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Reading Fyodor Dostoevskys "Crime and punishment" in animated cartoons

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REREADING FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* IN ANIMATED CARTOONS



RELATIONS BETWEEN literature and animation are a popular subject of numerous present-day books and papers. Educators quickly realized the advantages of the genre for developing creativity, critical thinking and other skills important to teaching and understanding literature. Dagmāra Ausekle and Lolita Šteinberga stress that

the animation in literature lessons improves learner's intellectual, emotional and social experience. Animation can be a successful tool in any teacher's hold; it develops visual literacy, linguistic literacy and musical literacy; it helps to support children's competence in interpreting literal text with visual images and sound.¹

The same opinion is shared by Xavier Mínguez López, José Coloma Maestre, Otto Guerra, María Lorenzo Hernández and many others. The web-site *Open Culture* provides an excellent collection of animations of literary works, which can be used in class².

Scholars who are involved in studying adaptations of works of literature through the idioms of the audio and visual arts also pay much attention to animation. Some animated cartoon literary projects, like *Shakespeare's Ani-*

- 1 D. Ausekle, L. Šteinberga, *Animation and Education: Using Animation in Literature Lesson*, "Pedagogika" 2011, vol. 194, p. 115.
- 2 *18 Animations of Classic Literary Works: From Plato and Shakespeare, to Kafka, Hemingway and Gaiman* [online], Open Culture, [access: 2013-11-22]: <http://www.openculture.com/2012/12/17_animations_of_classic_literary_works.html>.

mated Tales, already have their own critical tradition (Janet Bottoms³, Gregory M. Colón Semenza⁴). Emilio de la Rosa provided a detailed history of *Don Quixote*'s representation in animated cartoons⁵. However, in general, it is a relatively new direction in comparative literary and movie studies, which has not been established yet. Without any doubt, it has a brilliant future because transposition of literary works into the idiom of animated cartoons opens unusual points of view on many specifically literary problems, such as poetics, genre, even ideology. Owing to its semiotic mechanisms, in particular, to the variety of sophisticated techniques of producing moving images, animation has become a powerful means of "making the familiar strange," as Victor Shklovky would define it, which means that practically every animated film based on a literary work becomes a pretext for re-interpreting the classics. It rediscovers hidden messages and converts rereading literature through animated cartoons into walks in the garden of polysemous meanings.

Crime and Punishment has a long and successful cinematographic history⁶ while the animated cartoons based on the novel are not as numerous. The very idea of making an animated cartoon of *Crime and Punishment* can seem crazy. "It's one thing to adapt fairy tales, plays and novellas, but it's an entirely different task when one is dealing with a mammoth work like Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*,"⁷ stresses Chris Robinson, the Art Director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival. However, there are animation directors who dared to take the challenge and to invent new audiovisual idioms for bringing the novel to the screen: among them are Piotr Dumala, Alexander Bakanov and Nariman Skakov, and Pavel Muntian are among them. They have found original artistic ways of "translating" the ideas, images, emotions, events, and spirit of the book into the idiom of animation and "visualized" some important traits of Fyodor Dostoevsky's poetics.

3 J. Bottoms, *Of Tales and Tempests*, "Children's Literature in Education" 1996, vol. 27, no 2, p. 73–86; eadem, *Speech, Image, Action: Animating Tales from Shakespeare*, "Children's Literature in Education" 2001, vol. 32, no 1, p. 3–15.

4 G.M. Colón Semenza, *Teens, Shakespeare, and the Dumbing Down Cliché; The Case of Animated Tales*, "Shakespeare Bulletin" 2008, vol. 26, no. 2, p. 37–68.

5 E. de La Rosa, *Don Quijote se anima*, in: *Cervantes en imágenes. Donde se cuenta cómo el cine y la televisión evocaron su vida y su obra*, eds. E. de la Rosa, L.M. Gonzalez y P. Medina, Madrid 2005, p. 101–120.

6 The list of the adaptations of the novel can be found in Wikipedia (*Film adaptations of Crime and Punishment* [online], Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia, [access: 2013-11-22]: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_adaptations_of_Crime_and_Punishment>.

