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DREAMS AND THE NOVEL

 *For you are not alone even in your dreams*

 (Gyula Illyés: A Sentence on Tyranny)

The daily rhythm of human life is determined by the alternation of time spent awake and asleep, thus falling asleep and waking up are the most important turning points of our existence. “For a long time I would go to bed early” (PROUST, 2004, 5), begins perhaps the most significant novel of the 20th century, Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, while Franz Kafka, writing almost at the same time, begins his *Metamorphosis* with the words: “One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams”, (KAFKA, 2009, 34. )etc. The representation of the rhythm of sleeping and waking has a long history. Plotinus reversed the everyday formula: in his works, waking up means stepping out of everyday existence, and stepping into a higher reality. “Many times it has happened: Lifted out of the body into myself; becoming external to all other things and self-encentered; beholding a marvellous beauty; then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order; enacting the noblest life, acquiring identity with the divine.” (PLOTINOS 2016, 97).

Thus, we live two lives: a conscious and an unconscious one. As Carl Gustav Jung wrote, the unconscious period, which makes up if not half, at least a third of our lives, is a period in which free will cannot manifest itself, in contrast with the conscious period, in which – provided it exists at all – it has the opportunity to prevail. The time spent in an unconscious state is also the time of dreams. We know how great a significance Friedrich Nietzsche attributed to this part of human life: he regarded it as the source and origin of all art*.* He made this claim in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and further elaborated on it in an aphorism in his *Human, All Too Human*: “In the dream, mankind, in epochs of crude primitive civilization, thought they were introduced to a second, substantial world; here we have the source of all metaphysic. Without the dream, men would never have been incited to an analysis of the world. Even the distinction between soul and body is wholly due to the primitive conception of the dream […]” (NIETZSCHE 1996. 26.)

Dreams (and visions) naturally and self-evidently appear in written literature as well. In Homer’s *Iliad*, Zeus sets events in motion with the help of a dream; in order to convince the hesitating Agamemnon of the necessity of starting a war, he resorts to the intervention of the god of dreams. The dream, which is repeated three times, is integrated into the text in a fully natural manner; the narrator is situated above the story, as it were, he knows and sees all that passes at the human and divine levels. Thus the language of the narrated story is entirely homogeneous, the acts and speeches regarded as referential appear in the same manner in the poetic text as those seen and heard in the dream. The distinction between them is due to the narrator alone, who simply announces that the recounting of a dream will follow the description of the preparations for war. Whether the audience follows actions presented as realistic or as part of a dream, we remain in the same world, the world of language, which Nietzsche called a separate world created by mankind. The difference between the two lies in their function: the dream narrative reveals the truth to the characters within the narration, the truth which they would have attained with less certainty in any other manner.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is similarly a truth of a higher order that manifests itself in dreams. In the *Gospel According to Matthew*, Joseph sees three dreams, all three of which have life-changing consequences. In the first dream, the angel of the Lord speaks of Mary conceiving a son, in the second he warns Joseph that they will have to flee to Egypt, and in the third the angel tells him that they may return from Egypt to Israel. What is more, Joseph is also warned to go to Galilee instead of Judea. The essence of the mechanism operating in the dream narrative is that only errors and mistakes are possible outside the dream, and only the Lord may guide men to the right path in the wilderness of life. (With this, the role of dreams comes to an end in the New Testament, because as soon as Jesus starts to speak, a mediator is no longer necessary.)

In the above-mentioned texts, the dream narrative is located in a threefold structure consisting of the narrator, the addressee and the audience of the text. The situation within the text is clear, the addressees – Agamemnon, Joseph and so on – never doubt the truth of the message they receive. The character situated outside the text, i.e. the reader, only receives this truth conditionally, in the case that they accept the superior nature of the sender of the message, the existence of God or the gods.

