

**THE MOTIVES OF THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS
IN VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S "INVITATION
TO A BEHEADING"**

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Abstract. Nabokov's fiction based on a recollection of the past at various times became the object of psychological and psychoanalytic research. All the despite the fact, that there is hardly any other novelist in the history of modern literature who declares more antipathy toward Freud and his method than Nabokov. Purpose of the present study is to show that Nabokov's memoirs, as well as in his novels, provide interesting material for psychoanalysts and psychiatrists. General method of the present research is the psychoanalytic theory by Jung. Articles on the topic of Nabokov's antipathy toward Freud were reviewed to identify relevant studies including psychoanalytic methods in Nabokov's works.

An analysis of Nabokov's novel "Invitation to a Beheading" proved that in his early modernist texts the writer reached visionary insights and operated on images and models of the collective unconscious born in his imagination.

During the life of the writer, many psychiatrists and psychoanalysts turned to his novels for finding examples for their scientific constructions. The most likely version seems that Nabokov was afraid of his own personality and tried to create his

own method of artistic texts that was equally accurate in the preparation of human psychology.

According to Jung, the plot of the dream is not as important as the interaction of the archetypal motives of the dream with the details of the dreamer's personal life; often the artist's biography suggests clues, but an unequivocal interpretation is still impossible. The symbolic meaning is often hidden from the artist himself, but visionaries are able to follow the channels of the unconscious, being able to pull out of the "basement" meanings that are easily identifiable by consumers of literature. Notwithstanding how scornful was the attitude of Nabokov to psychoanalysis, it can be assumed that in his novels there still flashes the shadow of Sigmund Freud.

Keywords: archetypal models; psychoanalytic method; collective unconscious; dream; hallucination story

Introduction

European modernism in the time of significant social changes offered the audience an extraordinary degree of candour. Surrealism that made a giant step forward in the development of patterns and recognized forms of dream poetics, opening, new shape of modernistic expression, to many dream writers of the XXth century such as Jorge Luis Borges, Jean Cocteau and, undoubtedly, Vladimir Nabokov who was searching for his own manner in the second half of the 1930s. Nabokov's fiction based on a recollection of the past at various times became the object of psychological and psychoanalytic research (Alexandrov A., 1995; Appel A., Newman C., 1971). All the despite the fact, that there is hardly any other novelist in the history of modern literature who declares more antipathy toward Freud and his method than Nabokov (De La Durantaye L., 2005; Green G., 1988; Shute J.P., 1984).

Apparently, it's not easy to dig out any children's traumatism and psychological problems of Nabokov's personality: the autobiographical "Speak Memory" (Nabokov V., 1989), for

instance, reveals the idyllic world of childhood, reminiscent of the myth of forever lost paradise.

Purpose of the present study is to show that Nabokov's memoirs, as well as in his novels, provide interesting material for psychoanalysts and psychiatrists.

Materials and Methods

General method of the present research is the psychoanalytic theory by Jung. Articles on the topic of Nabokov's antipathy toward Freud were reviewed to identify relevant studies including psychoanalytic methods in Nabokov's works.

Findings

Vladimir Nabokov vs Sigmund Freud

It's a very well known fact that from his first works to his last - in Russian, English or French - Nabokov shows himself ever ready to combat what he calls "madly frolicking Freudianism" (*le freudisme folâtre*). From the 1920s to the 1970s, the emphasis remains the same: psychoanalysis is associated with the medieval and the superstitious, with the stupidity and credulity of the simple and communal. For Nabokov Freud's thought is something that should be mocked and thwarted. It is associated with prison, with pre-school, with the pre-mature and the pre-modern, e.i. it is something that limits freedom and individuality.

In "Lolita" (Nabokov V., 1995) Nabokov parodies not only the methods but also the professional skills of psychotherapists. The trauma of Humbert Humbert, in fact, is associated with the unfulfilled half-childish love to the twelve-year-old Anabella, who died in Corfu. Pathology came out in adulthood as a love to the *nymphets* (Nabokov's term). Humbert married an adult woman and for a long time was receiving treatment in a psychiatric clinic, trying to be normal.