7 Ch. Robinson, *Beyond Good and Evil: Piotr Dumala's Crime and Punishment*, "Animation World Magazine", 2001, no. 5.10, [online], Animation World Network, [access: 2013-11-22]: <<http://www.awn.com/mag/issues5.10/5.10pages/robinsondumala.php3>>.

Dumała's film is the best-known "adaptation" of *Crime and Punishment* (2001), although the very term adaptation is hardly appropriate in this case. "People wanted a standard adaptation, – the director explains his intention. – People expect to see what they read in the book. This is something else so they feel cheated. It was not my aim to copy the book. I was really close to the book. I took one level of the book. It's not possible to show everything from this book. I got what I wanted."⁸ Dumała takes only two main sub-plots: the killings and meeting Sonia. "This is not a tale of evil or the like in St. Petersburg. [...] This is about love and how obsession can destroy love. In our life, we are under two opposite influences: to be good or bad and to love or hate."⁹

As in his other animated cartoon films, including "Gentle Spirit," also based on Dostoevsky's work and very well studied by Colleen McQuillen¹⁰, in *Crime and Punishment* Dumała uses a sophisticated animation technique, which he invented in 1983. He creates images on slabs of plaster covered with glue. "It goes very fast, – Dumała says. – I put paint on the surface and it's absorbed very quickly. I scratch on it with a sharp tool and I can achieve very nice effects from dark tones to white plaster. The animation goes onto one piece so I make one drawing and change it on the same plaster and re-paint it."¹¹ It takes a day to produce a second of the film. Dumała spent four years to make 30 minute-long *Crime and Punishment*. Monika Król in her essay *Мультики по Достоевскому* ["The Animated Cartoons of Dostoevsky"] compares him to a monk in the cellar of his house copying diligently his old sacred books.¹²

This time-consuming technique allows the director to represent the dense and gloomy visual reality of the writer's world. Dumała's animated cartoons and *Crime and Punishment*, in particular, very much resemble the mysterious world of desperation and anxiety of the *film noir*: most of episodes take place at night or in rooms with bad light; the day scenes are dark; the shot is constructed as a combination of vertical and oblique lines; the faces of characters dissolved into the gloomy atmosphere surrounding them; the action is set in the urban labyrinth of dirty streets; the motifs of water contribute to creating melancholic and disturbing emotions; the chronological order of events is broken by abrupt time transitions and flashbacks.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 C. McQuillen, *Animating Dostoevsky's 'Gentle Spirit': Piotr Dumala's Kineasthetic Palimpsest*, in: *The Effect of Palimpsest*, eds. R. Nycz and B. Shallcross, New York 2011, p. 49–64.

11 Ch. Robinson, op. cit.

12 М. Круль, *Мультики по Достоевскому*, „Новая Польша” 2005, no. 12 [online], Новая Польша, [access: 2012-11-22]: <<http://www.novpol.ru/index.php?id=536>>.

The critics who studied this animated cartoon point out the numerous connections of Dumala's animated cartoon with the visual culture and the literature of modernity. Robinson stresses that Dumala's aesthetics is rooted in Alfred Hitchcock's tradition because the Polish director, like the creator of *Psycho*, is much more interested, not in the crime itself, but "in the voyeurism of the person who sees it."¹³ Among Dumala's predecessors Król names "creators of the dreamlike reality whose works are full of mystery and symbolism"¹⁴ and, first of all, Francisco Goya with his grotesque and ghastly *Caprichos*. "The faces of *Crime and Punishment*, and especially the old money-lender, resemble the images from Goya's engravings."¹⁵ Max Ernst, Odilon Redon, Daniel Mróz, Edward Gorey, Edvard Munch, Rembrandt, Johannes Vermeer, and Honoré Daumier are other great artists whose works, in Król's opinion, inspired the Polish animation director to produce his somber and fascinating visions. The cinema influences on Dumala are divided by Król into two directions united by an oniric motif: feature films (Keaton, Murnau, Bergman, Antonioni, Kurosawa, Munk, Polanski) and animated films (Norshteyn, Brothers Quay). Król stresses that the interest in the grotesque dreamlike reality determined the selection of Dumala's favorite authors, Jonathan Swift, Jorge Luis Borges, Albert Camus, Franz Kafka and, of course, Dostoevsky among them. "When being a student, the future animation director drew a black-and-white cartoon based on *Crime and Punishment*."¹⁶ Thus,

the characteristic feature of all films by Piotr Dumala is exaggerating the supernatural, irrational events, atmospheric phenomena, and unexpected steps undertaken by protagonists. The plot and heroes are surrounded with an aura of something extraordinary and mysterious. The cause and effect sequences are broken, the logic is absent. The spectator feels immersed in the dream, full of reticence and vague symbols.¹⁷