The novel is different. The world of the novel, as Georg Lukács puts it, is “a world without God” (LUKÁCS, 1974,93), “[t]he novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God” (LUKÁCS, 1974. 88). The novelist recognizes the duality of the world; hence the ever-present irony, which, according to Lukács’s theory, is a “formal constituent of the novel form” (LUKÁCS, 1974, 63). This is the only way in which unity can be achieved, that “internal form” or “totality” which makes the novel “the representative art-form of our age: because the structural categories of the novel constitutively coincide with the world as it is today” (LUKÁCS 1974, 83)

It logically follows from the above that the realistic novel that regards itself as referential does not deal with dreams. We will not find dream narratives in the novels of Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert or Tolstoy. After the ideological victory of the Enlightenment, those elements that had previously formed an integral part of the discourse on the world and mankind no longer had a place in serious discourse. For example, we learn that Julien Sorel, after parting with the De Rênals, has to spend the night in a cave in the mountains. He sleeps, but he does not dream. Stendhal uses a different, but ingenious solution to describe Julien’s situation. The hollow where he sleeps and where he is buried after his execution clearly refers to the lost maternal womb.

In *the Theory of the Novel,* Lukács becomes uncertain when discussing Dostoevsky: apparently, he is unable to integrate this author into his carefully elaborated model. He would probably need to amend the above-cited criteria in order to include Dostoevsky among the authors listed as references in his theory of the novel. One point where the theory and the novel clash is precisely the re-inclusion of the dream narrative in Dostoevsky’s novels. It is well-known that the novelist was inspired by *Acis and Galatea*, a Claude Lorrain painting exhibited in the Dresden Museum, when formulating his most important dream narratives. Dostoevsky evokes the idyllic world depicted in Claude Lorrain’s painting as a dream image on three occasions: first in *Devils*, where Stavrogin visits the monk Tikhon and tells him about his dream. In his written confession, Stavrogin reveals that he accidentally ended up in Dresden, where he visited the museum and saw *Acis and Galatea*, which he refers to as *The Golden Age*. The memory of the painting is related to Stavrogin’s grave crime: he seduced the ten-year-old Matryosha, and did not intervene when the child subsequently hanged herself. (Part III, Chapters 9 and 10). In *The Adolescent,* it is another sinner, Versilov, who sees the dream evoking the golden age.

The idyllic image of the golden age appearing in a dream of the protagonist receives its most detailed elaboration in the short story *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. This time the narrator makes no references to Dresden, Claude Lorrain or *Acis and Galatea*. However, the idyll, the sinless, paradisiacal world is similar to the world appearing in Stavrogin’s dream. The narrator, the ridiculous man, also states that the dream reveals truth, that is, the dream is truth itself. The narrator would assign to the dream narrative the same function that we have seen in Homer or the Bible: this is the only road to attaining truth.

The modern, enlightened world, however, works in a different way. The first to sentences of the short story already invalidate the conventional threefold structure: “I am a ridiculous person. Now they call me a madman.” (DOSTOIEVSKI, 2006. )That is, the harmony seen in the dream, the golden age, the sin-free world is only relevant to the narrator, and is not valid for anyone else. We may perceive the impossibility of attaining the desired goal in two ways. The first and more important of these is the problematic nature of the role played by language. Structuring and transposing into words the images appearing in the dream, which seems to be problem-free in the dream narratives of Antiquity and of the Bible, here seems to come up against unsurmountable obstacles. The narrator wishes to tell the story he experienced so that it may present an example to follow to all of his listeners; if they understand and believe it, then earthly life may at once be transformed and brought in line with the images seen in the dream, and the once existing paradisiacal state may be restored. However, the narrator cannot find the right words and is unable to recount what he saw on Sirius in a manner which would have the desired effect on his listeners.

The other problem lies in the interpretation of the painting itself. Similarly to the protagonist of his novel, Stavrogin, when Dostoevsky speaks about the golden age after visiting the Dresden Museum, he does not take into account the title of the painting, which alludes to story with a tragic ending in Greek mythology. The painting depicts the idyll of the two lovers; Acis is sitting, Galatea embraces his neck, there is an Amor in the foreground and two others in the left corner; we see a man in a boat, and a ship a little farther off at sea. Only Polyphemus is missing from the story as told by Ovid, the giant who is in love with Galatea, and who will in the next moment crush his rival to death with a rock. The golden age exists, and it is indeed evoked by the painting, but this golden age is extremely fragile and bound to end soon, just like the dream recounted in fiction, which evokes the Garden of Eden. It is the ridiculous man himself who will provoke the Fall that will bring an end to the word which is a paradisiacal version of the earthly one, and the new world will henceforth be identical with its earthly counterpart. The ridiculous man who sets out to prophesy wishes to convince his fellow humans of the superiority of a world that may have existed once, but certainly does not exist at the time of his prophesying; of course he appears ridiculous and even as a madman to others. However, this part of the narrative points out something, an entity that Carl Gustav Jung in his writings on dreams calls the common heritage of humankind, part of the collective unconscious occasionally manifesting in our dreams.

