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Summary

In: Pospíšil, Ivo. *Fenomén šílenství v ruské literatuře 19. a 20. století*. Vyd. 1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1995, pp. 141-144

ISBN 8021010835

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/122689>

Access Date: 08. 12. 2024

Version: 20220831

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Summary

In the introductory part called *Some Methodological Contemplations* I arrived at the conclusion that the whole project dealing with the category of madness in literature does not represent the thematic category only as we had expected, but an existential layer expressing the anthropological dimensions of human existence and – at the same time – one of the essential functions of literature in general supported in Russia by its specific historical development and national mentality and ethics. The theme of madness seems to be the direct result of the peculiar tendencies of East Slavonic world and has been integrated into Russian dualities which are dealt with in the following treatise.

The chapter *Ethical Transcendence in Russian Literature* contains the analysis of the problems typical of Russian literature and culture in general starting with the antinomies pagan – Christian, Western – Eastern Christianity, old Russia – new Russia etc. Dissatisfaction with the individual models of life led in Russia to the attempts at the rejection of history and to the rise of various utopian projects. The crucial problems are closely connected with the analysis of the genre system of Russian literature, especially that of the 19th century which manifests dualism and ethical transcendence of Russian thought realised in the conception of „the overcoming of literature“, in Russian passivity and in the motifs of madness. Some traces of Eastern philosophy found in the Russian development are associated with Gnosticism (D. S. Merezhkovsky, N. Berdyaev, O. Mandelshtam, N. Gogol, N. Leskov, M. Bulgakov and others). The phenomenon of Russian literature seems to form a specific ethical system leaving the milieu of pure aesthetics and leading to the original synthesis trying to overcome the antinomies of Russian culture and the contradictions of human existence.

Strange, mad characters, people put off their tracks are typical of literature in general because of its artistic functions. V. Shklovsky, one of the Russian formalists, spoke about extraordinary features of artistic creation, about its strangeness, peculiarity, about its capability to make things strange, to depict the world and its elements as seen for the first time („ostraneniye“) In spite of this generally accepted fact the frequency of strange, peculiar, mad characters in Russian literature is even higher than it is expected (the chapter *Madness as an Ethical Gesture*). What is the reason? Sociologically speaking it is associated with the position of Russia as a guard of Europe; inside the country it evoked the unbearable social and psychological tension. The evolution of Russian culture and thought in fatal antinomic pairs, the magic role of the Russian word and the enclave character of everything Russian, the polyfunctional role of Russian literature which has often substituted non-existent sciences and even politics led to the

formation of madness as a mask enabling men to escape from the impact of the cruel reality. Mad people, as for example, „the yurodivye“ of the Russian Middle Ages, used to be protected as saints (it has partly concerned drunkards whose physical and mental appearances have fundamentally changed). Madness in the works of A. S. Pushkin, N. V. Gogol, N. S. Leskov, F. M. Dostoevsky or even M. Gorky may be understood as an ethical gesture of protest against the impact which the individuality was forced to live in. All the madmen and strange characters have been connected with Russia's love of extremes and utopias. Madness as an ethical gesture in Russian thought has been associated with the Russian tendency towards unification and the medieval conception of simplicity of the world which found its reflection in Russian politics, economy and even modern art.

A. S. Pushkin has been traditionally regarded as a poet of love, harmony and the Renaissance understanding of life and its beauties. But the end of his artistic creativity showed him to be more a poet of thought, anxiety and madness (the chapter *The Genre Function of the Motif of Madness in the 19th– Century Russian Literature*). The motifs of madness are very frequent in his poetical works forming even a specific semantic structure (*Gipsies, Poltava, The Bronze Horseman*). A new light was thrown on Pushkin's „little tragedies“ (*The Covetous Knight, The Stone Guest, The City of the Plague, Mozart and Salieri*) and on some of his short stories (*The Queen of the Spades*). In the works of A. Pogorelsky (*The Double or The Nights in Ukraine*) and N. Leskov (*Unselfish Engineers*) madness represented as a split of personality influenced – as well as in Pushkin – the disintegration of genre structures; a new structure arises from the original basis (*Poltava* and *The Bronze Horseman* are odes and existential tragedies at the same time), a new structure of the artistic dialogue (*The Double or the Nights in Ukraine*) or the existential fiction of man's career (*Unselfish Engineers*) appear. The motifs of madness function as a genre catalyzer forming all the literary structures to anticipate a „postmodernist“ ambivalence.

The category of madness is also part of other Russian poets' creations; in the chapter *The Death of Reason, Russia and Cosmic Poetry* the author deals with the poetry of V. A. Zhukovsky, K. N. Batyushkov, Ye. A. Baratynsky, F. I. Tyutchev and M. Yu. Lermontov. It is most interesting that the themes of mental depression sometimes lead to the utopian visions of the Great Russian Empire (especially in Zhukovsky and Tyutchev). The inner tension seeks its escape in the extrinsic expansion which tends to reach the harmony of the artifact.