The Dostoevsky in Dumala's *Crime and Punishment* is different from the Dostoevsky which is read and taught at schools and universities. The sequence of events is changed in comparison to the novel: when in the original text the murder is committed in the first part, in the film it is shown at the end. The director left only five characters (Sonia, Raskolnikov, the old money-lender, her sister Liza, and the old man prying into the affairs of the others from the shadows) and introduced a new character based on the dream that

13 Ch. Robinson, op. cit.

14 М. Круль, op. cit.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

Raskolnikov has of himself as a young boy trying to save a horse from a severe beating. "I felt that I could make another hero who can exist like an angel representing his innocence."¹⁸ The old grey-beard resembles Svidrigailov. There are at least five arguments for this assumption: 1) he has more or less the same age as Dostoyevsky's character, 2) he spies on the student and Sonya as he does it in the novel; 3) he is a double of Raskolnikov; 4) he can be deadly in love with the woman whose picture hangs on the wall of his room (Dunya, Raskolnikov's sister); 5) he keeps a pistol in the drawer of his tallboy and commits suicide. Thus, the whole film can be interpreted as a visualization of Svidrigailov's prying and dreaming before he kills himself. However, the identity of the grey-beard man cannot be definitely proved: he can be a neighbor curious to learn about the mysteries of other people.

The world of the animated cartoon is narrow. In this space of pain, anxiety and horror the protagonist is driven by the irrational darker side of his soul. In Król's opinion, "the ominous signs (drops of blood dripping from the door handle, the drinks in Raskolnikov glass, which turn into blood, the apple, which falls off the window-sill and leaves a bloody trace) foreshadow the terrible murder."¹⁹ To this list the red (bloody) curtains in the room of the grey-beard man in the hat should be added. At the same time, Sonya's red dress means something different – it is the color of hope and love.

The episode when Raskolnikov kills Aliona Ivanovna and her sister impresses with its visual cruelty and naturalism. It looks enigmatic and scary:

at the moment when Raskolnikov is going to hit his victim with the axe his eyes become the eyes of a predatory bird looking for blood. As if the spectator were prying, the crime is shown through the window. The scene of Alyona Ivanovna's murder is shown as it is described in the novel. The mysterious intonation of the film is intensified by the figure of the old grey-beard man in the hat, a kind of Raskolnikov's double. He spies on Sonya; he discovers the hidden layers of the young murderer's mind. In one of the episodes, he summons the image of the woman on the wall. At the end he commits suicide. In the episode on the bridge Raskolnikov's shadow disappears. The man dissolves into the darkness.²⁰

Król's description of the aura of the film is correct but in the cited fragment some important elements are missing or misinterpreted. Raskolnikov's eyes undergo even deeper transformations than it is indicated by the critic: the camera shows his eyes, then the eye of a predatory bird appears and, finally, the student gives us a wolfish look. A human being has become a Beast. As for

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

the grey-beard man, he does not evoke any spirits. He cannot help staring at the portrait of the lady whom he adores. It is not a mystery but the obsessive power of the passion, which brings him to suicide. The roots of the evil are in his mind.

Dumała's *Crime and Punishment* has absorbed the achievements of the visual arts of the 20th century. The animation director uses a unique combination of poetics resources and creates the atmosphere of anxiety. The poetics repertoire of the devices contributing to the total enigmatic effect of the film can be divided into several groups: 1.) allegorical imagery, 2.) ways of looking at things and narrative techniques, and 3.) textual functions of the soundtrack.

