

## BOOK REVIEWS

Michael R. Katz

### *DREAMS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIAN FICTION*

University Press of New England, 1984. Pp. 215.

Reviewed by Edward Wasiolek

The title is ambitious and misleading. The book is only partly on nineteenth-century fiction and very little on dreams and the unconscious. There is a brief review of dream theory and a rapid overview of dreams in Russian fiction before the nineteenth-century. After that Katz gives us capsule summaries of the dreams in the works of Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. There is a nod to a few other novelists, but not too many. And even among the works of the four novelists', much is omitted. "White Nights" and *The Dream of the Ridiculous Man*, for example, are not discussed. The author would like the book to be a profound treatise on dreams and the unconscious and there is throughout a kind of special pleading that insights of significance are in the offing. He tells us that Russian authors "explored the twilight realms of consciousness in their art as no other European writers did" (p. 1). Anna's dream about being married to Vronsky and Karenin at the same time "provides profound insights into her consciousness" (p. 137). "Sheds light" is one of the favorite phrases. But as a matter of fact we learn very little about the unconscious and very little about dreams. The theoretical skills the author brings to the problem are too frail. Freud and Jung are given only a few pages and then dismissed: "In novels there are no psyches to be psychoanalyzed and literary dreams are dreams that have never been dreamed" (p. 14). True, but that is the beginning and not the end of the problem. Psychoanalysis has provided us with a very sophisticated vocabulary for dealing with dreams, and there is a large and intelligent literature on the theory of dreams and much spirited discussion, especially on the theoretical difficulties of dreams in literature. Katz shows no familiarity with this literature.

He describes his theoretical position as "eclectic," a term used too often to avoid a coherent position. I take it that literary dreams for him are intentional constructs, created for structural purposes. If so, they are no different from other materials the author uses. Andrey's and Pierre's dreams in *War and Peace* show, for Katz, contrasting progressions toward life and death, but then so do lots of other things in the novel: images, statements, actions, attitudes. Alyosha's dream of the Cana of Galilee shows his transformation from the temptation of unfaith to faith. True, but we really don't need the dream to tell us that. Katz never makes a case for the literary dream as a distinctive element of language and structure. All the complex and fascinating questions about dreams in literature are never raised, and consequently never applied to the understanding of the literary works. He gives us an intelligent reading of Raskolnikov's mare-beating dream, but the interpretation does not tell us anything we don't get from a number of other sources. For Katz the dream tells us that Raskolnikov's *mechta* (conscious dream) is contradicted by his *son* (unconscious dream). The fact of the matter is that the dream tells us a great deal more, but you need the logic and structure of dream language to get at that something more. The mare-beating dream not only shows that Raskolnikov's unconscious is in revolt against his consciousness, but that he has furious and destructive aggressions against his mother, society, authority, and himself, aggressions that live side-by-side with pity and love for those whom he aggresses against.

It may be that I have been judging Katz by a book he did not write and didn't want to write. He has written, after all, lucidly and intelligently about dreams in the works of these various authors in the way that one would write about any thematic or structural element: the way one would write about children, or peasants, or political themes. But his title promises a lot more and he himself insists throughout that something about the nature of the literary unconscious is being revealed. If so, he has not done so. He has converted dreams into rationally defined thematic and structural functions, thoroughly assimilated to consciousness and intention, the very opposite of what dreams are supposed to be.