

**Dialogue on the threshold and diatribe: construction mechanisms of
the individual's self-consciousness / *Diálogo no limiar e diatribe:
mecanismos de construção da autoconsciência do sujeito***

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about the dialogue on the threshold whose origins are in the Socratic dialogue and the diatribe (a dialogued internal gender), both understood as privileged mechanisms in the construction of the main character of Dostoevski's novel *Uma criatura dócil* [The Meek One]. Its aim is to discuss the materiality of the text – mainly the dialogue on the threshold when the main character is in its existential crisis – and the mechanism of the diatribe which provoke the philosophical dialogue experience that the individual assumes while constituting his voice.

KEYWORDS: Dialogue on the threshold; Socratic dialogue; Diatribe; Self-consciousness

RESUMO

Este artigo tem o objetivo de refletir sobre o diálogo no limiar, um gênero nascido do diálogo socrático, e a diatribe, um gênero retórico interno dialogado, compreendidos ambos os fenômenos, neste estudo, como instrumentos privilegiados para a construção da autoconsciência do protagonista de Uma criatura dócil, novela de Dostoiévski. Tencionamos examinar, na materialidade do texto, o partejar das ideias desenvolvido pelo diálogo no limiar no momento da crise existencial vivida pela personagem-narrador e os expedientes da diatribe que provocam a experimentação filosófico-dialógica que esse sujeito assume ao constituir a sua voz.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Diálogo no limiar; Diálogo socrático; Diatribe; Autoconsciência*

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On the romanesque truth

In the preface to *The Meek One* (2009), Dostoevsky discusses the nature of the narrative to which the reader will be introduced. According to the author, this is a fantastic narrative, however not in conformity to the traditional conception of this genre, that is, the one which casts a doubt regarding the occurrence or not of certain events in the story, but referring to the verisimilitude of the focalization of the narrative instance. Dostoevsky's reflection on inverisimilitude lies in the fact that the author could not be aware of what is told in a first-person narrative if the reported events were not a remembrance nor a confession, such as this story. In it, the protagonist has conversations with absent addressees who supposedly listen and give an appraisal of what is told by the speaker. The dialogue follows the course of the character-bound narrator's reflections back in the past and into the future, in order for him to understand what motivated his wife's suicide and to understand himself. The narrative, captured in its inception, therefore still in the process of mental elaboration, generates a fantastic situation according to Dostoevsky's understanding. How would the author, from the perspective of the exotopy of the character's self-questioning, gain access to the process of search for the truth? – asks Dostoevsky. He notes that such knowledge would only be reasonable if an “invisible stenographer” took notes of these speeches and transmitted them to the author. Dostoevsky remembers that a similar technique had been used by Victor Hugo. In *The Last Day of a Man Condemned to Death*, the French writer inserts in the narrative the character's flow of thoughts in the last moment prior to his death. According to the author of *The Insulted and Injured*, if Victor Hugo “without allowing that fantasy, the story would not exist – the most real and most truthful work of all he wrote” (DOSTOEVSKY , 2009, p.355).

From the excerpt above it is possible to infer that the essence of Dostoevsky's narratives is built upon the desire to create human realism: to depict the emergence of truth from its fountainhead, to follow the clash of ideas in their origin, disoriented, with assertions shortly-after denied, entwining all these discursive means in a woven narrative characterized by contradictions, until the hidden truth is revealed.

When examining the writings of the Russian author, including *The Meek One* (2009), Mikhail Bakhtin notes another aspect to be considered for the understanding of the matter herein treated as narrative verisimilitude and as realism. It is the way by which the character becomes aware of the world and how this process turns into a pathway to self-knowledge. Dostoevsky's characters are "ideologues", as Bakhtin teaches us (2008, p. 111). They are built from the philosophical stance adopted towards the *other*; their thoughts and actions respond to the speeches of the *other*. Provocation and the clash of ideas, according to Bakhtin, are rooted in the Socratic dialogue, a carnivalesque popular genre developed in the field of the serious-comic genre in the Hellenic period, with Plato, Xenophon, Glaucon, Antisthenes, among other authors. With these philosophers, the genre was characterized by short narratives which recovered Socrates' dialogues with his disciples (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.111), without holding to historical and memory-related bonds. The primordial feature of this genre is "the Socratic notion of the dialogic nature of truth and human thinking" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.110), that is, it originates in the "know thyself" principle, whose basis are settled in the understanding that self-consciousness is born from the interaction with the other, a process triggered by provocation, by questioning, which in turn lead to reflection and auto-elucidation. This ideological notion was widely spread in Roman literature and also in the literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, ultimately reaching out to the Reformation period (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.111). From the core of Socratic dialogue arises the dialogue on the threshold¹, a mechanism to search for truth and self-knowledge motivated by an extraordinary situation of intense dramatism in the narrative, which ends up constraining the character to a speech characterized by "summing up and confession" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.111), as we shall see by examining *The Meek One*².

