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Conception of the Dream and the Vision in Dostoevsky's Early Novels

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Dream, vision and ecstasy belong – we can maintain without exaggeration – to the most interesting questions of literature. Two opposite spheres – the irrational and rational – get into contact with one another, spatial and temporal bounds move in the daily and nocturnal visions and mysterious powers enter the life of people bringing good or evil messages. The books of the Bible are accompanied by visions and oneiromancy (interpretation of dream) but the visions play an important role in the other ancient cultures too (in Egypt, Greece, Rome etc.)(1). I mention the ancient source because the roots of the topoi of modern literature go back to these old traditions, without them we can not closely interpret the meaning of symbols.

Dream, vision, ecstasy and the changed consciousness influenced by them (obsession, gift of prophecy) have a very significant role in Russian literature as well. We could enumerate a large number of works (novels, short stories, poems) whose themes build on the above mentioned themes. One of the most characteristic examples is the novel *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoi. At the beginning of the novel the fate "appears" in a double form : first in the reality – it is the death of the moushik by a railway accident –, then in Anna's dreams (or rather nightmares) wheret his fatal figure returns continuously as a symbol of death.

The abundance of dream-motifs in Russian literature is interesting not only because the quantity (though in Tolstoi's works 43 dreams are described!) (2) but by the increased awareness of continuity: from Shukovsky to Poushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Sollogub, Tourgeniev, Dostoevsky; the allusions and the variations of the borrowed elements and archetypes make this abundance very dynamic. The further question is the difference between the diabolic, dark visions and the light dreams – the so called golden- age-dreams. (3) They connect sometimes with Utopy as in Vladimir Sollogub's *Tarantas*. In the Russian literature

of the 19th century it is Dostoevsky, who built a continuous system of the dark and light dreams and visions and discovered in them philosophical and psychological meanings (see Mishkin in the *Idiot* and the "golden age" of Versilov in the novel *The Adolescent*).

By way of introduction I will give the main outlines of "dream-literature" (dream as the center or a very important part of the literary works) before Dostoevsky and then start the analysis of *The Housewife*. The brief survey of the previous, most typical examples helps us to find the genesis of the symbols used by Dostoevsky, as well as the function of the "light" and "dark" dreams – which are precursors of the later masterpieces (*Crime and Punishment*, *Idiot*, *The Dream of the Ridiculous Man*, *The Brothers Karamasov*, etc.).

In the literature of Russian romanticism there are many interesting variations of the dark, demonic dreams and the appearance of the power of the other-world in the nocturnal life of heroes. The fearful nightmares announce not only the fulfilment of negative events; on the contrary, they often help the hero to wake up – in a concrete and a figurative sense as well – , or to get disenchanted.

In Vasilij Shukovsky's ballads this theme plays an important role. Two ballads – *Ludmilla* and *Svetlana* - we call *dream-ballads* (a current term of ethnography) because their proper content is the dream itself. Both ballads deal with dark visions, but the "result" is different: in *Ludmilla* it is negative as the heroine did not understand the warning of the other world and chooses evil, while in *Svetlana* we find the positive outcome. The sources used by Shukovsky are remarkable: superstitions and various suppositions of Russian people and the literary material of German romanticism (Uhland, Bürger, *Der Erlkönig* of Goethe, etc). He had translated into Russian many excellent German and English ballads which then inspired him to study and use the Russian folklore as a possible poetic material.

The next important author of Russian early romanticism is Antony Pogorelsky (1787-1836) who can in some respects be considered the precursor of Gogol. His interest turns gradually to the irrational world: dreams, ambivalence (*dvoinichestvo*), superstitions etc. He gathered Ukrainian and Russian folk-tales, legends, popular interpretations of dreams, stories about witches and black magic but he was an expert in the European literature of mysticism as well; he has read Swedenborg and the German romantic writers, mainly E.T.A.Hoffmann

