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Dostoevsky's Shadows

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Abstract

In this paper, I bring to light Jung's Shadow archetype in Dostoevsky's works and also analyzes their implications in the structure of his characters. Taking into account that the Russian writer's creation is vast, I shall select a limited number of his works, namely 'The Possessed'; 'Crime and Punishment'; 'The Brothers Karamazov'; 'Notes from Underground' and 'The Double'.

We are all burdened with our Shadow and must strive to overcome it, but what happens if we fail or never even try to master it? Raskolnikov's attempt to free himself from the chains of his Shadow was too late, he had already committed the murder, but not in vain, he succeeded in redeeming himself, and so his effort must be taken into account. This does not help him to avoid the punishment, but offers him a chance after serving it. On the other hand, Smerdyakov's case is different: he made no attempt to overcome his Shadow, the only argument that he brought in his favor being that he acted fuelled by the desire of fulfilling his brother's wish. It is clear that, he has no chance for a better future and the fault lies with him because he did not create that chance. Dostoevsky's characters always seem to be ruled by a tragic destiny, an unlucky fate from which they cannot escape.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, Jung's Shadow archetype, Russian writer, characters.

Introduction

According to Jung, the archetypes that can be most easily discerned are the ones that have the most frequent and destructive influence over an individual's ego. These are the 'Shadow', the 'Persona', the 'Anima' and the 'Animus'. The most accessible and easy to experiment is the Shadow, due its nature than can, in most part, be identified form the contents of the personal unconscious.

In AION Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self (Jung, 1969), the Swiss psychoanalyst states that the Shadow is a moral issue, since we cannot become aware of it without a considerable moral effort. According to Charlotte K. Spivack, "...the shadow is the psychological equivalent of original sin, irrevocably lodged in human nature" (Spivack, 1965). This interpretation clearly underlines the moral aspect of the Shadow. To become conscious of the Shadow implies, to recognize the dark aspects of the personality as being real and present. The inferior traits that constitute this archetype have an emotional nature and a special kind of autonomy, this leading to the fact that, at this subterranean level of the personality the individual acts more or less primitive; he is a passive victim of his own emotions and he is incapable to discern.

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Review of the Shadow within the Cultural Domain

In the cultural domain, the main symbolical embodiment of the Shadow is the devil, as God is for the archetype of the Self; we will see the devil as a product of mental illness in ‘The Brothers Karamazov’, but also in ‘The Possessed’.

Another cultural embodiment of the shadow is the character of the ‘Schelm’ or the ‘Fool’. This motif is also portrayed in ‘The Brothers Karamazov’, by Smerdyakov. This symbol brings together the individual and the collective aspects of the Shadow. In the Jungian psychoanalysis, the confrontation with the shadow represents one of the first and most important stage of removing its coercive force over the ego. Usually, Dostoevsky’s characters fail to confront with their Shadows; one exception being ‘Raskolnikov’. Also in this context, I need to mention the inseparable connection between the ‘Shadow archetype’ and the ‘motif of the double’. Many cultures regard the Shadow as the second nature of beings, this becoming manifest when the dark side is not accepted. The Shadow is the one that brings with itself the unmasking of all characters (here we have a reference to the Persona archetype). Dostoevsky’s ‘Double’ appears at dusk or during the night, usually when their possessor is alone in his bedroom; they tend to lack color and are painted in shades of gray.

The Concept of the Will and Self

A brief outline of the concept of the will is necessary to continue our discussion. As we already know, the will is that which exerts conscious control over an individual’s behavior; it is also the power of choice between alternative actions. In the first volume of *Understanding Conflict and War*, R. J. Rummel defines the will as “*the power of practical reason, and being thus, the will brings the mind to rational or physical action*” (Rummel, 1975).

Whatever the type of the action, we can see that the will is a force that actualizes various rational potentials that exist within a person. Moving on to the concept of the self, it is worth noting that both the will and the self are powers or forces. The will is a facet of the self, it is the particular ability to exercise conscious choice and to use practical reason. It also is a specific aspect of the self that guides the person through practical reasons toward self-actualization. It is the will as power that enables a person to choose. As we already mentioned, the shadow is instinctive and irrational and so it is prone to psychological projection – an individual will project all his negative traits of personality on the people he comes in contact with and so will perceive them as being enemies. Therefore it’s safe to assume that the shadow can function as a veil between the ego and the outside world.

An important part is played here by the merger of the individual with the shadow. This happens in situations of shock or confusion, when the conscious mind becomes paralyzed by indecision. The individuation process raises this very possibility, since it assumes the assimilation of the personal and collective unconscious. The impact of such confrontation with the shadow produces a hampering of moral decisions.

The Appearance of Psychopathology

Returning to Dostoevsky, I should specify another relevant component to his characters’ behaviour, namely mental illness. In ‘The Double’ the use of the motif with the same name gives us an image of the psychopathological. Here, the paranoid illusions and hallucinations of figures that persecute, spawn out of a feeling of shame and of a pathological lack of self-esteem. Golyadkin Senior attributes to everyone around him his own negative traits of personality, thus, everyone becoming an imaginary enemy. This is the same mechanism that make the Shadow archetype function. We see that Golyadkin Junior is the double, but also the Shadow, for it is on him that Golyadkin Senior projects all his imperfections and pent-up impulses. However, here we have a problem if we want to accurately diagnose our character.

While the feeling of persecution and the burdening of everyone around with the patient’s defects are characteristic to paranoia, the phenomena of the double is not one of the symptoms of this illness. The patient considers himself without mistake and believes he is continuously tortured

by the others around him who are seen as being evil. Exactly this is the case of Golyadkin Senior who is convinced that everyone is plotting against him*.