¹ According to Bakhtin, Plato's *Phaedo* is characterized by the "dialogue on the threshold", on a Socratic dialogic basis, for establishing a clenched, intense debate on the immortality of the soul, in a situation of impending death (1984, p.111).

² All the excerpts from *The Meek One* herein quoted have been extracted from the 2003 edition, published by Barnes & Noble. The original version of this paper, written in Portuguese, quotes the 2009 edition of the book, published by Cosac Naify. Since we cannot work with the Russian text, this study relies, in its two versions, on the translator's hypothetical reading (Constance Garnett for the English text and Fátima Bianchi for the Portuguese one).

“Who I was and who she was”³

Focusing our attention on *The Meek One*, we can say that this work is also affiliated to the Socratic dialogue genre, in the dialogue on the threshold variant. From the beginning of the narrative the protagonist is presented in full conflict, unable to understand the reasons that led his wife to suicide and not knowing how to deal with his feelings. It is in front of his dead wife on the table in the living room – a space dividing the inside and the outside, the wife’s body still there and the imminent separation from her – that the character’s inner drama takes place when he finds himself in the border between his consciousness and the other’s, summoned by his memory. The dialogue on the threshold is the confrontation between two consciousnesses, between two ways of seeing and thinking the world. This situation of peculiar tension forces the protagonist of the narrative to elucidate the facts and know himself.

In order to shape the dialogue on the threshold, the author selects the diatribe⁴, a rhetorical genre constituted in the character’s inner world and “usually structured in the form of a conversation with an absent interlocutor – and resulting in a dialogization of the very process of speech and thought” (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.120). These two genres are decisive for the constitution of Dostoevsky’s story because the dialogue on the threshold allows us to access the character’s inner-self, by revealing the deep layers of his personality and the formation of the idea, at the same time the diatribe shows the process by which the story is composed.

In order for us to understand how the diatribe structures the narrative and what philosophical speeches it updates, it is necessary to present here a synthesis of the story to further examine the process by which the character’s self-consciousness is built and, concomitantly, investigate what philosophical experiences it proves. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the diatribe is a privileged rhetorical instrument to explore the character’s dialogue on the threshold, shelter the clash of contradictions, organize the ideas, and lead to lucidity, or in the character’s words, be able to “put it out together and look at it as a whole” (p.362), that is, the one that clarifies the reported event and that elucidates itself. By examining the text, we will observe that throughout the

³ This subtitle is the title of the first chapter of *The Meek One*.

⁴ According to Bakhtin (1984, p.120), the diatribe was created by Bion Borystenes (III a. C), who was also a founder of the menippeia.

narrative the character undergoes a maieutic process characterized by the tension which quickly progresses in the speech. From this approach, language is an instrument to acknowledge the *other*, to discuss the subject's ontological doubts and to express oneself.

A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another* (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.287. Emphasis added by the author).

The narrative begins in the moment of crisis, when the husband, a pawnbroker, is terrified at the sight of his dead wife. In the face of the inexorable fate and the painful loss, he, in the role of character-bound narrator, holds a dialogue with the addressee – the “gentlemen”, presumably their listeners –, in order to try and comprehend the tragic evidence of his wife's suicide. It must be clarified that this absent addressee not only allows the communicative function to emerge but is also responsible for the creation of an “artistic atmosphere” favorable to the manifestation of the word of the hero (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.64). As the construction of the truth develops, the character-bound narrator sees himself represented in the consciousness of other, the social environment, which has provided him the moral understructure that now comes to his consciousness and condemns him. The clash between the I and the other is thus created, the latter being the agent provoking the speaker's self-interpellation and self-evaluation through the birth of ideas. During this recovery of memory, the reader follows the protagonist's conflict, in his distinct soul movements which generate different shades to the narrative.

