

## Психологический анализ антипсихологического романа: чтение «Преступления и наказания» Достоевского через призму психоанализа Выготского

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В данной статье произведение Ф.М. Достоевского «Преступление и наказание» рассматривается как роман, расширяющий границы психологического анализа в литературе. Следуя подходу Л. С. Выготского к психологии искусства, автор намеревается углубиться в структуру романа, чтобы найти уникальную психологическую перспективу, которая заложена в нем. Анализ фокусируется на противопоставлении фрагментации и единства в структуре романа и изображении персонажей, а также на эпилоге как моменте повествования, полностью раскрывающем антипсихологическую природу этого литературного произведения. В статье представлено изображение глубинной реальности, которую невозможно постичь линейным биографическим или научным пониманием личности. Данная глубинная реальность одновременно является уникальной сутью психологии романа, охватывающей метафизическое и духовное царство, в котором Богоявление находит свое значение. Наконец, мы надеемся, что эти аналитические и разумные усилия могут как-то способствовать обогащению контактов с литературой Достоевского, опытом, который сам по себе незаменим.

**Ключевые слова:** Психология искусства, русская литература XIX века, Л. С. Выготский, Ф. М. Достоевский.

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## A Psychological Analysis of an Anti-Psychological Novel: Reading Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment with Vygotskian Spectacles

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The present paper discusses Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment as a novel that pushes the boundaries of psychological analysis in literature. Following L. S. Vygotsky's approach to psychology of art, the commentary intends to delve into the structure of the novel to find the unique psychological perspective that is embedded in it. The analysis focuses on the opposition between fragmentation and unity in the novel's structure and character portrayal, as well as on the epilogue as a moment in the narrative that fully unveils the anti-psychological nature of this literary work. The depiction of a deeper reality that cannot be grasped by a linear biographical-scientific understanding of personality is simultaneously the core of the novel's anti-psychologism and its unique psychology, one that encompasses a metaphysical and spiritual realm in which epiphany finds its meaning. Lastly, we hope that this analytic and sensible effort can somehow contribute to enriching the contact with Dostoevsky's literature, an experience that is in itself irreplaceable.

**Keywords:** Psychology of Art, 19th Century Russian Literature, L. S. Vygotsky, F. M. Dostoevsky, Close Reading.

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### *Introduction*

With utter realism to find the man in man... They call me a psychologist; that is not true. I am merely a realist in the higher sense, that is I portray all the depths of the human soul.

*F. M. Dostoevsky*

Russia's contribution to world prose literature in the 19th century has been unmistakably categorized under the label of Realism. However, it has been often argued that this tradition provided a unique type of realistic literature, not to be mistaken for the scientism and positivism of French realism. The uncovering of Russian literature by Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé [4] is very eloquent at

pointing out the breath of fresh air that novels by Turgenev and Tolstoy provided to the dry and “soulless” belletrists of France.

For De Vogüé the religiousness and in-depth sight of the inner world made Russian literature original and relevant for the further development of this art. Later in the 20th century these traits were read as constituting the so-called psychological realism, a type of literature that is concerned with unveiling motivations, describing emotions and portraying character development, with obvious predominance of round characters over flat ones. Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-1881) is considered to be one of the leading names of this canon.

The present paper aims at challenging the seemingly self-evident notion that Dostoevsky's novels are all examples of psychological literature, through a commentary on *Crime and Punishment*. To pursue this objective, we propose the approach developed by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934). In *The Psychology of Art* [18], Vygotsky presented a highly original and still little explored understanding and methodology to the study of works of art. The objective analytic method requires the investigator to delve into the structure of the artistic object (i.e. its form) in order to reconstruct potential targeted effects on the receptor. This approach does not depart from a prior understanding of psychology but derives one from art itself. According to this perspective, all types of art are embedded with a certain psychology, not only those forms that are explicitly marked by a psychological content.

Based on an examination of *Crime and Punishment's* formal traits, particularly the polyphonic construction and the dialogism that marks the characters' voice [2], this paper intends to reconstruct the psychology of the novel, which, as we intend to demonstrate, is in a certain sense an anti-psychology.

