

VISUAL AND AUDIBLE IN DOSTOEVSKY AND TOLSTOY'S WORK

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Abstract: *The paper starts with the finding that the literary and philosophical criticism considered that the monologue universe created by Tolstoy is fundamentally different from Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel. But the dualism plasticity-musicality is inaccurate: Tolstoy's universe is surrounded by the music of nature and Dostoevsky's spirit is essentially visual. His artistic conception is expressed by plastic representations, primarily by images and secondary by ideas. Eye and not ear is the central organ, is an expression of how the human being learns of the world and his own. Dostoevsky's art seems mysterious because it uses the resources of images, often charming, and extremely fearful.*

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1. The dualism plasticity – musicality

Literary and philosophical criticism often regarded musicality as the main feature that characterizes the novels written by Dostoevsky. Likened to a symphony in which the dominant themes returns and metamorphoses by arranging the counterpoint, with sudden tempo changes and unexpected endings, Dostoevsky's work seems to fully satisfy the requirements of music, moreover, is itself a dissimulated music in words. Creator of literary polyphony, in which dialogue plays a central role and where everything is concentrated around "voices" of the characters, Dostoevsky has created a world where speech tends to regain music, and ideas are integrated into an articulated music structure, acquiring something from consistency of the combined harmonic sounds. "The plurality of voices and of autonomous consciences, the authentic polyphony of voices with plenary value constitutes indeed the primary particularity of Dostoevsky's novels"¹. Literary criticism has always emphasized this fact: from the coexistence of self-consciousness that enters into relationship with each other arises the musicality of Dostoevsky's work; in other words, the dialogue is a sign of the participant's desire to interpret their own score, contributing in their own way to the genesis of this music.

Duality launched by Merezhkovsky, but consecrated by M. Bakhtin in a famous book dedicated to the Russian writer, the "musicality" of Dostoevsky was placed in opposition to the "plasticity" of Tolstoy, and so an inner conflict was

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¹ M. Bahtin, *Problemele poeticii lui Dostoevski*, București, Ed. Univers, 1970, pp. 8-9.

associated with Russian literature that seemed to fully characterized it and which print it a strange tension; although contemporary, or almost, because Tolstoy was a contemporary of most of the nineteenth century and some of the twentieth century, the two emblematic Russian writers have adopted very different artistic ways. While Tolstoy remains traditionalist and faithful to the classical form of art, where the narrator knows everything in advance and is not surprised by anything that happens in history that narrates, Dostoevsky has the merit to innovate the art of the novel and to put it into question the central role held by the narrator. Each character created by Dostoevsky retains the right to have his life as he wants, the freedom of each remains unaffected, unlike the characters created by Tolstoy, where the author is manifest deeply dictatorial. Therefore, the old and unresolved conflict between traditionalism and modernity, between ancient and modern art seemed to revive into the two writers' creation.

2. *Three Deaths* (1859)

Bakhtin insists therefore on this distinction: the monologue universe created by Tolstoy is fundamentally different from Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel. To illustrate this, Bakhtin choose from the Tolstoy's work the short story *Three Deaths*, published in 1859; he says that "this work is very characteristic of Tolstoy's monologic manner". Here is described fugitive the death of three beings that seem to have nothing in common: a rich and slightly hysterical noblewoman, an old coachman, and a tree. The main reproach that Bakhtin made to Tolstoy concerns the lack of communication between characters, the fact that nobody knows and is not even interested in anything outside its own dead. "In Tolstoy's story all three lives, and the levels defined by them, are internally self enclosed and do not know each other. There is no more than a purely external pragmatic connection between them, necessary for the compositional and thematic unity of the story... So, they are close and deaf, they cannot hear each other and do not respond to each other. They do not argue or disagree. In contrast, the three characters together with their closed worlds are brought together, face and understand in terms of their reciprocity in horizon and comprehensive awareness of the author. He, the author, knows everything about them, compares, opposes and considers the three lives and three deaths. In Tolstoy's story there is only one subject endowed with the gift of knowledge, all others being only objects of his knowledge. Dialogical position of the author over its heroes is excluded here and so is missing *the big dialogue* in which participate the heroes and the author on an equal peer; here exists only the objectual dialogues of the characters expressed in the author's horizon"¹.