Not even the concept of multiple personality could be used in his case, this illness referring to a hysterical phenomenon in which the personalities are independent one from another. The problem is that all of Dostoevsky's characters are conscious of their doubles. We could say that they have classical symptoms of an obsessive compulsive character. We've seen that this not a case of separation of the selves, but instead of an "obsessive balancing" (Kohlberg, 1963), of trying of eliminating an idea or a force with its opposite. This type of obsession is a characteristic of the narrator from 'Notes from Underground', but also to Ivan Karamazov's devil.

Dostoevsky's doubles (physical, as well as mental) persecute their creators by adopting their identities. In the novel, 'The Brothers Karamazov', I have a different point of view. The double and the Shadow take a corporeal form through Smerdyakov, the fourth brother, the bastard, the epileptic, the inhuman and the demonic (according to both his biological and adoptive father); he also represents the figure of the Schelm by his peculiar behaviour – he rarely eats and this only after inspecting his food, he is seen to stop from his activities and to stare blankly and unmoving for minutes and he seems to have no sexual desires of any kind. He is "...the human embodiment of the townspeople's dark, sordid past..." (Cohen, 2014).

However, Smerdyakov is not only the devil's son, as his adoptive father called him, he is also an embodiment of the holy fool through his mother Lisaveta, the town's fool, whom everybody tried to protect: we can say that he is a fusion of evil and innocence. It is in him that Ivan projects all his negativity and it is through Smerdyakov that he fulfills his parricidal desire. When mental illness takes over, Ivan's Shadow is projected through a hallucination of the devil. This type of double that acts as a Shadow is also present in 'The Possessed', where the action is centered on the life of Nikolai Stavroghin, an underground man if you will, that waits impassable for a suicide that he caused, to take place.

The initial embodiment of the Shadow is a demonical hallucination, but this changes when Fedka, the Convict comes into the scene and commits the murders that Stavroghin himself desired. The latter fails to confront his shadow and commits suicide. Another interesting case is 'Notes from Underground', a prologue to Dostoevsky's later writings. The man from the underground is the man that emerges from the shadow of its being and speaks from the subterranean on his unconscious. Captive inside his own ego that regards its own self with disdain, the underground man is torn between his multiple antagonised impulses.

In the second part of the novel we have a clear description of the narrator's sick mind, who disregards everybody else, but at the same time is happy to be included in their group. Jung states that, to develop and become aware of a function, it is necessary for its opposite to slide into the unconscious. The same idea works for the subterranean man from 'Notes from the Underground' who admits that he solves his problems alone, with the help of a logical chaos.

Raskolnikov from 'Crime and Punishment' is the only one who accepts his darkness and is redeemed in the end. His Shadow is uncovered in the dream in which he witnesses the beating of a mare. It is obvious from Jung that, dreams are the unconscious channel towards the individual's hidden reality (Jung, 1954).

The Appreciation of Characters and their Shadows

Raskolnikov's aggressivity and all his frustrations are encapsulated in his Shadow that is projected on Mikolka, the one who performs the beating, and all of the spectators that are cheering him represent the demonic voices of the character's soul, but also his alter-egos. The mare is the scapegoat that is being sacrificed, it is Raskolnikov's crucified ego, his lost innocence, the voice of his conscience that has been reduced to silence; by its death, everything is allowed, including murder. The main character's double is Svidrigailov, a cynical and isolated person. Raskolnikov becomes aware that he is his secret Shadow and when Svidrigailov commits suicide, the former is freed and can confess his crime (Jung, 1954).

* In Russian, "goly" means naked, and this is a clear pointer to Golyadkin Senior's life and personality: a mediocre functionary who is spiritually void. He even names himself a "goliadka", which means poor, pauper.

It can be seen that both Raskolnikov and Smerdyakov commit murder for reasons that can't even be considered as being pragmatic, the former out of frustration for the conditions of living and for what he himself called a higher purpose, and the latter merely because he thought he should fulfill Ivan's wishes (this case is similar to that of Fedka the Convinct who committed the murders that Stavroghin wished for, even though the latter never asked for this particular favor). In defence of the first two characters mentioned in this paragraph we may say that their judgement was distorted by the influence of their own shadows that acted as veils.

Also, one may state that Raskolnikov's fault is lesser than that of Smerdyakov, since in the end he managed to confess his crime, or we can simply say that whatever the influence of the Shadow or of any other thing, they are both guilty. One can already see that, establishing the guilt of the characters and passing a verdict on them is a very difficult task. If we analyze the situation from an objective point of view that would be acceptable today, they are both guilty. However, the situation changes if we take into account the Jungian interpretation of Dostoevsky's works (it is very interesting how the Russian writer created his characters as if they were molded after Jung's theory of archetypes).

Conclusion

We are all burdened with our Shadow and must strive to overcome it, but what happens if we fail or never even try to master it? Raskolnikov's attempt to free himself from the chains of his Shadow was too late, he had already committed the murder, but not in vain, he succeeded in redeeming himself, and so his effort must be taken into account. This does not help him to avoid the punishment, but offers him a chance after serving it. On the other hand, Smerdyakov's case is different: he made no attempt to overcome his Shadow, the only argument that he brought in his favor being that he acted fuelled by the desire of fulfilling his brother's wish. It is clear that, he has no chance for a better future and the fault lies with him because he did not create that chance. Dostoevsky's characters always seem to be ruled by a tragic destiny, an unlucky fate from which they cannot escape.

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