardly condenses any of the novel's characters. Furthermore, Khotinenko aspires to authenticity and fidelity to Dostoyevsky also by revisiting and reviving the material from Dostoyevsky's letters and notebooks. In particular, Khotinenko draws on the scenes, conversations, and ideas that Dostoyevsky did not include in his final manuscript when composing *Demons*. But does Khotinenko's apparent reverence for Dostoyevsky and do his attempts at authenticity guarantee that his work will convey the spirit and major ideas of the novel?

As Khotinenko emphasized in several interviews, his film relies on Dostoyevsky's guidance on how to adapt *Demons*, as allegedly stated in a letter from the author to the princess V.D. Obolenskaya dated January 20, 1872. In the letter, Dostoyevsky expresses skepticism about adapting the discussed work for the stage, and gives the princess the following advice:

Другое дело, если Вы как можно более переделаете и измените роман, сохранив от него лишь какой-нибудь эпизод, для преработки в драму, или, взяв первоначальную мысль, совершенно измените сюжет. (*Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenij*, 1986, Vol. 29.1., p. 225)

Dostoyevsky's instructions, however, concerned the transformation of the text of *Crime and Punishment* into a drama, rather than an adaptation of *Demons* into film (Saraskina, 2014). All the same, following these instructions might have the effect of raising a director to the status of Dostoyevsky's faithful disciple in the eyes of the viewing public. But Dostoyevsky's instructions stand in tension with what the director stated in his first quoted citation to be his intent. As Alexander Burry (2011) has noticed, "Dostoyevsky seems to invite and discourage transposition simultaneously" (Burry, 2011, p. 5). The novelist's call for change and abridgement of his works is the very antithesis of close fidelity to his texts, and perhaps Dostoyevsky is challenging other artists to approach his texts in a creative manner.

Vladimir Khotinenko claims to have achieved both: a high-fidelity transformation of and a creative response to *Demons*. Following Dostoyevsky's advice to "change the plot", the

filmmaker turns the philosophical and psychological novel into a detective story, introducing the character of a police official from St. Petersburg, named Goremikin, who arrives to investigate the murder of Shatov. This new character, while he does not demonstrate any deep psychological or intellectual insight, undoubtedly embodies the ethical and moral authority in the film. As Andrei Archangelsky (2014) has correctly noted, the narrator in the novel is one of us (namely a common, but an engaged civilian), whereas in Khotinenko's film, we examine the “demons” from the perspective of the “Grand Investigator”. This seems to change the viewpoint of the novel and introduce judgment that is contrary to Dostoevsky (Archangelsky, 2014). Goremikin, also appears as the only ultimate force capable of defeating the “possessed” revolutionaries. The portrait of revolutionaries that this character constructs, however, does not seem to resemble either the charismatic Nechaev or Dostoevsky's characters, but rather corresponds to the popular image of the leaders of the contemporary Russian opposition – “incompetent folk with sick ambitions” – as often presented in pro-government media. Khotinenko's adaptation emphasizes the lack of ideas among the conspirators over several episodes. What the film leaves out, however, is precisely what Dostoevsky's novel exposes as the essence of demonism: the division of mankind into two unequal parts, and the establishment of a state where “all are slaves, and are equal in their slavery”. (Demons, 2008, 463). These are namely the ideas of Shigalev, which the Talankins' film introduces in its opening scene. Unlike the Talankins, Khotinenko does not seem to find these ideas pertinent to present-day Russia. Moreover, at the beginning of the Talankins' film we hear Stavrogin's famous question: “Now listen, Verkhovensky, you're not from the secret police?” (Demons, 2008, p. 429) But Khotinenko's film, drops this citation, making the representative of the “higher police” the personification of honor (Bykov, 2014). On the other hand, the director does find relevant the shocking excerpts from Nechaev's “Catechesis of a Revolutionary” that describe the horrible practices a true revolutionary should follow, although Dostoevsky's novel does not cite Nechaev at all.