And still, Bakhtin seems to ignore that the central problem of the story is death, or, more precisely, the attitude in front of death of the three characters. It is no coincidence, nor does it flow from the so-called *monological function* of the Tolstoy's art the fact that the three characters are left alone at this point in their life, because death is by excellence affirmation of solitude of every creature, death is the moment when every being discover his profound loneliness and if it's able to

¹ M. Bahtin, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

assume this loneliness. When life is threatened, put between parentheses, being can be found in front of his own isolation, his immeasurable remoteness from the world. And here, in this short story, Tolstoy does nothing more than to communicate how each of the three beings understands his own death. Thus, the intimacy of death finds the woman on a mediocre hypostasis, with obstinate refusal of both death and family; she wants compassion for all, but in the same time she rejects them, and we, the readers, doubt that she would have understood something of the importance of the death moment. The old man dies lazily, on the oven, his powers diminishing with each passing moment. His easy death is rendered strangely by Tolstoy: the cook dreams that the old man has regained all the energy, has suddenly become younger, as if death is nothing more than retrieval of a vitality lost gradually during life. It's like taking it again. Finally, the three falls under the blows of the axe as if to highlight the beauty of the other surviving trees. In conclusion, each of the three paid for their different accounts with life, Tolstoy and led the way in which they meet their end.

Death levelled everything around it and everything else, outside of death itself, becomes insignificant and unworthy of any interest. Death requires challenge of any relationship with the outside; it is, in fact, a closure process, of abandonment the world and just the alchemy of Tolstoy's art makes it finally revert a reopening for life. But this road to return to life is definitively blocked in case of the woman, generator of hopes for the coachman and really occurs only from the perspective of fallen tree.

In other words, the subject of the story itself requires the monologue method. Despite Bakhtin's statements, not get close to death through dialogue, but only by assuming, by integrating death in the natural cycle of life, and on the path to retrieval the essential loneliness of self. That hence the apparent simplicity of the story; it is, as I said, a radiography of death, especially of the human heading in the face of death. And, more than this, *Three Deaths* is crossing from the beginning to the end by a secret music, which seemed to comes from the depths of the universe and the life itself; a music that regenerates nature thrilled at the sight of the tree cut off, but soon finds its harmony deep. In fact, this story is not an isolated case. It can see in the entire Tolstoy's works this image of discovery the majesty of nature and life waste from the death and calling the internal resources of the music.

3. Tolstoy's musicality

Music shines through in all Tolstoy's major works and the argue that he was a writer only concerned by nature, by visuality, by the plastic aspect of life it means to totally ignore his musical sensibility. The implicit arguments used so far to support the claim that he was a writer only concerned with image and completely uninterested in music (if not ignorant in this area), in dialogue, in the "internal connection of consciousness" was Tolstoy's outright suspicion for music in general and especially, virulent criticism of music in the novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889). But it must be pointed out that this criticism was targeted the easy music in generally, music understood as mere entertainment, and on the other hand the attack against the salon music is only one face of the writer's offensive against the

Russian aristocratic lifestyle, the nobility who is wasting time and money organizing expensive, pompous balls. It is necessary to remark the irony with which Tolstoy deals such parties, and there's no accident that *War and Peace* (1869) begins with a description of the soiree of Anna Pavlovna Scherer house; the war comprise across Europe and the elite of the Russian society does nothing to spend and to weave plots. Always, Tolstoy seems to say, behind such mundane meetings is hidden a drama and we cannot forget that Anna Karenina meet Vronsky to such ball.

Music is an absolute immoral force, Tolstoy seems to say, it has the power of hypnosis, because seizes the soul, possessing him. It is an obstacle to real life, active life, under the spell of the music the soul feels what actually not feels, in him a morbid sensitivity arises which it diverts attention from important things from his life and directs it towards of an illusion. Music is therefore an enormous lie that people should look with any price. In fact, despite appearances, the main theme of *Kreutzer Sonata* is not music and its negative influences on the soul, but the lack of measurement and the disaster it causes by immeasurable pride.

Jealousy, pride and once with them music removed the man from his primary Christian condition of practice the humility and push him on a way of no return at the end of which is crime, disgrace, lie. As a last resort, the author even suggests that music accompanied by jealousy is the moral author of murder committed by Pozdnyshev, the central character of the *Kreutzer Sonata*. The demonic capacity of music consists in its power to displace the listener into another world, in a hermetic universe where he will always be a prisoner.

Music creates emotional illusions, states of mind that are inspired in secret to the music lover by the composer himself. In music there are different mixed emotions, feelings of a stranger ego that comes to dictate what he wants to the music lover, and even to substitute his feelings, by replacing them with his. It's a very dangerous process of splitting, indicates Tolstoy, this construction of an imaginary world to which music lovers inevitably tend. To listen to the music without tackling from the start a minimum ironic distance is leaved you filled with monomania, to be deceived by your illusions.