(*Der Elixiere des Teufels, Der kleine Zaches, Der Sandmann etc.*). In Pogorelsky's works there is an original alloy of Slavonic and European cultural traditions but he never mixes the different sources with one another. When he takes his theme from the life of Ukrainian and Russian people, he does not involve the influence of Svedenborg or Hoffmann, and inversely, when he deals with the nature of fantastic phenomena, he remains rather in the area of the European supernatural experiences. The synthesis of the Eastern and Western traditions appears in his way of thinking. He is the first in Russian literature to introduce the concept of the double (*dvoinik, Doppeltgänger*) in the cycle of short stories *My Evenings in Ukrania* (1828). Later it will be very important in Dostoevsky's works, not only in *The Double* (1846) but in the other novels too. Pogorelsky's double is not a copy of Hoffmanns "Doppelgänger", he has a unique attitude toward this theme, because he describes not the pathologic, demonic but the comic moments of the split personality. He preserves some of optimism of the Enlightenment, that's why the dark visions and the crisis of the romantic soul cannot capture him despite of his interest in mysticism. He was more distanced from his subject than Hoffmann or Gogol were.

Pushkin and Gogol – both masters to Dostoevsky – play an important role in the elaborating of literary functions of dream, vision and magic. Their attachment to the area of the supernatural was already appreciated by contemporary criticism; the younger generation – Turgeniev, Goncharov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoi – were interested in this theme, too. Later, at the turn of the century, the Russian symbolism, being responsive to mysticism, began to analyse the depiction of dreams in Gogolean and Pushkinian art. A. Remizov (1877-1957) (4), one of the best representatives of this period wrote a long essay on the dreams of Gogol's works (*Ogon' veshchei* – Fire of Things). His point of view is very original: he retells the visions and dreams of Gogol's fiction as those were his own experiences or remembrances, but at the same time the reader can see the difference between the imitated and imitator. Remizov makes it consciously: by this way he declares his literary attraction and his own voice and style.

Returning to Pushkin and Gogol, both authors join biographical moments and fiction in their works, namely, the interest in the irrational side of life is provoked by personal

questions and searches. Pushkin, for example, liked to listen to tales and other fantastic stories told by of his nurse, sometimes he tended to believe in superstitions. It is not accidental that he composed Tatiana's in the central part of *Onegin*: this prophetic dream, an artistic composition of archaic symbols that is a proper intersection of past and future; both the heroine and the reader can solve the riddle of it only by the end of story. After the decoding of the hidden moments the whole narrative poem obtains a deeper and a more-sided meaning. In the Pushkin's short-stories there are interesting dream-depictions as well. *The Coffin-Maker* (Grobovshchik) is not only a short story but also a psychological "study" in artistic form: the story is built on the dream of the hero, who will, after awakening, discover something important about himself. He has seen a "danse macabre": his former "customers" appear and dispute with him because the too expensive coffins he had made for them. In the daylife he always thought he was a good man, but in the dream he had to be confronted with his own small-minded swindles.(5) In *The Queen of Spades* the dream has an ambivalent character: it is a riddle, too, and the right solution could bring for the hero a fortune, but he misses the cards when in the game he uses the trick (the secret of the old countess) suggested by vision, and psychologically breaks down at the end.

Merging rational and irrational, communication between the fantastic and real worlds turns to be the central problem in Gogol's short story cycles at the 1830-ies (*Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki* – Evenings at the Grange Near Dikan'ka, *Mirgorod*) and in the so called Petersburg stories (*Nevsky Prospect*, *The Portrait*). The writer goes back to Ukrainian and Russian folklore: in a letter of April 1829 he asks his mother to describe national dresses (mail and female, the costume of village deacon and other principals), and collect wedding customs, rites, concerning Midsummernight, dream interpretations and ghost stories.(6) He uses this material freely, not as an ethnographer but as an artist: it serves fictional, not documentary aims in his works. Dreams and visions in the Petersburg stories have already more indirect character than in Dikan'ka-cycle. It opens a new theme for Gogol – the theme of city – and together with them the problem of alienation. In *Portrait*, for example, the hero's vision means the seduction of evil but it has very real psychological roots: the young painter, Chartkov (his name derives from *chart* = devil!) hesitating between the easy success