1.) **Allegorical imagery.** Into the texture of the animated cartoon the director interweaves emblematic images, which turn the story into a fable or a myth. Pocket watches and clocks belong to this category of images. They are inseparably linked to the money-lender: her appearance on the screen is accompanied by ticking; before being murdered she looks at the watch; after her death the camera shows the close shot of her arm and the watch; the drawer of her tallboy is full of watches producing annoying squeaking sounds. Alyona Ivanova is depicted as the Evil Queen of Time. The pocket watch plays an important part in the lives of other characters: in his dream Raskolnikov sees a pocket watch with broken glass and stained with blood; in the episodes telling about the murder the grey-beard man takes another watch out of his pocket and checks the time as if he wanted to know how much time is left before the performance of murdering begins. The images of watches and clocks perform various functions in the film. They express the idea of suffering of an individual in the historical time, predict the future tragic events and produce monotonous repetitive sounds, symbolizing the wasted spiritual landscapes of the modern man.

Another group of the allegoric imagery is connected with the opposition of natural/urban. It makes sense to stress again that in Dumała's film, according to the director's words which were cited above, the natural world symbolizes the open state of consciousness, the innocence of Raskolnikov as a child. In this phase of his personal development he is able to see the night sky with stars, to admire the beauty of the moon. After he moved to city he lost his contact with nature and his mind became sick. However, not all images of nature are safe. When the natural phenomena get into the urban environment they become dangerous and destructive: the eyes of a human give wolfish looks, the hand of the grey-beard man taking the pistol to commit suicide is covered with bear fur.

Thus, all natural phenomena in the film are ambivalent as their functions depend on the environment. Out of the urban world, they refer to the eternal layers of culture, to the norms of existence, which can bring humanity to salvation. It is the beauty which Dostoevsky spoke about. In the urban world, they lose their sacred meanings and turn into the tools of punishment. Drips of water in Raskolnikov's apartment symbolize his spiritual emptiness and produce an annoying noise. The biblical downpour at the end of the film means hope for purification. The moon in Raskolnikov's childhood has a different shape – it is full, blue and round. It is the moon of meditation adored by dreamers. In the city Raskolnikov sees the moon through the window. It is the cold crescent with sharp ends. The full moon coincides with the innocence of the character; the crescent is a sign of depression and frustration. The insects in the grass can seem strange or even ugly but, at the same, they are enigmatically beautiful, in any case they live in the harmony with the universe. When they get to the urban milieu they behave as if they were obsessive thoughts of a maniac. The leitmotif of the film is the fly, which is present practically in every shot. It is a herald of deaths, a torturer, and the source of a monotonous sound.

2.) Ways of looking at things and narrative techniques. Dumała's *Crime and Punishment* is a perfect study of ways of looking at things by a human being, who is obsessed with the idea of killing someone or himself and the sufferings of repenting and passions. Most objects shown on the screen are fragmented: the spectator can only see parts of buildings, stair-cases, bridges, faces, bodies. The camera follows the eye movements of the characters when they look up or down. The director often combines two opposite perspectives when showing the same object: the grey-beard man and Raskolnikov's killing the money-lender are seen through the window from outside the building and from the inside the room. The look is limited by obstacles (window frames, key-holes, parts of buildings, etc.) and is fixed on certain points (hands, eyes, watches, flies). Streets, people, natural phenomena are covered with the haze of small black clouds transforming the shapes of things. The bodies are static and look like statues or puppets. The gestures are mechanical and slow.

The narrative techniques in the animation cartoon film are based on the voyeuristic mechanisms of prying. The whole story is constructed as a result of the combination of the following narrative instances: 1) the omniscient author presenting indifferently all the events, 2) a complicated system of I-narrators: the fragmented visions of the characters with two dominant I-narrators (Raskolnikov and the grey-beard man whose "voices" intermingle).

The narration focuses on the repetitive leitmotifs: the fly, the watch, the dripping water, the bridge, the lady's portrait on the wall, the pistol in the drawer, *etc.*, which reappear in the oniric flows.