### **Fragmentation versus totality**

One of the most remarkable traits of *Crime and Punishment* is its careful architecture around the protagonist. Raskolnikov appears in almost every moment of the narrative, and every element of the plot is connected to him. This provides the novel with a highly developed sense of unity. Every aspect of the novel's composition, from the narrative perspective to the etymology of the characters' names, constitutes a totality in the storytelling of a double murder and its consequences. This striving for totality is, according to Lukács, an essential feature of the novel: “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” [8].

Such sense of narrative unity, on the other hand, contrasts with the multiplicity of the character himself: “There is Raskolnikov the altruist and there is Raskolnikov the egoist, ‘a despot by nature’; there is the crypto-revolutionary Raskolnikov and there is the self-styled genius who demands power as his right and as the guaranty of his freedom; then of course there is the neurotic who acts out his illness through a murder intellectually rationalized but inexplicable except in terms of an unconscious drive” [11, p. 424].

Dostoevsky's realism has been described by the novelist himself as a “realism in the higher sense”, inasmuch as it does not aim at a documental portrayal of either the objective or the subjective realities. In that sense, Ortega y Gasset claims that Dostoevsky conveys reality not in its content, but in its form: “Dostoevsky's ‘realism’ – let's call it this way not to complicate things – is not in the things and facts refereed by it, but in the way the reader is forced to treat them. It is not the material

of life that constitutes his 'realism', but its form. With his strategy of misleading the reader, Dostoevsky gets to the point of cruelty. Not only does he avoid clarifying the characters through defining anticipations of who they are, but also the way characters behave varies from one stage to another, revealing different facets of a person that seem to be gradually formed and integrated before our eyes" [10, p. 247-8].

The unity of character in a literary work can be drawn from a psychological explanation that encloses and justifies all traits of the individuals portrayed in it. Dauner, for instance, sees *Crime and Punishment* as a "psychic odyssey" [3, p. 199] constituted by an individuation process in four stages, as conceived by Carl Jung – confession, explanation, education, and transformation. Nevertheless, it is arguable that such stages could be actually found in the novel. While it may somehow correspond to the second half of the novel, the attempt to identify clear phases of the process of unveiling and understanding the character disregards the fact that the narrative is dominated by a moment of crisis, that is, a process that does not evolve linearly and is marked by discontinuities and coexistence of contradictory states. Considering such a multifaceted character, one of the ways to unveil the protagonist is to examine him in his interpersonal relations, so that the "I" is revealed not in itself, but in the exchanges with the "Other".

A closer examination reveals that Raskolnikov can hardly be grasped by rigid biographical frameworks, or by a linear plot of character development. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is revealed by the invisible third person narrator – an instance that relates dreams and internal monologues – examples of proto flows of consciousness [11] – and most importantly by clashes with other characters-ideas [9]. In this dialogue with the other, inconsistencies and ambiguities are brought to light.

It is noteworthy that, within his typology of the novel, Bakhtin links Dostoevsky's characters to adventure novels, and not to social-psychological, familiar, costumes. While in a socio-psychological, biographical narrative the hero appears as "someone fully embodied and strictly localized in life, as someone dressed in the concrete and impenetrable garb of his class or social station, his Family position, his age, his life and biographical goals" [2, p. 104], in the adventure novel the character does not have a fixed position, he is placed in "extraordinary positions that expose and provoke him, it connects him and make him collide with other people under unusual and unexpected conditions precisely for the purpose of testing the idea and the man of the idea, that is, for testing 'man in man'" [2, p. 105]. Therefore, working with elements of the adventure novel, Dostoevsky reconfigured Realism in his own way: "As a precursor of modern fiction, Dostoevsky created works in which the rupture with causal determinism of XIX century resulted in a prose that is oddly close to poetry, rich in contrasts and leaps, where sublime and ignoble are mixed, and elevated ideas are combined with the petty everyday life" [13, p. 58].

Terras claims that in Dostoevsky time is predominantly romantic, since it is dominated by *kairos*, not *chronos*, "Time is seen as the creator of values, its flow is goal-directed, it is emotionally and aesthetically charged" [15, p. 39]. The author also observes that Dostoevsky's novels do not represent or explain life but produce a symbolic counterpart to it.