and the true art, can't refuse the gift of the demon, that of the money. One day he buys a strange portrait of an old man and he can't get free from the deep and suggestive eyes of this figure. While he sleeps, he is feeling on himself a magic glance, it seems to him as these eyes were living, and the whole night goes on in a turmoil of visions and awakenings. He covers the portrait with a cloth but it always falls down and the dark eyes are watching him. Finally the visions disappear and he falls asleep deeply. Wakening up in the morning, he goes to the portrait but its frame suddenly breaks up by touching it and a lot of gold coins fall on the floor. He accepts this unexpected – but desired! – "gift" which symbolises the choice of the false way, leading to success and to a routine without soul. From this day a gap is created in his life: he betrays sanctity of art and becomes richer and richer because he paints portraits of rich people as serial productions – but little by little he loses his talent. A few years later he sees a great picture of his young colleague which hits him as a thunderstroke: Chartkov understands what talent he has lost and becomes mad. In this short story the Gogolian romantic concept of art manifests itself very clearly: dualismus between authentic and diabolic art, between *ars sacra* and *ars diabolica*. In his opinion human soul is a battle-field between the good and evil powers and our destiny is to make the choice. In religiousness of Gogol this romantic dualism appears, too: by his longing for God he sees it nearly impossible to reach the moral ideal; that's why he often falls into pessimism and becomes responsive to the tragicomic aspects of life.

In Dostoevsky's oeuvre the description of dreams, visions, ecstasy and epileptic attacks make a certain system: the subconscious reveals itself once in light, and then in dark form. Before analysing the dreams and their connections, we must pay attention to language question which is very important in Dostoevsky's concept of this theme, namely the expressions (or denominations) of the non-conscientious state: 1. *son* = dream, that is "picture" that we see while sleeping, 2. *mechta* = daydream, product of fantasy, 3. *bred* = feverish dream, hallucination, 4. *griozza* = reverie, imagination. These four states in Dostoevsky's works are in a permanent movement and interchange: the daydream (*mechta*) and imagination (*griozza*) continue in the night-dream deformed by the subconscious, and on the contrary, impressions of feverish dreams and "normal" dreams influence the reality of the

hero. Moreover, in the great novels (*Crime and Punishment*, *The Adolescent*) the ideal (*id'eia*) and contemplation (*sozertsanie*) appear as correlations with day-dream (*mechta*).

In the early period of Dostoevsky's the function of dream is not so elaborated, as in his great novels, though remarkable is the author's interest in this theme. In 1846 he writes together with Nekrasov and Grigorovitch a little grotesque story whose dream- descriptions and fantastic details give evidence of Dostoevsky's attraction towards the secrets of human soul. (7) One year later in the *Petersbourg cronicle* he sketches the typical Russian daydreamer (*mechtat'el*); the sujets of the following stories – *The Double*, *Mr. Prokharchin* – are closely connected with the feverish dreams and hallucinations, then in *The Housewife* these elements will be composed in a more systematic and organic construction. It's plot is built on the identification (in language of stylistics paronomasie) daydream = life

~ life = feverish dream.

The hero of the novel, Ordinov has trouble facing reality like artist-heros of Gogol (*Piskar'ev* in *Nevsky Prospect*, *Chartkov* in *The Portrait*): he would like to realise his wishes and day-dreams, while in everyday life he shows a preference for the absurd, strange or irrational moments. He has a great passion towards the art (history and philosophy) which gradually gets him estranged from everyday life and he becomes a day-dreamer who confuses reality with his own wishes and fantasy. The most of artist-heroes in Russian literature (by Gogol, Turgeniev, Dostoevsky, Goncharov) are in some degree daydreamers (*mechtat'els*), though it is not necessary in general: i.e. not follows directly from the nature of things; the artists are not determined to live in disharmony with reality. But nearly all Russian artist-heroes and idealists (like Raskolnikov) come in conflict with their society and the common ideas of their time. In this conflict we should see their passionated desire to find the authentic existence and the real values – in spite of the fact they often miss the way which may lead to them. The "mechtat'el" with his divided soul is more responsive to the supernatural, mysterious aspects of life than the "normal", "healthy" people (by the general romantic conception of mid-nineteenth century). (The modern psychology beginning with Freud and Jung borrowed much experience of these dream-fictions).