3.) Textual functions of the soundtrack. The soundtrack, consisting of monotonous disquieted melodies and noises (water, street, insects, doors, steps, wind, rain, thunder, *etc.*), is involved in telling the story. It emphasizes the emotional state of characters and the meanings of some episodes, and defines the rhythm of editing. Robinson stresses that the combination of music and color – the repetitive piano notes, which accompany the reddish brown visuals appearing in and out of shadows – “perfectly capture the increasingly blurred line of dream and reality in Raskolnikov’s disturbed mind.”²¹

Thus, the case of Raskolnikov is told in the animated cartoon with the help of the audiovisual idiom, which reveals the profound spiritual crisis of the modern man. Although the film does not follow the plot of Dostoevsky’s novel, it can be considered an adaption as the aesthetics of the Polish director is, to a great extent, derived from the novel *Crime and Punishment*. Dumala takes the Russian writer as an absurdist and surrealist dreamer going into the depth of human unconsciousness and the subconscious. On one hand, the Dostoevsky in the animation is not a great moral teacher with global messianic projects of salvation of the world but it is the Dostoevsky of mystery and dream. On the other hand, the way of re-reading *Crime and Punishment*, suggested in the animated cartoon film, has a great meaning for rethinking approaches to Dostoevsky as a whole. At least, it reveals the importance of paying more attention to visual components of the poetics of his novels. As Ionuț Anastasiu points out,

Dostoevsky’s spirit is essentially visual; his artistic conception is expressed by plastic representations, primarily by images and secondary by ideas. Eye and not ear is the central organ, is an expression of how the human being learns of the world and his own. Dostoevsky’s art seems mysterious because it uses the resources of images, often charming, and extremely fearful.²²

The Polish animated cartoon director intuitively felt the affinities between the aesthetic codes of the contemporary visual arts and Dostoevsky’s writings. He found out that the Russian novelist was not only a great teacher of life, a profound philosopher and a messiah, but, at the same time, a writer whose

21 Ch. Robinson, *op. cit.*

22 I. Anastasiu, *Visual and Audible in Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy’s Work*, “Cogito – Multi-disciplinary Research Journal” 2011, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 72.

works influenced and even programmed the development of the idiom of the audiovisual arts of the 20th and the 21st centuries.

Another audiovisual product based on the novel *Crime and Punishment* was released in 2004 by the studio "Timeanimation" from Kazakhstan. It is entitled *Dostoevsky project*²³ (directors Alexander Bakanov and Nariman Skakov, script by Nariman Skakov). It is a video-installation, which combines animation, video and stage acting. The main objective of the project sounds very ambitious – "reproducing of the 'spiritual landscapes' of Dostoevsky's philosophy by means of the contemporary technologies"²⁴. Skakov, one of the members of the team, is a professional historian of Russian literature with profound interest in Dostoevsky's works. In his paper "Dostoevsky's Christ and Silence at the Margins of *The Idiot*" the scholar studies the writer's approaches toward interpreting some contradictory passages from the Gospels. In particular, the scholar stresses that, when citing Jesus Christ's last words on the cross, Dostoevsky omits the words speaking (im)possible resurrection²⁵. Trying to understand the "philosophical and spiritual consequences" of that fact Skakov comes to the conclusion that

Dostoevsky follows Heidegger's train of thought in an attempt to avoid a "sham clarity" while addressing the issues posed by 'mocking' nature. [...] Dostoevsky's partial citation of Christ's last words on the cross is [...] a positive "passing over in silence" of a solution to the "horrifying riddle" that the mortal reality poses. Silence for Dostoevsky is not about leaving something unsaid—it is about saying something by means of the unsaid.²⁶

Published in 2009, the above-cited paper focuses on the issues raised in the video-installation. In both cases, the main concern is looking for new ways of thinking and speaking about religious values. However, the creators of *Dostoevsky Project* set this problem in a shocking and provocative way. The plot of the novel is reduced to the episodes of murder and the repentance of Raskolnikov. The poetics of film combines elements of a tactical first person "killer" computer game with video-recordings of the Turkmen actor Anna Mele, who behaves on the stage like a God's-fool. He pronounces phrases from the texts of the novel, including the famous monologue about "the aesthetic

23 *Dostoevsky Project* [online], Timeanimation, [access: 2013-11-22]: <<http://timeanimation.kz/>>.

24 *Достоевский проект* [online], Киношок, 2004 [access: 2013-11-22]: <<http://www.kinoshock.ru/rus/archive/2004/films/short/?id=401>>; transl. by – O.P.

