

Lonny Harrison. *Archetypes from Underground. Notes on the Dostoevskian Self*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016. 206 pp. ISBN 978-1-77112-204-7.

When a scholar of esotericism sees a word “archetype” in a title, they often tend to be wary about the content of the publication. Lonny Harrison’s *Archetypes from Underground*, however, manages to avoid the most common problems associated with this type of literature. The main aim of the book is to provide an analysis of Dostoevsky as a psychological author whose ideas were in some regards close to the tradition of depth psychology, instead of the usual approaches to the author as a novelist, philosopher, or religious thinker. The depiction of Dostoevsky as a psychologist has a long tradition, stretching right back to his contemporaries. A problem with this approach, however, is that Dostoevsky seemingly rejected the title. “They call me a psychologist,” he wrote, “It is not true, I am only a realist in a higher sense, that is, I portray all the depths of the human soul.” (Dostoevsky, quoted on pp. 27–28) The passage demonstrates Dostoevsky’s ambiguous approach. He definitely opposes modern psychology, yet at the same time he aspires to study and to depict the human soul as realistically as possible in his writings. And what is a psychology if not a science of the soul?

To support the legitimacy of a psychological approach to Dostoevsky’s texts, Harrison relies on interpretation provided by esteemed Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, according to whom Dostoevsky’s rejection of psychology should be understood as a rejection of a *wrong* modern psychology rather than a rejection of psychology in general. From this point of view, Dostoevsky sought to contrast his own idealistic approach to the human psyche with other psychological approaches of his time. If this is the case, what constituted the core of Dostoevsky’s work as a psychological author? Here we come to the central idea of Harrison’s book, namely that Dostoevsky attempted to describe a number of psychological “types”, as he called them, or typical characters reflecting the nineteenth century psyche. According to Harrison, Dostoevskian “types” have some prominent parallels with the archetypes of Jung’s analytic psychology. One could ask, however, on what grounds we can talk about parallels between Jung and Dostoevsky. Harrison obviously understands this problem and dedicates a substantial part of the introduction to answering this question.

First, he claims, Jung and Dostoevsky had a shared understanding of the urgent problems of contemporary society and their causes:

One of the ruling themes of Dostoevsky's mature works is the chief problem upon which Jung's theories are based: that the loss of a spiritual sense of modern life is a problem not only of individuals but of societies, representing a self-destructive danger to modern civilization. (14)

However, it was not only about a similar feeling of the crisis of modern culture; their backgrounds were similar as well. "Dostoevsky and Jung," claims Harrison, "shared an array of common sources and contexts out of which their thinking on the life of the unconscious mind and archetypal patterning could have arisen." (77) Just like Jung, who was fascinated by alchemy, Gnosticism and other forms of esotericism, Dostoevsky "would have encountered concepts from alchemy, Hermeticism, and Neoplatonism via German Romantic Idealism, which dominated Russian culture in the 1830s." (16) To be more precise, Harrison names several particular figures, namely Goethe, Schelling, and Carus, who may have influenced both the development of analytic psychology and Dostoevsky's work. (12)

The idea of connecting Dostoevsky and Jung through their common roots in German Idealism seems persuasive. On the one hand, the Russian nineteenth-century intelligentsia had many ties with Germany and was prominently influenced by German philosophy. On the other hand, the Romantic approach to science, as well as German Idealism in general, had obviously influenced Jung, who is best understood in the frame of a specific research program of Romantic science. This common background and the similar historical situation they faced may indeed have led Jung and Dostoevsky to similar solutions; at least, it definitely justifies the possibility of comparative research of their works and ideas.

Based on this conception, the author sets out his disposition: the Dostoevskian literary "type" is an analogue of the Jungian archetype, the "underground" of Dostoevsky's novels corresponds with the collective unconscious, while the stories about a character's transformation represent yet another depiction of the process that Jung would call "individuation." To demonstrate this very process is, according to Harrison's interpretation, the central artistic goal of Dostoevsky:

...his characters almost unanimously experience a sense of inner division, enact roles (archetypal forms) that catalyze change and transformation, and ultimately move toward discovery of authentic self (though that process is rarely completed). (13)

At the core of Dostoevsky's work, according to Harrison, is the story of the divided self of a nineteenth-century person placed into the "underground" of a secularized culture inhabited by figures who are more personifications of psychological types than actual men and women. A hero must encounter them in order to learn lessons that, little by little, lead him to a cathartic transformation. The most important of these figures is probably the hero's double, which represents a shadowy aspect of the hero's psyche. Harrison claims that such a narrative resembles some classical concepts of Western esotericism:

Traditions of Western esotericism such as Hermeticism and alchemy gave prominence to the tension of opposites and their underlying complementarity. Rediscovery and recovery of the authentic self is the "Great Work" of perennialist tradition, grounded in Neoplatonism. An experience of rebirth and awaking is the noumenal event of seeing and recognizing the apparent self for what it is – a fiction, an illusion... (152)

Here Harrison steps on shaky ground, trying to find the source of Dostoevsky's "psychology" in Platonic tradition, which could in that case be regarded as an initial philosophical source of Dostoevsky's and Jung's approaches. However, as Harrison himself admits, "there is no direct evidence ... that Dostoevsky took an explicit interest in Plato," even though interest in Platonism was widespread among Russian philosophers and writers like Tolstoy. A more direct and therefore more reliable source of the doppelgänger image can be traced back to Romantic literary tradition, and Harrison earnestly demonstrates how Dostoevsky's works were in many regards a reaction to the Romantic approach.

For scholars of esotericism, Harrison's study may be interesting as another examination of influences and parallels between nineteenth-century esoteric circles, German Idealism, psychology, and literature. One question that, unfortunately, is not addressed sufficiently in the book is the role of Dostoevsky himself in the development of depth psychology. We know that Freud wrote about Dostoevsky in the essay "Dostoevsky and Parricide," published in 1928. Although Freud does not seem to have been influenced by Dostoevsky in any prominent manner, we know that he influenced Freud's student, Alfred Adler. However, can we speak about any direct or indirect influences of Dostoevsky on Jung's conception of archetypes? It seems at least quite possible, and deeper study in this direction may provide new ideas about similarities between Jungian archetypes and Dostoevsky's characters.

Nevertheless, Harrison's analysis of Dostoevsky's writings is filled with fruitful insights and can be considered as a worthy contribution to the study

of this influential, but complex and controversial Russian writer. Placing Dostoevsky in context of the history of Western esotericism is an exciting idea, and Harrison has performed a magnificent job in this regard, analyzing ideas and approaches of both English-speaking and Russian scholars of Dostoevsky. Another thing that makes the book important is the fact that it shows new parallels between Western European and Russian thought of the nineteenth century, demonstrating (even if it was not the author's explicit goal) how classical Russian literature developed in the same context as European thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, responding to the same issues with sometimes very similar solutions. I believe that nowadays, when many would like to oppose Europe and Russia, such reminders of common cultural heritage are very timely.

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