Khotinenko's film also portrays in one of its final scenes close cooperation between the representatives of the police and the church. Tikhon in the film is not as humble and apolitical as Dostoevsky's; in fact, the director turns him into a mouthpiece for one of his own – not Dostoevsky's – major quotes: “Revolutions never change anything. They just rearrange old elements in a new manner.” Significantly, the three-hour version of the film, screened during Moscow Film Festival in 2014 ends precisely with this conversation between Goremikin and Monk Tikhon. In this respect, Khotinenko's film seems to pick up Dostoevsky's unrealized project of a political pamphlet aimed against the spread of revolutionary activity in Russia. It is well known, however, that Dostoevsky abandoned his initial idea, and that his project ultimately became a polyphonic philosophical and psychological novel.

Unlike the dark and gloomy film of the Talankins, Khotinenko's film is full of light, color, and beautiful costumes and decorations of the 19th century. In one of his interviews, Khotinenko admitted that he wanted “to release Dostoevsky from the gloom that unjustly follows him like a plume.” (Zogorovskaya, 2014). This desire may partly explain the major leitmotif of the movie – namely, the image of a butterfly, an invention, which the director closely connects to Nikolai Stavrogin.

In his interviews Khotinenko justifies the butterfly leitmotif by drawing on a citation from Dostoevsky's notebook for *Demons*. In his conversation with Shatov, Stavrogin says:

«Мы, очевидно, существа переходные, и существование наше на земле есть, очевидно, непрерывное существование куколки, переходящей в бабочку» (*Polnoe Sobranie*, Vol 11, 1974, p. 183). Inspired by this citation, the director grants Stavrogin a hobby, entomology, which leads him to chase and study butterflies. As Khotinenko admits, Stavrogin, in his study of beauty as in everything else in life, tests the boundaries (Aljperina, 2014). As the full citation suggests, Stavrogin in Dostoevsky's earlier scheme perceived butterflies as the quintessence of beauty and a metaphor for the highest stage of existence. His interest in these creatures implied a yearning toward perfection. Yet Khotinenko subverts this striving in developing the metaphor. In one episode in the film, Stavrogin, studying the anatomy of a butterfly under a microscope, winces in horror at the ugly close-up image of the creature. Further, in a dream sequence he even turns into a butterfly, as if having metamorphosed from the form of a pupa, and wakes up shocked by the vision.

Is this imagery a mock homage to Nabokov, a passionate entomologist and a famous critic of Dostoevsky? Does it stand for the form of scientific and aesthetic contemplation, devoid of any humanistic goals or moral scruples? Or maybe the anatomy of a butterfly alludes to the 'anatomy of protest,' namely the essence of revolution as such – the 'beauty' of idealistic ideas, so often combined with the destructive means of achieving them? The ugly microscopic image of the butterfly seems to suggest this last interpretation, as well as Dasha's gesture of tossing all of Stavrogin's butterflies to chickens at the end of the movie. Yet, while the metaphor of a butterfly is an innovative aesthetic invention, none of its potential meanings corresponds to the spirit of Dostoevsky's work, or amplifies any deeper meanings of the novel. Rather, the leitmotif stands for the director's failed attempt at expanding in a creative manner on the source text, while drawing on Dostoevsky's notes.

The character of Stavrogin does not receive proper treatment in the film either. Since the essence of his letter to Dasha is excluded from the movie, Stavrogin's suicide, as Ludmila Saraskina (2014) has already noticed, appears to be triggered not by the character's spiritual crisis, but rather by the efforts of the local police, who surround his house shortly before his death (Saraskina, 2014). The film suggests, however, that the effect of the deeds of Stavrogin and his accomplices is felt to the present day. Khotinenko expresses this thought by enlisting another idea from Dostoevsky's notebooks. Whereas Dasha in Dostoevsky's earlier notes was meant to be pregnant with Stavrogin's child, but possibly had a miscarriage (which is symbolic – Stavrogin's children in Dostoevsky's scheme should be doomed), the last scene of the full-length film shows Dasha with Stavrogin's child against a beautiful Swiss landscape greeting a visiting Petr Verkhovensky.

In the end, Khotinenko's attempt at establishing authenticity and faithfulness to Dostoevsky by working with the author's notes and letters seems to have produced the opposite result. Whereas Dostoevsky's polyphonic work, as Bakhtin argues, never offers either a straightforward judgment or a monological synthesis of competing ideological perspectives, Khotinenko's film, on the contrary, is reminiscent at times of 16th century morality plays with good and bad angels, or of fables, in which the boundaries between moral extremes are so thickly drawn that independent thinking seems unwelcome and superfluous.