25 N. Skakov, *Dostoevsky's Christ and Silence at the Margins of The Idiot Dostoevsky Studies*, "New Series" 2009, vol. 13, p. 139.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

louse". In the last part of the video-installation the off voice is reading of the Death of Lazarus from the Gospel of St. John in the Turkmen language while the Mantra Om is performed. All other characters of the novel (Sonya, Liza, Svidrigailov, *etc.*) are absent, which means that the film is about personal relations of a contemporary individual and God in the age of digital technologies.

To increase the shocking impact of the film, the creators convert Raskolnikov and Alyona Ivanovna into cyborgs. The film starts with the photographic image of a man whose countenance expresses horror. The face of the man is transformed into the digital one-dimensional picture painted in kitschy colors and then transformed another time into a robot-monster with the hammerhead shark carrying an axe in his hands. This bizarre and frightening character is shown from behind so that one could see on his back the copyright sign and the dials of the devices located inside the body. Alyona Ivanovna is an ugly abstract image with black lines instead of eyes. Before Raskolnikov kills her, the spectators can see the projection of her body from the back with a dash line indicating the place where the axe will hit. When she falls down on the floor a hole in her body opens so that one could see another machine working – it is her heart. In a smaller screen appears the scheme illustration of the parts of this mechanism. It is an apparatus, a mechanical device. The most surprising thing is the fact that Raskolnikov, in spite of being a cyborg, possesses a conscious and a soul and is able to repent and suffer. The conscious, a huge mechanical eye armed with sharp teeth, opens and closes like the diaphragm in the camera and stings Raskolnikov. The spirit of Alyona Ivanovna disturbs him too, and comes in his day and night dreams. She looks at him from the roofs of the apartment houses and is multiplied in a mechanical way: three rotating identical copies of her body pursue Raskolnikov; they are armed with tools of murder (an axe, scissors, and a screw key).

The video sequences are no less shocking than the animated part. First of all, it concerns the choice of the language: the actor speaks Turkmen and Russian while his monologues are dubbed into English. He jumps on the stage screaming "I am a murderer!" In the episode of Raskolnikov's kissing the land the insane becomes a sage. He looks in front of him and pronounces the phrase directed to the audience: "There's no knowing who's a gentleman and who isn't nowadays".

The treatment of Christian imagery is especially provocative and can be even considered blasphemy. In one of the episodes in the flow of aggressive and ugly images the spectator's eye catches an icon. It is a silhouette of a saint: a face with nimbus sending light to the Earth. The eyes, which are looking at sinners with love, turn out to be lice. In another episode the read-

ing of the Gospel in the Turkmen language is synchronized with the Mantra Om while the destruction of the Holy Scripture is projected in the screen: the image of the book starts shaking as if it happened because of the problems with transmitting the signal, after that the pages are covered with random combinations of signs, characters and symbols, which have no sense. In the final part the creators of the video-installation manipulate with digitalized images of crosses. Their yellow color projections look annoying: they rotate, change shapes, and are used as decoration in design samples. Finally, the Christian-related imagery is swept away by the chaos of digitally generated squares, lines, dots, and color spots.

The soundtrack and editing techniques contribute to creating the impression of hell. In contrast to Dumała's *Crime and Punishment*, the video-installation soundtrack does not perform any narrative function. It is mainly used to stress the dissonances of the film. The disgusting sharp and mechanical sounds provoke a feeling of horror. It is not a melody but repetitive imitations of electronically synthesized noises of computers, engines, human breathing, vehicle horns, alarms, whistles, radio sets squeaking mixed with the screaming of the God's fool. In many cases it is not possible to hear what the actor says. The episodes connected with the Christian imagery are illustrated with "pathetic" music profaning the metaphysical dimension of the pronounced words. The composition of shots combines elements of animation, videos and texts. The screen space is divided into smaller zones, in which contrasting activities are projected simultaneously. After killing Alyona Ivanovna, Raskolnikov's body is broken into two parts by the black stripe. The screams of the actor are visualized with images imitating contraction of the vocal chords shown from inside at the moment when the speaker produces load sounds. In some cases, darting of the aggressive images is synchronized with red dots growing quickly in the screen.

