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Dostoevsky and psychoanalysis: *The Eternal Husband* (1870) by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881)

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Dostoevsky, the great 19th-century Russian author, was the son of a Muscovite doctor. Raised near a lunatic asylum, he suffered from epilepsy, neuroticism and gambling addiction. His writings (*The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Idiot* and *Notes from Underground*) reveal rich portrayals of psychiatric cases, including epilepsy, hysteria, dementia and psychopathy, and his psychological insights are remarkable in world literature. His characterisation of unconscious psychological motivation prefigures terms later described by the psychoanalytic movement.

Dostoevsky's novel *The Eternal Husband* appeared in 1870, when Sigmund Freud was just 14. It portrays defence mechanisms now known as repression, reaction formation, displacement and rationalisation, as well as unconscious material surfacing in dreams and impulses. The tale depicts a cuckold (Pavlovitch) who after his wife's death discovers her infidelity. He tracks down Velchaninov, his wife's former lover. Velchaninov does not recognise him; his memories of the affair are initially repressed. However, psychic unease ferments in his dreams. In 1895 – 4 years after Dostoevsky's death – Freud coined the term 'repression' to refer to the ego defence mechanism of excluding undesired impulses from consciousness. By 1900, Freud's classic text acknowledged dream interpretation as the 'royal road to . . . the unconscious'.

Pavlovitch is unaware of his purpose in compulsively seeking Velchaninov. Overtly, he embraces him, drinking with him and declaring his love. However, unconscious hatred emerges one night in his impulsive attempt to stab him. Velchaninov concludes, 'love that comes from hate is strongest of all', indicating Pavlovitch's friendliness was a defence Freud later termed 'reaction formation'. Pavlovitch, discovering his beloved daughter, Liza was sired by Velchaninov, displaces hatred for Velchaninov onto her with cruel torment. Velchaninov senses he himself is driven by unexplained forces, but rationalises his actions.

Not until 1926 (*Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*) did Freud reformulate repression as one among many defences, naming other mechanisms (reaction formation, displacement and rationalisation) which operate when repressed material threatens to return to consciousness. Dostoevsky certainly anticipated psychoanalytic concepts; but did he influence the developing psychoanalytic movement? Freud was familiar with Dostoevsky's works. *The Eternal Husband* appeared in German circa 1900 and Freud's Viennese acquaintances, Rene Fulop-Miller and Friedrich Eckstein, collected Dostoevsky's supplementary manuscripts for German publication, approaching Freud for comment. Freud commenced *Dostoyevsky and Parricide* (an introduction to drafts of *The Brothers Karamazov*) in 1926, the same year he revised his theory of defences.

Analysing Dostoevsky's personality from his fictional characterisation, Freud detected Oedipal and sexual conflicts behind the writer's 'hysterical epilepsy' and gambling. Of 'Dostoevsky the psychologist', Freud complained his 'insight was so restricted to abnormal mental life . . . all he really knew were crude instinctual desire, masochistic subjection and loving out of pity'. However, Freud bowed to his artist: 'before the . . . creative artist, analysis must lay down its arms'. He pronounced *The Brothers Karamazov* the 'most magnificent novel ever written'.

Some Freudian case histories (*Rat Man*, 1909) unfold artistically and psychologically like the plot of *The Eternal Husband*, whereby narration of seemingly inexplicable impulses builds to a concluding denouement by the protagonist/analyst, rendering unconscious processes explicit. Both formats revolve around the centrality of unconscious motivation and its exposure.

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