In an attempt to incorporate an ethereal sphere of existence, Dostoevsky confronts the reader with the limitations of rational and psychological understanding. While *Crime and Punishment* provides input for tentative psychological analyses, it exposes the character in manners that reveal layers and levels of his personality that are far beyond rigid cause and consequence explications. For

Terras [15, p. 44], in this novel psychological analysis reaches its apex, but it is also “exposed for what is it, and left, as it where, in the antechamber of a higher level of human understanding”.

Nietzsche's famous statement about having learned psychology more from Dostoevsky than from any scientist, is discussed by Todorov within a tradition that “reads the psychological, the philosophical, and the social in the literary realm – but not literature itself, or discourse; a tradition that fails to see that Dostoevsky's innovation is far greater on the symbolic level than on the psychological one, which is only one element among others. Dostoevsky alters our ideas of ideas and our representation of representation” [17, p. 80].

Hence, following Vygotsky's lead to uncover the psychology that is embedded in the text, in analyzing *Crime and Punishment* one must abandon linear thought, that might suffice to explain bourgeoisie psychism, but fails to uncover Raskolnikov. No conventional psychological theory can fully encompass the complexity of this protagonist, if the analyst is to be honest and consistent with the aesthetic procedures of the character revelation deployed by Dostoevsky.

This unique example of crime novel does not pose the question “whodunit”. The murder's identity is known to the reader, it is rather the perpetrator's quest for self-identity. Raskolnikov tries to figure out who he is (ordinary or extraordinary), and why he committed the crime. He attempts to retell his own story – for example, his reenacting of the crime (in dreams or by visiting the crime scene) – are ways of organizing the events in an intelligible way.

The experiments that the protagonist conducts upon himself make way to the surfacing of unwelcome emotions. The crime that was designed to be an experiment to validate a theory (of ordinary and extraordinary beings), becomes the story of a man struggling with going beyond himself and being open to contact the other, struggling to reconcile with the realm of sensibility. Raskolnikov constantly seeks the other, but remains unable to be genuinely affected, which he considers a sign of weakness.

By committing the crime, he takes a step towards self-affirmation, and that requires the negation/annihilation of the other, according to his self-master logic. But Dostoevsky's carnivalistic cosmivision, according to Bakhtin, allowed the author to overcome ethic and gnoseological solipsism as well as to “extend the narrow scene of a personal life in one specific limited epoch to a maximally universal mystery play scene, applicable to all humanity” [2, p. 177].

The idea of a “literary determination of the modern individual” [7, p. 88] according to which the understanding of the “I” is to be found not in social or psychological motives, but in literature itself, provides one possible key to reading *Crime and Punishment*.

Despite granting literary unity to the depicted universe, the novel's narrator, unlike the traditional omniscient narrator, is not capable of explaining characters' actions or providing a sense to them, he removes the “comforting illusion of unity, coherence in everyone's life, as well as a certain logic causality for the acts and choices made in one's lifetime” [7, p. 85].

The acknowledgement of this trait makes Adorno express his famous appreciation of Dostoevsky: “[...] to the extent to which there is any psychology in his works at all, it is a psychology of intelligible character, of essence, and not a psychology of empirical character, of human beings as we find them. It is precisely in this respect that Dostoevsky is advanced” [1, p. 54].

Although Dostoevsky operates with certain immateriality, concrete life and materiality is a strong trait of his fiction. His ideas are always incarnated in concrete human beings, and derive their strength from “from the unity between the intelligible and the sensible (as striven by Hegel), from the

capacity of turning ideas into something vital and everyday that has to do with each one of us” [14, p. 247].

The different dimensions of a split self are presented through literary procedures that are carefully devised and chosen to cast the reader into the very core of the conflict of an individual that seeks to go beyond himself. Such aspiration corresponds to the all too human need for transcendence, that in Dostoevsky appears as a crisis, as a struggle between the objective and the subjective that pervaded of a deep feeling of inadequacy. Therefore, Dostoevsky provides a perspective of “the man in man”, the backstage of the consciousness and the constitution of subjectivity.