In brief, *Dostoevsky Project* is the *Crime and Punishment* of the digital era. The posthumanist ways of living and thinking is spreading quickly in the world so that in the nearest future almost all people will have to recognize the fact they are already more or less cyborgs. This unusual and paradoxical version of *Crime and Punishment* due to its extravagant cacophonous form does what its creators promise – it represents the Russian writer's "spiritual landscapes" and reflects the great problems, which he tried to solve. The advance of the digital civilization does not cancel "the eternal questions", which Dostoevsky asks in his books.

At the same time, the creators of *Dostoevsky Project* reveal the provocative aspects of poetics of *Crime and Punishment*. This approach towards the works

of the novelist is not new. In particular, George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thomson open the introduction to the book *Dostoevsky and Christian Tradition* with the statement: "Dostoevsky has emerged as the most provocative writer in Russian literature, the one who speaks most to the modern human condition"²⁷. Bakanov and Skakov follow this tradition and show *Crime and Punishment* as a shocking novel, which uses such sensational and ugly events as murder or a suicide as examples to teach a moral lesson. The video-installation shows that the contemporary man, the same as Dostoevsky's characters, continues feeling the metaphysical hunger. This feeling is becoming even stronger. The Raskolnikov of the video-installation represents the image of the digitalized age man who looks ugly, but he is not uglier than the Raskolnikov from the famous book. Moreover, by releasing their "adaptation" the creators of *Dostoevsky Project* want to warn against those "prophets" of post-humanism, who proclaim the absolute freedom of any moral or religious taboos. The "blasphemy" is not negation of God but a rhetoric strategy against simplified solutions of the most difficult issues and getting faith involved in ideologies. They are aware of the fact that all old-fashioned concepts, like "conscious," "God," "hell," "crime," "punishment" are still here and that in the contemporary world it is not possible to speak about them using the outdated idiom. They follow Dostoevsky's way as he was a writer with open-ended dialogical thinking and did not accept the ready-made clichés concerning any problems, especially the philosophical ones.

The third animated cartoon film *Raskolnikov: Alternative History* (director Pavel Muntian)²⁸ raises an important problem, which concerns the role of stereotypes, imposing certain ways of reading works of literature and, *Crime and Punishment*, in particular. *Raskolnikov: Alternative History* (2009) is a commercial product, which advertises Kaspersky anti-virus computer software and shows the murder scene from the novel. Raskolnikov hits Alyona Ivanovna on the head with an axe but cannot kill her as she is wearing a helmet under her wig. The money-lender takes the wig off and shows the trade-mark of Kaspersky with the motto: "The object is protected." The "Toonbox" studio produced a number of similar animated cartoons changing the tragic endings to happy ones and based on biographies of famous people and works of classics: Chapaev, Darwin, Pushkin, Jack the Ripper. All of them have gained

27 G. Pattison, D.O. Thomson, *Introduction: Reading Dostoevsky religiously*, in: *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by G. Pattison, D.O. Thomson, New York 2001, p. 1.

28 *Раскольников: альтернативная история* [online], YouTube, [access: 2013-11-22]: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQMWUm-gyLw>>.

a wide popularity in the Russian Internet but *Raskolnikov: Alternative History* is especially successful.

The enthusiasm of the audience for-the film is explained by the fact that it is not just an attempt to sell Dostoevsky's novel as a commercial brand but a first-rate postmodernist work, which suggests a new angle of rereading the novel. As can be seen from the title, the whole cycle of animated cartoons uses the genre conventions of alternate history. Following the well-known definition of AH given by Steven H. Silver, 1.) the story shown in the film has a point of divergence from the plot of the novel – the money-lender is not killed and Raskolnikov does not experience the suffering of repentance; 2.) the change that alters history is known – it is the invention of Kaspersky antivirus software and 3.) it examines the ramification of that change – Raskolnikov and the money-lender makes a breath-taking financial career and her face replaces the portrait of Benjamin Franklin on the 100 “Babki” bill (“babki” is a pun: it is a slang word for money and plural from “babka,” the old lady). Thus, the sub-plot telling about Raskolnikov and his crime is completely changed. The whole novel is reduced to the episode of murder while Raskolnikov's sufferings of repentance, as well as other characters, never appear on the screen.