Ordinov belongs to the "mechtate'els" as well, but life disconnects him from the world of ideas: he must leave his old lodgings and look for a new room. He gets into milling of Petersburg' streets, first enjoys these colorful scenes but in a little while beyond the funny mask he observes tiredness, grief, misery. In such a dubious mood he goes into a little church far from the city, where an interesting couple draws his attention: a beautiful young woman (Katerina) and a bad-looking old man (Ilia Murin) with a somehow suggestive, demonic gaze. They are praying before the icon of the Blessed Virgin, but the woman suddenly bursts out sobbing. Her beauty and her suffering shake Ordinov, in his idealistic soul some presentiments awaken, he wants to know who they are. His love for her is similar to obsession, he follows them after leaving the church and he will not rest before they get acquainted. A few days later he moves to them into a little dark room, then he gets ill, loses consciousness, suffers from feverish dreams and visions. From this point the two worlds – the inner and outer – are in permanent interchange, life is mirrored in dream, while dream reaches into life; the visions show a curious succession, a special rhythm.

During these hallucinations and visions he experiences a depressing fear, which suddenly transforms into ecstatic happiness. Delineation of similar conditions will appear in the late novels of Dostoevsky, too, as the indication of epileptic attack (for example, in *The Idiot*). In *The Housewife* the author follows an interesting method of dream description: from the intensiveness and temporariness of the fear and ecstasy he unfolds extensive and "stereoscopic" pictures of golden age and its destruction by the "unknown dark old man". There are scenes of his childhood, in a beautiful garden he is listening to a lullaby and feeling harmony, peace and caressing of his mother. Then the atmosphere changes, appears the "dark old man" and disturbs all: he expels the jolly fairies, takes away his mother for ever and whispers him dreadful tales in the night. The wicked man torments the child in spite of his imploring and sobbing. This scene closes with a surprising turn: the little boy suddenly awakens as an adult.

The elements of Ordinov' dreams – merry sprites, a beautiful garden with flowers, a crystal-clear lake and the personification of evil – are typical motifs found in fairy-tales. For Dostoevsky these topoi serve as symbols of the unconscious layers of the human psyche: from

these depths various signs come out to the surface of consciousness suggesting that one must change his life. In Ordinov' case: he has to abandon from an infantile state and reach fully adulthood. In the novel we can see a struggle of a young man for self knowledge: after awakening from the fever-dreams he is trying to understand his dreams. He perceives the parallel between his real life and his visions. Katerina (as a "fairy girl") and Murin ("dark old man") appear in his way at the moment of crisis, when he walks on Petersburg' streets, seeking lodging – and dreaming about future. Katerina and Murin can be identified with the typical persons of tales or myths: the hero must meet certain temptations and overcome difficulties for reaching his aims. Katerina's figure splits into two substances: in the Ordinov' dream she is "the mother", in his awoken reality (as fantastic as the dream) she is the woman of desire, who initiates him into the mysteries of love. The way from mother to woman is full of suffering but necessary for Ordinov, who lived until this "adventure" in an abstract world of arts and fantasy, knowing neither himself nor the real world. On the other hand, Katerina has a similar model of "initiation" but a more tragic and fatal one. She lives together with the old Murin (who could be her father) as his wife – and his captive. From her worrisome telling (a kind of ballade, or a Gogolean short story) of life it is evident, that Murin disturbed her family with his demonic power; the young Katerina simultaneously felt attraction and fear in his presence.

The figure of Murin connects the dream with the real world: the symbol of evil ("unknown dark old man") is fulfilled in life. His role of the "destroyer" and the "magician" gets clear in the stories of two young people: as Katerina's seducer and "gaoler", and at the same time, the disturber of the "golden age" i.e. the symbol of Ordinov's happiness.

Ordinov gets two variations about the dark, secretful past of this strange couple. By Katerina's version, Murin has a magnetic power; he manipulates emotions, intellect and sensitiveness. By this way can destroy all moral controls and reflections in his victim. Her adventure with Ordinov is a kind of abortive revolt against her seducer and warden. As for second version, Ordinov comes across it at the end of the novel, when Murin explains him the hysterical behavior of Katerina's: he takes her for insane, who needs care and only Murin is able to do it.