Moreover, the name of the hero of the "Invitation to a Beheading" (Nabokov V., 1980) seems to be in the direct borrowing from one famous work by Freud's "The wit and his relation to the unconscious" (Freud S., 2011) that tells about a certain minister of agriculture, the least suitable for the position of all who occupied

it. Indeed, this choice of the Roman name for the hero, is unexpected, moreover, it gives a reservation according to Freud. All these features demonstrate “metaphysical” identity of the hero and author himself, who constantly accentuates in other texts and diaries his exclusivity and aristocracy, painful abruption of the world of realities and cold contempt for the crowd, its social prohibitions and taboos. In Central Europe of the mid-thirties, this perception was obviously much more intensified due to the flourishing of totalitarian systems that rely on an undifferentiated mass consciousness in which intellectuals and the “electees” were really black sleep subject to “purging”.

Nabokov’s dream motive

The work of dreams, according Freud, essentially consists in translating thoughts into some kind of hallucinatory experience (Freud S., 2001: 134). The dreams and hallucinations make up the narrative basis of Nabokov’s “Invitation to a Beheading” that is full of images and Structurally-semiotic motives of the collective unconsciousness. In this “metaphysical” novel there is no binding to the space-time landmarks that are so traditional for Russian literature and so relevant to Western Central Europe of the time, which fills it with ambivalence adding a touch of fragility. At the beginning of the novel the protagonist, named Cincinnat C. learns of his death sentence. At the end he is beheaded with an axe in the square in front of the huge gathering of people that turn out to be partially painted on backdrops of the scenery. A confession or rather the inner monologue of the one sentenced to death makes the plot the novel. The leitmotif of a dream followed by imaginary hallucinations, appears from the very beginning of Nabokov’s “Invitation to a Beheading” and runs throughout the text.

The essence of Cincinnat’s crime is described as “metaphysical” vague and is defined as “gnosiological filth” and opaqueness on the background of rather “transparent” society. The author is likely to hint at the hostility of stupefied and hardened world in which there is no place for a man like Cincinnat. All these features reflect the identity of both the protagonist and the author.

The basic spatial landmarks of the novel are born from this worldview: an ancient fortress with towers where Cincinnatus languishes; endless cranked labyrinthine corridors that lead either to dead ends or to his chamber; the tunnel that leads either to the executioner's room or to the prison director's apartment. They escalate fear or are derived from this fear as well as steep meaningless stairs going nowhere. A direct parallel to the painful dreams of *Borges*, captured in "The Immortal". Usually such dreams haunt people that have suffered a psychological trauma. In the case of *Borges* it occurred in infancy (the birth by cesarean section). As the antithesis to the space of fear serve the memories of the Tamarins Gardens - a symbol of paradise where the hero was happy and beloved.

Each of the characters in the novel, with the exception of Cincinnatus, is endowed with the derogatory features of a carnival parody and at the same time coincides with the long-known archetypes of the collective unconscious. His wife, Marthe, the *Everlasting Mother*: sexy, feminine, depraved, and charmingly ugly. This is the embodied Anima in all its duality and unpredictability. She is not going to hide from him their constant infidelities. It is not the only female image in this novel characterized by hypersexuality and promiscuity in sexual relationships. In the earlier "The Gift" (Nabokov V., 1991), the protagonist Cherdyntsev creates a parody of Nikolay Chernyshevsky, the apostle and martyr of the Russian revolution. One of the pejorative moments with a clearly carnival character is the image of the young wife of the ardent revolutionary democrat Olga Sokratovna, who seduced and duped the awkward virgin, and the marriage turned out to be miserable. It is obvious that the fashion for such types of novel heroines is becoming widely replicated in modernist literature after Joyce.

The mother of the hero Cychillium C., that is appearing only in one episode, is dry, cold and restrained, an allegory of the Puritan moral, broken by her with the birth of an illegitimate son and the cynical refusal of him. Rodion is the rustic jailer, a peasant with a

fake red beard, blue eyes and corresponding smells - a good-natured animal, frightened by the moth, which he himself brought to feed the spider. Rodion is often reincarnated in Rodrig Ivanovich and, conversely, in at least two episodes, the twins are the junior jailer and director of the prison. The prison director himself is a phatous rogue, prone to panache, just as his subordinate does not understand the guilt or the suffering of the prisoner entrusted to them. The twins, embodying the violence of society over the individual, are also an embodiment of power, perhaps not cruel, but unjust and, most importantly, senseless.