This simple moral scheme is particularly noticeable in Khotinenko's characterizations. Shatov, for example, is undoubtedly a positive character in the novel, but Khotinenko's film raises him almost to the status of national hero. For example, Shatov's conversation with

Stavrogin in the novel takes place at night during heavy rain in Shatov's tiny, dark room. During this conversation, Shatov expresses rather controversial nationalistic ideas, raising one nation – the Russian nation – to divine status, without even believing in God. The mise-en-scene of this conversation in Khotinenko's film moves to a sunny day in a beautiful park, where Shatov delivers his famous monologue against the background of an Orthodox church. Depicted in this manner, the character of Shatov and his ideas appear in the eyes of the viewer as the ultimate and unambiguous moral authority. Furthermore, the film comes close to suggesting that the belief in God is secondary to the belief in the divine mission of the nation.

In a similar manner, Khotinenko devises his own characterization of Stepan Verkhovensky. While in the Talankins' scheme the elder Verkhovensky had no place, Khotinenko includes the character, but shrinks his role according to his own conception. The novel, while presenting Stepan Verkhovensky as a ridiculous man, grants to precisely this character the responsibility of conveying the idea of Christianity by making him interpret the Biblical story of Luke. Dostoevsky, in the *Writer's Diary*, shows that Stepan Verkhovensky held more than a parodic meaning for him, writing: “Ведь я люблю Степана Трофимовича и глубоко уважаю его” (*Polnoje Sobranie*, 1981, Vol. 23, p. 64). Khotinenko, on the contrary, does not allow this character die on the way to Spasov with the Bible in his hands. Since Verkhovensky is a representative of Westerners and liberals, the director illustrates the vagueness and futility of his ideas by making him leave the town along a foggy road leading to nowhere. Arranging such a denouement for Stephan Verkhovensky caters precisely to the current expectations of both the state television and its audience, well accustomed to fierce anti-Western rhetoric.

Khotinenko does not shift the timing of the events to the present day, but his film undoubtedly employs the technique of actualization, signposting the film with references to current political issues in Russia. As a result, instead of a creative translation or a dialogue with the source text, one observes condensation and substitution not necessarily of characters and scenes, but rather of the ideas and polyphony of the novel. Whatever claims the director makes of scrupulous adherence to the source text and to Dostoevsky's notes, a novel conception underlies Khotinenko's engagement with *Demons*. This conception reflects the overall social and political climate of the present-day Russia and corresponds rather to the goals of the state television in promoting particular values and ideas, bolstered wherever possible by the authority of the high literary canon. This way, Khotinenko's adaptation seems to enact and embody its own metaphor. Like Stavrogin's butterfly, the film, at first sight, presents its spectators with a bright and beautiful image, but a closer view makes one shudder.

Khotinenko's *Demons* and the earlier film by the Talankins were made for very different audiences and employed opposite strategies in adapting a literary text (literal adherence to the source text versus creative reinterpretation). Yet both films seem to succeed, and fail, in a similar manner. Both exemplify well the cinematographic tendencies and preferences of their times. Secondly, both 'extend' the source text by exploring its relevance to the social-political issues of the periods in which each was made. Yet, in contrast to the Talankins' *Demons*, Khotinenko's film does not reflect on Russia's past; rather, it sends warnings for the future generations, aligning those who look for changes in Russia's present political status quo with the leftist extremists of the late 19th century.

One would hardly argue, however, with Khotinenko's observation that “no other book

than *Demons* has so much relevance to the present day” (Khotinenko, 2014 p. 79). Political extremism, fanaticism, and ethical disintegration remain pertinent contemporary issues. In Russia, in particular, many examples echo Dostoevsky’s text. Danich’s demonization of liberal intelligentsia with his painting “Demons in Moscow” seemingly reverberated in the acts of true «бесовщина»: less than a year after Danich’s exhibition one of the “demons” portrayed in his painting, the prominent opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, was assassinated close to the Kremlin walls; Danich’s other “demons” – some of Russian journalists and politicians – have been targets of long running campaigns of assault and intimidation. These attacks bring to mind another famous quote from Dostoevsky’s text: “Demons undoubtedly exist, but the understanding of them can vary greatly.” (*Demons*, 757)

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