Stuck in the past, the hero activates the memory to recover his experiences with the wife, from the first date to her death. In the first part of the story, the husband, unnamed, is guided by the pride sustained by the idea of superiority towards the *other* and starts manipulating the wife, introduced to the reader according to her position in the family structure, or referred to in the husband's speech only by the feminine third-person, singular personal pronoun. The authoritative tone dominates the speech, which shortly after opens breaches that reveal this person's frailty. The character-bound narrator relinquishes the prerogative of uttering his wishes according to his intimate choice (devote himself to love). Let us see this game of power and control in the following excerpt:

We went [to the theater] in silence and in silence we returned. Why, why, from the very beginning, did we take to being silent? From the very first, you know, we had no quarrels, but always the same silence. She was always, I remember, watching me stealthily in those days; as soon as I noticed it I became more silent than before. It is true that it was I insisted on the silence, not she. On her part there were one or two outbursts, she rushed to embrace me; but as these outbursts were hysterical, painful, and I wanted secure happiness, with respect from her, I received them coldly. And indeed, I was right; each time the outburst was followed next day by a quarrel.

Though, again, there were no quarrels, but there was silence and – and on her side a more and more defiant air. “Rebellion and independence,” that’s what it was, only she didn’t know how to show it. Yes, that meek face was becoming more and more defiant. Would you believe it, I was becoming revolting to her? I learned that. And there could be no doubt that she was moved to frenzy at times. Think, for instance, of her beginning to sniff at our poverty, after her coming from such sordidness and destitution — from scrubbing the floors! you see, there was no poverty; there was frugality, but there was abundance of what was necessary, of linen, for instance, and the greatest cleanliness. [...] It was not our poverty she was scornful of, but my supposed miserliness in the housekeeping (p.370-371).

In the first place, the long fragment is justified by the need to follow the protagonist’s mental journey in the diatribe, which, gradually, will break the crust of materialism produced by usury, allowing him to understand his wife and her reasons, and also favoring self-gnosis.

We can see then that the character-bound narrator activates the memory in order to remember the beginning of his marriage. Questions about the lack of dialogues between the couple are raised as soon as the process of recovering the past starts. From this provocation, whose aim is to understand the past, the enunciative voice initiates the reflection on the aspects that unleashed the conflict, analyzing the behavior of each character:

He		She
“silence”	→ ←	“watching me stealthily”
“intensifies the silence”	→ ←	“outbursts”
“coldly”, “silence”	→ ←	“a more and more defiant air”

We note that husband and wife defy one another by their reactions and counter-reactions. When recovering the memories, on the one hand, the character-bound narrator feels compelled to justify his reactions in the past: “as these [the wife’s] outbursts were hysterical, painful”, “I wanted secure happiness, with respect from her, I received them coldly”. From this standpoint, in order to validate his version, the husband puts his efforts into euphorizing his behavior and dysphorizing hers. On the other hand, he tries to make the addressee believe his reasons, the logic of his behavior: “And there could be no doubt [about that]”, “that’s what it was, only she didn’t know how to show it”. In this last fragment the discrediting of the possible knowledge of the facts by the wife becomes explicit. The partiality of the report is confirmed by both the assumption from the protagonist’s point of view in the first-person narrative, supported by the expression that endorses the one-sidedness of the report and tries to impose his truth (“And indeed, I was right”), and the argument of the character-bound narrator about his wife’s unawareness of the nature of their relationship.