The poetics of the absurd, permeating the whole novel, actually resembles Franz Kafka specially his anonymously non-rational and metaphysical “The Trial” (Kafka F., 1999) and “The Castle” (Kafka F., 1998). In the behavior of these avatars of power one could see indifference and the tyrannical essence of an archetypical Father. There are two mediators: the senseless and weak lawyer Roman Vissarionovich, who has sympathy for the condemned, but no will and desire to help, because life is going on as usual, and to fight against something obvious is meaningless; and the executioner, Monsieur Pierre, is a real jester and a provocateur seeking to make friendship with the victim, even with a kiss for brotherhood, for which he arranges circus performances, theater stunts, home get-togethers for chess and tea, and finally, an imaginary dig. This is a well-fed and foul-smelling evil, the entire embodiment of Death, with its inevitability and obsession.

Cincinnatus C. himself is the distracted, rejected by the world intellectual, a teacher of sick and outcast children, a subtle nature on the outskirts of the banal burgher life. His sensitivity, his spiritual aristocracy, special manners, his self-consciousness are similar to Nabokov himself, as well as the tragic (“pessimistic”, according to the critic) attitude that unites them. The portrait of Cincinnatus, “light as a leaf”, with thin fingers, a fluffy blond beard and mustache, looks like either the young author, or Christ, persecuted, doomed, misunderstood prophet of high ideals.

Already on the first page of the novel, an allusion to Christ breaks in - the Cincinnatus' dream of a man walking on water (Nabokov V., 1980: 3). An obsessive leitmotif, supplemented with imaginary hallucinations, Cincinnatus' dreams pass through the entire text, containing elements of a miracle or hallucinations. But this miracle is instantly interrupted by the sound of the key in the lock when Rodion unlocks the camera. With a prayer for the Chalice of Christ in the Gethsemane garden, the hero of "Invitation to a Beheading" is also related to the modernist prayer of Cincinnatus, passing as a leitmotif throughout the novel. Nabokov's hero feels himself a penitential victim, a scapegoat in the chilling world of universal alienation: "Everything was coming apart. Everything was falling. A spinning wind was picking up and whirling: dust, rags, chips of painted wood, bits of gilded plaster, pasteboard bricks, posters; an arid gloom fled; and amidst the dust, and the falling things, and the flapping scenery, Cincinnatus made his way in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him" (*ivi*: 207).

Discussion

During the life of the writer, many psychiatrists and psychoanalysts turned to his novels for finding examples for their scientific constructions. Nabokov himself provoked interest in his writings with harsh statements about the teachings of Freud and his students. In recent years, the discussion has become even more acute. The opinion that Nabokov simply hated Freud long ago swept aside. The most likely version seems to us that Nabokov intuitively sensed some kind of rivalry with Freudians and psychoanalysts, was afraid of their conjectures about his own personality and tried to create his own method of artistic texts that was equally accurate in the preparation of human psychology.

Conclusions

An analysis of Nabokov's novel "Invitation to a Beheading" proved that in his early modernist texts the writer reached visionary insights and operated on images and models of the collective unconscious born in his imagination. This quality of Nabokov's prose gives a wide scope for psychoanalytic studies. According to

Jung (Jung C.G., 1976; Jung C.G., 1989), the plot of the dream is not as important as the interaction of the archetypal motives of the dream with the details of the dreamer's personal life; often the artist's biography suggests clues, but an unequivocal interpretation is still impossible. The symbolic meaning is often hidden from the artist himself, but visionaries are able to follow the channels of the unconscious, being able to pull out of the "basement" meanings that are easily identifiable by consumers of literature. Notwithstanding how scornful was the attitude of Nabokov to psychoanalysis, it can be assumed that in his novels there still flashes the shadow of Sigmund Freud.

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