It is impossible to reproduce within the genre of the novel the construction that worked in previous ages. In the age of agnostic humanism the best the novelist can do is to indicate the possibility which Martin Heidegger, when discussing Rilke and Hölderlin, puts as follows: only the poet is able to descend into the abyss to ascertain the existence of the treasure that may lie buried there, and to then bring back news of his venture. (HEIDEGGER, 1977, 269.)

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky experiments with a different method. Ivan Karamazov is ill, with a high fever, and in his feverish dreams he meets and debates with the devil. The extent to which this scene may be accepted is indicated by the text of the novel itself, on two occasions. Ivan is aware that he is in fact debating with himself, that the devil represents one half of his own split ego. Secondly, at the trial of Dmitri, who is accused of murdering his father, Ivan tries to explain that the culprit was Smerdyakov rather than his brother, but he can refer to the devil as witness. His testimony is considered invalid, and everybody thinks he is a madman. In the enlightened world, dreams are not seen as creditable, and neither are visions.

Thus, among the great realists of the 19th century, Dostoevsky is the only one who considers it important to use dream narratives, and he finds the appropriate method to incorporate these into his narrations. In the 20th century novel, the problem remains the same as in the previous century. In the first chapter of *Swann’s Way*, Marcel Proust solves the issue in an ingenious way: Marcel falls asleep quickly, but he soon awakens, reads, dreams, daydreams, awakens again. These states mingle and swirl without the fragments of readings, memories and short dream scenes forming a structured narrative: the short period described here is neither wakefulness, nor a dream, rather a transition between the two. The narration is in the first person, and the narrator of the story is entitled to juxtaposing the differing elements in the text, melding them into his own discourse.

It was not Marcel Proust, however, who continued to apply the solution proposed by Dostoevsky, but Thomas Mann. *Doctor Faustus* would not work without a devil; the novelist solves the problem with the procedure borrowed from Dostoevsky. Like Ivan Karamazov, Adrian Leverkühn has a conversation with the devil while in a delirious state, splitting his own self. What is more, Mann used dream narratives decades before *Faustus*. In *The Magic Mountain*, for example, Hans Castorp sees a golden age-type dream when he is caught in the snowstorm. If we take it as our starting point that *The Magic Mountain* is a Bildungsroman, and thus its narrative is composed of several threads – those of Castorp, Naphta, Settembrini, Doctor Behrens, Doctor Krokowski, Peeperkorn and Madame Chauchat –, then the dream narrative is also one, if not the most important, of these threads. However, dreams acquire an even greater significance in the life or rather the death of Gustav Aschenbach, the protagonist of *Death in Venice*.

The dream narrative, which recounts the invasion by the half-animal, half-human horde of the alien god, i.e. Dionysus, occupies a relatively short space in the story. Nevertheless, it is not unexpected, as the entire short story is in fact a preparation for this dream. The Classicist writer arriving at the Venetian Lido believes he has a glimpse of beauty itself in the adolescent Tadzio. In the beginning he tries to describe and interpret what he sees and what he feels when seeing this beauty by using the elements of his classical education. A quote from the *Odyssey* indicates that Aschenbach has read and quotes Classical authors in the original, and this is followed by Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which he uses on several occasions to depict the situation, by imagining himself in the role of Socrates, and casting the beautiful Polish boy in the role of Phaedrus. The writer, portrayed as a modern incarnation of Nietzsche’s Apollonian, increasingly becomes a thrall to Eros. Freed from his irony, he falls out of the role of Socrates completely, and delightedly identifies with the clamouring, raging, destructive, cannibalistic horde. “The interpretation is earlier than the dream, and when we dream, the dream proceeds from the interpretation”, says Joseph to the butler and baker in Pharaoh’s prison, when they ask him to decipher their dreams. (MANN, 2002, 437 ) This observation in *Joseph and His Brothers* remains valid in Aschenbach’s case: the transposition of his experiences into Antiquity requires a continuation: this is the dream, and the dream narrative clearly indicates the only possible conclusion to the plot.