These two explanations are realised in different genres. In Katerina's story lyric and dramatic elements blend: the interrupted manner of speaking, her vocabulary give an effect of a romantic ballad. Murin imitates a popular style, but behind his pretended wisdom and categorical decisions interspersed with proverbs there lie cynicism and thirst for power. It seems that Ordinov could not know the truth about them. Unlike the mythological heroes, he did not conquer evil in the surface of reality, but in the fantastic interchanges of dreams and reality he descended in his subconscious; he passed an initiation into life; and this is more important, than the victory over his "outer" rival: he obtained selfknowledge, what can be the first condition for a true and creative life. We remember, at the beginning Ordinov is "dreaming" (mechtaet) about a great literary work, about the "creation" – but he lacks experience and resolution. Like the Pushkinian *Coffin-Maker*, there is no story in a classical sense of the novel: what was exciting, happened either in a dream/exaltation or in the past. In the triangle of Ordinov – Katerina – Murin relations change, but at least all things will be reestablished by the model of the starting-point: the beautiful woman and the "unknown dark old man" disappear from his way.

It is remarkable that young Dostoevsky was interested in the psychological problems of human being, for example in the defects and deformations of the consciousness. His early short stories and novels (*The Double*, *Mister Prokharchin*, *The Housewife*) depict a series of curious portraits which became for the contemporary criticism – influenced by the "natural'naiia shkola" – as somewhat extreme (8). In a letter of the 17 years old Dostoevsky (to the brother, Mikhail) we find an interesting account about his reading: he has read Hoffmann's novels and one figure – Alban from *Der Magnetiseur* – left a deep impression on his remembrance. Dostoevsky did not mention the title, only the name of the figure, but very important why Alban excited him. He writes: " it is terrible to see a man, who has in his power the unattainable, he plays with a toy (*igrushka*), that is no other than – God." (9). In that figure Hoffmann describes how people can abuse magnetism: with the manipulation of the psyche one can obtain domination over the other. It is not difficult to discover the connection between the figures of Alban and Murin: the magnetism as the instrument of deformation, manipulation. Of course, in Dostoevsky's character we can find other allusions as well: for

example, the name Murin gives associations with *Kater Murr* of Hoffmann, the same name goes back to Russian historical songs (*bylina*) whose hero is called Ilja Muromec; and it can be related a real historical person, a converted robber-chief, Ilja Murin.⁽¹⁰⁾ I would like to emphasize the above mentioned letter as one of the first documents of Dostoevsky's interest in psychology. The next and more important work in this relation is *Psyche* of Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869), a book that Dostoevsky begins to study with the help of baron Wrangel in Sibiria, 1856. ⁽¹¹⁾ In this book we can find a very serious analysis of the subconscious and conscious life of the soul. We do not know if Dostoevsky read the whole book, but the fact of having had this work in his hands and having read only the introduction is enough to attempt for criticism an interpretation of his early novels and short stories by help of the concepts of late romantic psychology. The instinct of the artist came to understand some secrets of the soul in an amazingly similar way science did (at that moment of human history). In the 20th century Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on Dostoevsky's novel, then the other modern theories concentrating only on text, overshadow the possible psychological approaches to the corpus of Dostoevsky's works. I mean, into the philology on Dostoevsky it will bring very interesting results, if we try to research the relation of the writer to the contemporary psychology more profoundly. We must not stop by his many quoted statement (" They call me a psychologist: it is not true, I am only a realist, in higher sense of the word, because I describe the whole depth of the human soul") and treat psychology only in biographical relation; the words "I describe the whole depth of the human soul" encourage us to search, what could mean "the whole depth of human soul" for Dostoevsky.

NOTES

1 HAHN, István: Álomfejtés és társadalmi valóság. Artemidorus Daldianus mint társadalomtörténeti forrás. Budapest, 1985.

2 KARANCSY, László: Tolsztoj lélekábrázoló módszere. Budapest, 1990.

3 SCHULZ, Christiane: Aspekte der Schillerschen Kunsttheorie im Literaturkonze Dostoevskijs. Vorträge und Abhandlungen zur Slavistik. Herausgegeben von P. Thiergen (Bamberg), Band 20, verlag Otto Sagner, München, 1992. The author of the book deals with common elements of Schiller's and Dostoevsky's aesthetics, among those with the "golden age" dreams. She emphasizes Dostoevsky's profoundly knowledge of the ancient literature,

works of Homer, Vergilius Horatius and Ovidius. He was interested especially in the 4. ecloga of Vergilius.