The partiality of the report goes through a winding path, built by truths that are relativized and/or unbuilt, which charges from the narrative voice a constant unsettlement of his certainties, a revision of what was rectified. The dialogue on the threshold is then held: the character lies between the simulacre he had built to hide the truth from himself and the new perception of the facts. The contradictions are presented in the story: “each time the outburst was followed next day by a quarrel” / “Though, again, there were no quarrels”; “Think, for instance, of her beginning to sniff at our poverty” / “It was not our poverty she was scornful of, but my supposed miserliness in the housekeeping”. The perceptions of one and the other are in equation. It is the passage to knowledge. The construction of the authoritative speech, based on the patriarchal-materialistic logic, cannot be sustained. The ideas are constantly gnawed, which causes certainties to dissolve and unveils what is hidden. Hence the assertions followed by rectifications (“That is”; “Though again”), or the reconsiderations that attribute to himself the responsibility for the disharmony: “It is true that it was I insisted on the silence, not she”.

Another very important point is that the clash of ideas does not occur only between the speech subject and the referent therein evoked. The justifications of the enunciative voice do not resist the addressee’s presumed reply— his consciousness —,

who does not seem to be convinced with the report. The invocations to make the addressee believe are constant in his speech (“Believe”, “You see”). In other terms: although the enunciative voice employs a series of strategies that mask the truth, it is revealed little by little, in drops, through self-questioning.

We can say that the protagonist’s process of self-consciousness follows two directions: it moves outwards and speaks about the other, and concomitantly, moves inwards and speaks about himself. The gaze out of the centrality of the *I* is subject to the memory that provides vital substance for the acknowledgment of the inner self. This detour to reach the axis of the conflict, self-knowledge, alludes to the myth of Perseus, in which the hero, when fighting Medusa⁵, chooses to look at her reflex in his polished shield to avoid being petrified by the Gorgon’s eyes. In *The Meek One*, gazing at the other and the past helps putting the facts in order, knowing the other, as well as assessing the present and oneself.

This centrifugal force of the heart of the matter – self-knowledge – is also manifested when the character-bound narrator becomes aware that his speech needs order, or when he foresees the surreptitious movement of disguising the truth, possibly fearing to face it.

[...] Ah! listen! listen! This is the beginning now, I’ve been in a muddle. You see I want to recall all this, every detail, every little point. I want to bring them all together and look at them as a whole and – I cannot... It’s these little things, these little things... (p.360).

We should also remember that the circumstances involving the marriage are fully unfavorable to this man that grieves for the passing of his wife. Remembering the past implies recovering the period between having met the sixteen-year-old girl, now his dead wife, and matrimony. In this gap, there is the usury imposed by the protagonist on the girl, which led her to despair, to penury, even causing her to pawn possessions of emotional value, such as an icon of the Madonna with the Babe. Besides the manipulation and oppression to force the girl to marry him, there was also her

⁵ Aeschylus, in *Prometheus Bound*, creates the Medusa, a chthonic monster that, along with her sisters, Stheno, and Euryale, were known as the three Gorgons. The Greek playwright describes them as follows: “[...] the human-hating Gorgons, with snakes for hair. No mortal who looks at them will breathe again.” (AESCHYLUS, 2012, p.40).

helplessness due to the rigorous work to which she was submitted by her aunts in orphanhood.

The character-bound narrator takes this period of poverty and exploitation suffered by his wife as an argument to legitimate his indignation face to her assumed haughtiness (“Think, for instance, of her beginning to sniff at our poverty, after her coming from such sordidness and destitution – from scrubbing the floors!” – p.371). This questioning presents the confrontation of two world views: the possessive one, lived by the husband, and the one determined by the humanitarian feelings of the wife, who does not agree with avarice. The protagonist defends the ambition for gaining profit and the accumulation of capital, strictly following the teachings of the capitalist system. His financial project complies with a rigorous planning that aims at possessing thirty thousand rubles and moving to Crimea, when he would then abandon the life of pawnbroker, according to his plans, not shared with by the wife. Furthermore, in his understanding, the wife’s prepotency is improper, as he was the one to free her from a life of misfortune. The protagonist’s argumentation continues, clenched, in defense of his standpoint until the moment that he reevaluates the wife’s worldview. In the confrontation with the *other*, he concludes that what troubles his wife is not a poor existence, but the greed for accumulating assets/capital and the exploitation of the *other*.