I only allude here to the interpretation of dreams and the dream narratives in *Joseph and His Brothers*, as elaborating on this issue would require more time. It is certain that Thomas Mann, who places himself in the position of the omniscient narrator, integrates the description of dreams into his narratives in a convincing manner. The problem of dreams has been an important topic of the discipline of psychoanalysis since the time of Sigmund Freud. Nevertheless, even in the 20th century, the novel makes scant attempts to include the dream in its still strongly ironic world. Albanian author Ismail Kadaré’s 1985 novel, *The Palace of Dreams* is an interesting experiment, which – echoing Illyés’s line quoted above – is set in a country (in the last days of the Ottoman Empire), in which the regime bent on achieving totalitarian power attempts to control the dreams of its subjects as well; a separate institution is established in order to record the dreams of each subject, so that nothing may remain outside the authorities’ controle.

Since Sigmund Freud, dreams have become a scientific topic, but nothing more: they remain a marginal phenomenon, and the contemporary novel treats them accordingly. I will exemplify this with two of László Krasznahorkai’s novels. In the bar scenes of *Satantango* (Chapters 4 and 6) nearly all characters of the novel are present, with the exception of Irimias and his companion. Sooner or later all those present fall asleep. First to do so is Kerekes, the farmer, who dreams, but we learn only as much about his dream as the others perceive: a few incoherent words and a gesture. “From the deep pit of Kerekes’s stomach rose a quite unclassifiable grumble that eventually reached his lips and issued forth in words like ‘…bitch’ and ‘really’ and ‘or’ and ‘more’ though that was all they could make out. The grumbling culminated in a single movement, a blow aimed at someone or something.” (KRASZNAHORKAI, 2009, 83) We may suspect that the farmer’s dream is a continuation of his rough daily existence. There is nothing here of the duality which characterizes Dostoevsky’s dream narratives, or, to use Bakhtin’s terminology, there is no enthronement or dethronement; the dream is in fact irrelevant, without significance. Its function lies in this very irrelevance, as this is the point in the novel at which the protagonists, Irimias and Petrina, appear, and Irimias’s enthronement takes place. The dream exists, yet it is not important. The essential is happening elsewhere.

The dream scene in *The Melancholy of Resistance* shows a similar approach; we see the sleeper from the outside, and we learn only indirectly that she is dreaming. This is the dream of Mrs Eszter at moment in the novel which may be regarded as the turning point of the story. After the intercourse, when her lover, the chief of police had left, the woman falls asleep. The narrator first describes the manner in which this takes place, presenting it as a sudden separation from the material environment surrounding the dreamer: “all disappeared; floor, walls and ceiling had no more meaning for her; she herself was nothing but an object among objects”. (KRASZNAHORKAI, 2002, 231) It is not surprising the Mrs Eszter, the objectified human being, although she soon “penetrated to the dense core of her dream”, (KRASZNAHORKAI, 2002, 233) does not dream of anything that the reader should be informed about. Here, too, the narrator describes the dreamer from the outside: “for a moment her face contorted(…) and [she] kicked off the eiderdown, stretching her limbs as if about to wake” (KRASZNAHORKAI 2002, 231).The narrator presents the different stages of the dream, and in the meanwhile he also tells the story of three rats cautiously appearing and searching for food. The rats chew half a loaf of bread, but Mrs Eszter, upon waking, does not object to this, mainly because she awakens from a nightmare: “like someone recoiling from a scene of horror, she gave a disconsolate snort, trembled, turned her head rapidly from left to right a few times, beating it on the pillow, then, staring-eyed, suddenly sat up in the bed”.(KRASZNAHORKAI, 2002, 234) In spite of the rats, waking up means an escape here.

I have brought Krasznahorkai as an example because his novels synthetize, as it were, the problems of the genre of the novel in the second half of the 20th century, including that of the dream narrative. In fact, it does not matter whether there are dreams in this world or not, as they do not affect existence and have no role. What remains is description from an external perspective, the image of the objectified, sleeping human being, which fits perfectly in the world evoked by the novels. The 20th- and 21st-century novel sets other directions for itself. If its main target is archaeology, then, as Emmanuel Bouju puts it, it does not search in dreams, rather behind the obscure points of history, trying to unearth forgotten or suppressed memories. (BOUJU 2006).

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