In contrast to Dumala's film in the *Alternative History* the image of Raskolnikov is ludicrous but he is not a cyborg from *Dostoevsky Project*. He wears 19th century fashion clothes and looks like a moronic, eccentric clown. He is a skinny young man with protruding eyes without a chin and sharp teeth sticking out of his mouth. The axe, which he holds with two fingers, hits the stone of the stair-case and makes repetitive metallic sounds. He is neither tragic nor frightening. The money-lender's figure is ludicrous as well: she giggles, has a huge hairy wart on her nose and speaks with squeaky voice. All portrait features are exaggerated and grotesque.

The animation is an excellent parody of all Dostoevsky's clichés, which were created by the literary critics and disseminated through the film noir tradition, including Dumala's adaptation. One can see what is expected to be in Dostoevsky's movies: trash heaps in the streets, the dirty St. Petersburg with its dark lanes; the blood on the floor (which turns out to be raspberry jam). From out of the foggy air comes a group of singing gypsies. Muntian skillfully integrates into the film the citation from the most-famous Russian animation film *The Hedgehog in the Fog* by Yuriy Norshtyen: Raskolnikov takes a policeman for an owl. In the “typical” 19th century urban landscapes the spectator notices from time to time the references to today's life (the graffiti “Zenith is a champion” or an announcement “Loans in 5 minutes without any documents or warrantors”).

Thus, the film is addressed to the Russian readers, who are tired of the “dull” Dostoevsky, of imposing his personality and works as icons of the Russian soul. In this situation it is no wonder that the film has proved to be in great demand. In this sense, the animation can be compared to Boris Akunin’s *FM*. All those clichés, which the film visualizes, have already become kitsch, which is very well sold to tourists and other international guests together with hotel “Dostoyevsky” and restaurant “Dostoevsky.” The film suggests reading Dostoevsky as a kitschy writer and, to a great extent, he was a kitschy writer: he knew very well how to use the formulas of mass literature in order draw the readers’ attention. S. Boym in her book *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* refers to “Dostoevskianism” (“Dostoevskishchina”) as a form of kitsch²⁹. H.-J. Gerick also stresses the elements of kitsch in Dostoevsky’s novels. It explains the popularity of writer among the film-directors: “at first sight, Dostoevsky and film are a natural combination. His novels and stories are thick with melodrama, vivid characters, plot twists, passion, and sin. The urban milieu, the cliff-hanging episodes, the murders, suicides, violence, even the whodunit in Dostoevsky offer large potential for a whole array of *films noirs*”³⁰, stresses Louis Menashe.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the three modes of rereading *Crime and Punishment* in the animated cartoons, which have been studied in this paper, reveal those traits of Dostoevsky’s poetics which make him one of the most popular authors of today’s world. He is presented in the films as a visual, provocative, shocking, and kitschy writer, like many other first-rate authors, theatre and film-directors, artists, computer designers of the end of the 20th-the beginning of the 21st centuries who followed his way. Many years before the postmodernist era and the digital age he discovered the communicative and receptive mechanisms of contemporary culture and successfully used them to set the metaphysical problems, to warn humanity about the dangers caused by the crisis of culture based on Christian values and to look for salvation.

29 S. Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Cambridge 1995, p. 252

30 L. Menashe, *Dostoevsky and Soviet Film: Visions of Demonic Realism by N.M. Lary*, “Film Quarterly” 1988, vol. 41, no. 3, p. 55.



ABSTRACT

REREADING FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*
IN ANIMATED CARTOONS

The paper studies interpretation of philosophical views and poetics of Fyodor Dostoyesky's novel *Crime and Punishment* in animated cartoons. The Polish director Piotr Dumala creates an enigmatic story full of tragic emotions and looks upon Dostoyesvky as an essentially visual writer. Another film *Dostoevsky Project* (directors Alexander Bakanov and Nari-man Skakov) combines computer animation with episodes of acting on the stage. It is a postmodernist interpretation of the novel reflecting shocking and provocative side of Dostoyesky's writings. The last film studied in the paper is *Raskolnikov: Alternative History* (director Pavel Muntian) is a commercial advertisement of the Kaspersky Antivirus program. This witty parody of the clichés, which are rooted in the Russian culture, presents Dostoevsky as one of the predecessors of contemporary kitsch.

KEYWORDS

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, animated-cartoon film, intermediality, film adaptations, poetics, audiovisual arts, kitsch