4 On the role of the fantastic phenomena and dreams in Pushkin's and Gogol's works see ROZANOV, V.V.: *Mysli o literature*, Moskva 1989, chapters *Pushkin i Gogol* (158-166) and *Gogol* (274-281).

5 *The Coffin-Maker* is one of the short stories of *The Tales of Belkin* (1830). The contemporary criticism failed to perceive the profound meaning of these stories, they were treated as pretty tales without serious thought. (Belinsky, for example, writes 1835 "they are simply tales and fables" In: *Poln. sobr. soch.* v 13 t., 1953, p. 139). In the 20th century, the formalists interpreted *Tales...* as a parody of the traditional romantic short story; we must not search meaning in them, because they have only form (see: EICHENBAUM, Boris: *Problemy poetiki Pushkina*, 1924). Sergei BOCHAROV discusses the problem of these preconceptions and discovers the true meaning of *The Coffin-Maker* (*O smysle Grobovshchika*). In: *O khudozhestvennyh mirah*, Moskva, 1985, 35-69).

6 GOGOL, N.V.: *Sobranie sochinenii*, t. 7, Pisma, Moskva, 1979. pp.54-59: "Eshche neskol'ko slov o koliadkakh, o Ivane-Kupale, o rusalkakh. Iesli est', krome togo, kakie-libo dukhi ili domovye, to o nikh podrobneie." (...) p. 58.

7 DOSTOEVSKY, F.M.: *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridcati tomakh*. Tom pervyi. Leningrad, 1972, pp. 321-334, 512-514.

8 BELINSKIJ, V.G.: *Vzgliad na russkuiu literaturu 1847 goda. Stat'ia vtoraja*. In: V.G.Belinskij: *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, Moskva, 1948, tom iii, Stat'i i recenzii 1843-48. pp. 836-837.

9 DOSTOEVSKY, op. cit. 1985, tom 28-1, Pisma, p. 53: "Iezheli ty chital vsego Gofmana, to naverno pomnish karakter Albana. Kak on tebe nraivtsia? Uzhasno videt' cheloveka, u kotorogo vo vlasti nepostizhenoe, cheloveka, kotoryi ne znaet, chto gelat' iemu, igraet igrushkoi, kotoraiia iest' – Bog!"

10 DOSTOEVSKY, op. cit. 1972, tom 1, p. 509: *Zhitie prepodobnogo otca nashego Moiseia Murina*. In: *Kniga zhitii sviatikh*, Moskva, 1840, 131-134.

11 CARUS, C.G.: *Psyche. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Seele*. Pforzheim, Flammer & Hoffmann 1846. 2. Ausgabe: Stuttgart, 1851. Alexandr Egorovich Vranghel (1833-19?) wrote his memoirs *With Dostoevsky in Sibiria*, 1906; he mentions Carus' work they were reading together. In: *F.M.Dostoevsky v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, Moskva, 1964.

In this fresh look at Chaucer's relation to English and French romances of the late Middle Ages, Crane shows that Chaucer's depictions of masculinity and femininity constitute an extensive and sympathetic response to the genre. For Chaucer, she proposes, gender is the defining concern of romance. As the foundational narratives of courtship, romances participate in the late medieval elaboration of new meanings around heterosexual identity. Crane draws on feminist and genre theory to argue that Chaucer's profound interest in the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity His novels also touch on new social problems that have been developed in the industrializing USA. These problems are mostly reflected in the novels such as "Sister Carrie", "Jennie Gerhardt", "The Financier", and "An American Tragedy". In Dreiser's novels all his major characters are attracted by a better life and its opportunities. In the novels Dreiser uses an absolutely new way of the describing the "American Dream". Instead of praising it he includes the dream in the authenticated life of the USA of the 19th-20th centuries' context and shows its real fate, not fictional one. In the "Trilogy of Desire" ("The Financier" (1912), "The Titan" (1914), and "The Stoic" (1947)) Dreiser describes a realistic development of capitalism of the second part of the 19th century.