The mysterious and enigmatic character of both N. V. Gogol's creations and his personality has been generally accepted. The early works of the Russian–Ukrainian author inspired by Ukrainian folklore motifs are, however, regarded as a mere reflection of the Romantic adoration of oral tradition. Due to our conclusions even his early short–stories (*Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka, Mirgorod*) have common motifs with Gogol's famous novellas from St. Petersburg cycle (*Nevsky Prospect, Diary of a Madman, The Portrait, The Nose, The Overcoat*)

and bitter comedies (*The Inspector General*, *The Marriage*) and with his „novel-poema“ (a long poetic narrative) *Dead Souls*. Gogol's world seems to be an enchanted kingdom the enchantment of which is represented by animalized people (the motif used later by F. Kafka), by a mechanical and puppet character of heroes and heroines, by the scenes of petrefaction. Gogol's „mad characters“ represent the symbols of man's situation in the hostile cosmos which leads to the impasse. Gogol's works also contain, however, an ascendant religious, national and utopian myth of the powerful and undefeatable Russia expressed not only in the lyrical digressions of *Dead Souls* but also in his earlier short stories and novellas.

In the following chapters the author of the monograph depicts the madness as a natural product of Russian provincial life (A. Goncharov: *Oblomov*, 1859). The central part of the analysis concerns the prosaic works of M. Ye. Saltykov-Shchedrin (*The Golovlevs*, *The Old Times in Poshekhona*), G. Uspensky and M. Gorky (the „Okurov cycle“). The madness as a rejection of the „herd-instinct“ is the topic of the following chapter in which the works and fates of A. S. Griboedov (1794 or 1795 – 1829), P. Ya. Chaadaev (1794–1856), V. M. Garshin (1855–1888), A. P. Chekhov (1860–1904) and L. Andreev (1871–1919) are analysed. The most interesting part of this study is possibly that devoted to the commentary of Chaadaev's correspondence with his brother. The future Russian philosopher was travelling in Western Europe (England, France, Italy, Germany) – the correspondence was published as late as 1912 in Warsaw by A. A. Vilkov, its owner. As he states, M. O. Gershenzon read it while working on his famous monograph (1908).

The extremes of reason in the works of Leo Tolstoy, in his attitude to modernism and asceticism are dealt with in the chapter in which the author mentions the recent research by G. S. Morson and depicts Tolstoy's contradictory evaluation of W. Shakespeare and French symbolism.

The key-chapter concerning F. M. Dostoevsky is subdivided into three parts. In the first part the author describes the initial phase in young Dostoevsky (1846–1849) before his arrest and Siberian exile. He demonstrates how the social motifs were transformed into psychological expressions and how Dostoevsky's early short stories contain the initial phase of the *idée fixe* which then became the dominant subject of his major novels. From *Poor People*, *The Double* (1846), *The Novel in Nine Letters* (1847), *Mr. Prokharichin* (1846) up to the fragment of the novel *Netochka Nezvanova* (1849) the author finds out that the motifs of depression, strangeness, distress, mental distortion and madness represent a unifying link of Dostoevsky's work as a whole. In the second part called *The Experiment with the Form and the Genre* the author interprets the medium phase expressed in Dostoevsky's genre innovations consisting in his tendency towards static and descriptive forms (chronicle), e. g. in *The Village Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants* (1859) and *The House of the Dead* (1860). The author of the monograph understands the experiment with the literary form and genre as an inevitable phase

of the artist's development leading – finally – to his major novels which are dealt with in the third part of the interpretation called *From Madness Towards Intrinsic Life*. At the beginning of his literary creation the category of madness represented a mere result of social oppression and personal dissatisfaction with the contemporary state of things in Russian society. At the same time the layer of social criticism contained many psychological elements which afterwards prevailed. The mental distortion is the first step of Dostoevsky's heroes on their way to intrinsic emancipation and to spiritual revival. From this point of view Dostoevsky's work expresses not only social distress, psychological tension, but – above all – existential anxiety of modern man (*Crime and Punishment, Idiot, Brothers Karamazovs*).

A. Grin (1880–1932) was Dostoevsky's successor in a way. Besides his purely romantic short stories and novels (praised and loved by K. Paustovsky) dealing with the „radiant world“ of his heroes, he also wrote several novellas which are sometimes classified as „psychological“ by some of the Russian critics. In *The Crime of the Fallen Leaf, The Mystery of the Foreseen Death, The Returned Hell, Rat-Catcher, The Strength of the Imperceptible* and other short-stories A. Grin expressed his anxiety and existential dimensions of human beings.

Contemporary Russian literature and its „postmodernist atmosphere“ is analysed in one of the final passages of the monograph. The author as a participant and contributor of the first international conference devoted to postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe (in post-communist countries) held in Poland in 1993 is rather sceptical when he speaks about the postmodernist phenomena in Russian culture although he takes into account that ambiguity has always been an integral part of Russian thought in general. He demonstrates the fact that even in the most progressive and original works of the Russian „New Wave“ the traits of tradition have not been completely lost – in a way the elements of tradition have been even strengthened (Venedikt Erofeev, Viktor Erofeev, Eldar Ryazanov, Vyacheslav Pyetsukh and many others).

Though the main subject of the monograph is, obviously, Russian literature, the author – being a Czech – could not forget to mention the comparative Russian – Czech perspective. The Czech literature tended to calmness, realism, to intrinsic order of men and things. The motifs of madness have been often understood as a mere expression of mental distortion, a moral crisis or as God's punishment. Božena Němcová, K. V. Rais, T. Nováková, J. Arbes, K. M. Čapek-Chod, K. Čapek, L. Fuks, whose works are commented here, are typical examples. Ladislav Klíma, Jaroslav Hašek, and later Bohumil Hrabal are rather exceptions to the rule though even they do not aim at the total destruction of conventional, rational principles of the world's perception.

In the brief final chapter the author summarizes the results of his research. The category of madness is regarded as a demonstration of existential crises, not only as a mental disease. The crises and their consequences led from the distortion