Contrary to what Bakhtin sustain, Tolstoy's work is a struggle against monology as a way of life, a fight against fictions that covers the self and from he builds a world where others do not have access. On the contrary, Tolstoy uses the means of monology to unmask it, to put it in its true, fearful light. In this sense, Pozdnyshev's bitterly and unstoppable crying from the final convince us infinitely more than his tirades against marriage and fornication. This project of exposure the selfishness and self-sufficiency has absorbed a good part from Tolstoy's life, his work being the meeting point of various chimeras with which people lived and what prevents them to live authentically. We can quote at random: Ivan Ilych from *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Father Sergius from the story with the same name, the eccentric old Bolkonsky, Andrei's father, from the masterpiece *War and Peace*, and above them, like a tutelary figure, seated on his throne and surrounded by lie is the tsar Nicholas I of Russia, a symbol of perfidy and selfishness. Moreover, he is the one that, along with Shamil, the leader of the Chechens, he crushes Hadji Murat with his nausea indifference.

And even as stemming from Tolstoy's fundamental insight about the world implicit musicality, his work is a meditation on the origin of life and destruction. Life and death, death and life, always closely linked these two reasons reappear, as if Tolstoy had proposed to decode their mystery and find the law that governs them. Moreover, the concern for life and death and their relationship forces the writer to give the measure of his forces to concentrate all power in himself to carry the war where it can not only beat out. Art is confrontation with life and death, trying to overcome them; it is not far from a mere imitation of reality. In the heart of authentic art is hidden the wish to dispose of real which is at hand, multiplying or endlessly reducing the elements of this reality that turns into a game of mirrors where the model and the copy are identified.

4. The poetics of sight

As for his part Dostoevsky, his major concern was the creation of images and his artist's vocation consists precisely to achieve these images which are pure poetry, true poetry that rejects any attempt at theorizing. His express artistic intention was to materialize his visions into an image that describes the dynamic tensions of the soul, its oscillations, hair or his triumph. Without ever getting to write poems, Dostoevsky aspired the whole life to the poetic destiny, where soul interprets the main score. Therefore, poetry does not make you float lazily to the unreal world, it's not escapism; Dostoevsky regards poetry as an instrument of knowledge, knowledge of a particular tip, in which everything that soul possessed, is preserved and recreated in new images and forms. Poetic creation must be a mirror of the soul. As knowledge, it seeks to discover the truth of the soul, or its seductive illusions. Always, in every novel, the hero perseveres towards achieving his own truth that it completely takes over and makes it so distinct from each other heroes, and to the author himself. And still, it is something baroque in the way that heroes divide the roles and lines between them; moreover, Dostoevsky's novel is the place of the utmost mobility, where everything succeeding with amazing rapidity.

This interpenetration of planes, the refusal of the definitive formulas is the essence of the novels and undoubtedly the cause for Dostoevsky's poetics avoid the tendency to monologue. Compared with any other author, Dostoevsky does not want to demonstrate anything, in his novels he take away from trenchant tone of articles and he has succeeded in a good position to abandon himself in his books. And this can be best shown by the function that he attributes to the imaginary narrator of each novel.

Everywhere, but especially in *Demons*, he is a fake narrator, he does not reveal anything at the same time without creating one nine enigma, his confidences is never the truth, but only fragments of truth, and sometimes, in crucial moments of the story, he forget the role and suddenly turns into his opposite, the mystifier. On the other hand, he is clever enough not to provide an overall picture of what happened, he let the characters unfold, always refers to the imperfections of his art writer, his inability to fully restore what has happened and especially the intensity with which the facts narrated occurred. The narrator himself is a mystery; Dostoevsky has challenged the role of privileged possessor of

truth, putting his gaps in light and consecrated him as a link rather distorted, disturbing, but necessary, however, between story and reader. We cannot dispense with the narrator, but needs to be wary of him and not to fall into the net woven by his story; through the ambiguity of his role, Dostoevsky, among other things, seeks to expand capacity of perception of the reader, increasing his desire to receive a multitude of information.

Dostoevsky's spirit is essentially visual; his artistic conception is expressed by plastic representations, primarily by images and secondary by ideas. Eye and not ear is the central organ, is an expression of how the human being learns of the world and his own. Dostoevsky's art seems mysterious because it uses the resources of images, often charming, and extremely fearful.

In the images created by the Russian writer is kept something which is the origin of the act of looking itself; although it wasn't a philosopher, Dostoevsky novels built a metaphysics of view. The internal poetry of novels and novellas materializes in vibrating images, into a poem that tries to penetrate sight by a poetic vision.

The issue of sight is in its place in each novel; her echoes can be heard in *The Possessed*, *The Adolescent* and especially in *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment*. These two novels are visual by excellence, Prince Myshkin is a metaphor of an eye that sees everything, and Raskolnikov is a symbol of the tension of an eye who doesn't want to see. The look is in fact the hidden element of each novel, it gives unity of Dostoevsky's work and only a holistic approach to the whole of Dostoevsky's works allow to restore directions and levels which dispersed that original look.

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