### Some remarks about the epilogue

The epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* has often been considered as a moment of religious conversion, and the appearance of Sonia has been interpreted as the apparition of an icon. However, Rosenshield sees it as a change in the direction of Raskolnikov's life, a first step to a gradual and long-lasting renovation process. Holding Sonia's Bible, Raskolnikov fancies “Could not her beliefs become my beliefs now? Her feelings, her aspirations, at least...” [5, p 464]. This indicates the seeds of a transformation in the mode of living, which used to be analytical and becomes emotional [12, p. 120], however the story of this renovation is “the subject of a new tale” [5, p. 465].

The presence of a transcendent realm is found in some characters of the novel (mainly Marmeladov and Sonia). Throughout the narrative, Raskolnikov is faced with this realm and, for the most time, rejects and mocks it. The very crime forces him to contact finitude, the passing to “the other side”. However, it is in the epilogue that this reality is fully unveiled to him. The acknowledgement of this line of force, which was already part of his inner world, allows the reconstruction of the schismatic self. This process is not opposed to the polyphonic form: “Thus to link Bakhtin solely to the atheistic and anti-metaphysical movements of semiotics and deconstruction, or to dismiss him as antithetical to Dostoevsky's high moral seriousness, it to ignore Bakhtin's deep spirituality. Perhaps Bakhtin 's celebration of the ‘I’ in communion with others can help to bridge the gap between the traditional and Bakhtinian interpretations of Dostoevsky, and show that dialogism 'and the carnivalesque are not incompatible with moral purpose. We can remember the existential maxim that not to take a position is to take a position. Not to judge monologically is to make a serious statement about the worth and dignity of the individual and to celebrate the birth, not the death, of the ‘I’, which is - or can be - the result of its spiritual communion with others” [16, p. 206].

Thaden's arguments offers an interesting counterargument to critics of Bakhtin's theory, such as Wellek [19]. By incorporating the transcendent aspect of the subjectivity, Dostoevsky provides a novelty to the realistic literature. Rosenshield, like Holquist, found in the dialogue of literary genres an answer to this novelty. He identifies elements of the romance [6] in *Crime and Punishment* [12, p. 128]. While the novel is traditionally based on objective reality, “the romancer does not attempt to create ‘real people’ so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes [...]. That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. Certain elements of the character are released in the romance which naturally makes it a more revolutionary form than the novel” [6, p. 304-5].

The identification of a metaphysical sphere in Dostoevsky makes Vygotsky draw parallels between Raskolnikov and Hamlet, and between Dostoevsky and Shakespeare, both were for

Vyacheslav Ivanov “servants of supreme revelations” [18, p. 27]. *Crime and Punishment* and *Hamlet* are united by a sensation of decisive catastrophe, by a mystical character and tragic automatism. About the protagonists, Vygotsky claims: “Raskolnikov, who does not distinguish reality, dream and delusion, who mixes real and mystical, is in many aspects close to Hamlet. Some otherworldliness of what happens, a special otherworldly light saturates the whole novel, as it happens with Hamlet” [18, p. 99].

In this sense, the epilogue appears as a moment in which material and transcendental planes unite, as an instance that validates and provides meaning to the conflicts developed in the six parts of the novel. Such unity of the planes happens more specifically in the epiphanic scene that starts with the dream and culminates in the encounter between Raskolnikov and Sonia, when he finally becomes able to establish an affective relation to the other, opening himself and allowing to be affected by her.

The conflict is only to be resolved through epiphany, since an unmaterial, ethereal realm could not be portrayed in the framework of rational experimentation (as it happens in the novel itself). The novel ends with a cabal rejection of a story that unfolds within biographic of historic standards. The poetics deployed in the novel reveals an understanding of subjectivity that fails the expectations of a reader that is used to psychologization. We are left with the mystery, with a deeper psychology, that reaches the unconsciousness and strives further towards the imponderable.

The novel presents the idea that the process of overcoming or transcending oneself is realized within and by means of human relations, that is, through the affirmation – not the negation – of the other. This is not an absolute truth that annihilates all others, but rather the very condition for the existence of multiple truths. All this speaks very closely to the contemporary individual, a creature that has favored rationality but constantly grapples with its limitations. To a certain extent this explains the fascination that *Crime and Punishment* has exerted in readership worldwide but does not exhaust the infinite interpretations that each new reading of the novel can produce.

Lastly, we hope that this analytic and sensible effort can somehow contribute to enriching the contact with Dostoevsky's literature, an experience that is in itself irreplaceable.

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