The dominating tone in the speech of the diatribe in the first part of the story is of oppression and phallogentrism. One example of this discursive structure is explicit in “Rebellion and independence, that’s what it was, only she didn’t know how to show it. Yes, that meek face was becoming more and more defiant” (p.371) One can assume, through the speech of the character-bound narrator, that the woman belongs to the class of the meek, the ones that should be subjugated; hence the non-acceptance of the confrontation. The husband manifests a watchful behavior by denying the will of the *other*, preventing the *other* from acting. This universe governed by a personal, one-sided logic brings with it the establishment of the rule, which causes the hierarchization of the individuals. Therefore, any attempt by the wife of not subjecting to this determined, fixed structure is seen as defiance, disrespect to the *status quo*.

Pierre Bourdieu (1995) speaks of the “experience of *doxa*” to the social worldview, a condition which coerces the behavior of a certain community to accept as natural a given consensual thinking. In the protagonist’s universe, the androcentric

behavior represents a notion crystallized by the *habitus*, that is, reproduced by the ruling agents and institutions (family, Church, State, etc.), admitted by the system as the “natural world” (BOURDIEU, 1995, p.164). Under this approach, the sub-representation of women in the family and, by extension, in society is understood by the protagonist as natural, that is, it is part of the consensus; thus, any rebellion must be crushed. Hence the oppressive silence to deny the voice of the *other*.

The conflict is set in the narrative because the protagonist’s wife is a different person from the one he pictures. He sees her as “kind and meek” (p.359), “childish” (p. 397), “truthful and naive” (p.377), a creature that could easily be controlled, whose naivety could not give her conditions to understand and guide herself through life. This flawed image is deconstructed little by little, at the same time the friction between the couple intensifies. At first, the wife does not accept this role expected by him and the patriarchal society; she wants to participate in her husband’s activities. The tension reaches critical points in the moment she interferes with his business:

[...] Then, without raising my voice in the least, I explained calmly that the money was mine, that I had a right to look at life with my own eyes and – and that when I had offered to take her into my house, I had hidden nothing from her.

She suddenly leapt up, suddenly began shaking all over and – what do you think – she suddenly stamped her foot at me; it was a wild animal, it was a frenzy, it was the frenzy of a wild animal. I was petrified with astonishment [...]. But I did not lose my head, [...] I announced plainly that from that time forth I should deprive her of the part she took in my work. She laughed in my face, and walked out of the house.

The fact is, she had not the right to walk out of the house. Nowhere without me [...] (p.374).

The fragment depicts a disagreement of the couple, caused by the wife when she underprices an object taken to the pawnshop when her husband is away. On the one hand there is a rebellious attitude from the young wife; on the other, the husband’s surprise faces the woman’s passionate reaction. His indignation is so intense that he seeks in the addressee the same astonishment that dominates him. He believes that the “gentlemen” share his values, that they partake of what has been set by that consensus mentioned by Bourdieu. In fact, what we have here is what Vološinov understands as dialogism, a language phenomenon based on the principle that the outer speech is the “*organizing center of any utterance*” (1973, p.93. Emphasis added by the author), and in

which the individual constructs his inner speech in search for, in this case, convalidation in the discursive structures of his social milieu.

The tension increases even more until the episode when the wife holds the gun in front of the husband, who at first pretends to be asleep. He opens his eyes, so that she notices he is aware of the confrontation, shutting them thereafter and remaining unmoved. The feud comes to its extreme limit when the wife, discouraged to continue, leaves the room. From this point the husband feels that he has defeated her. This episode is crucial to the narrative, for it changes its course and its tone. The roles are inverted. Subjugated, it is the wife who remains silent, becomes ill, is nullified, and closes herself to the world. Her process of cocooning and depression belongs to the second part of the narrative. The more the wife is nullified, the more the husband's speech is marked by the fear of losing her, by passionate declarations of love, with plans to put an end to the usury and travel abroad with her.

But suddenly she came up to me and, clasping her hands (this morning, this morning!) began telling me that she was a criminal, that she knew it, that her crime had been torturing her all the winter, was torturing her now... That she appreciated my generosity... "I will be your faithful wife, I will respect you..." Then I leapt up and embraced her like a madman. I kissed her, kissed her face, kissed her lips like a husband for the first time after a long separation. And why did I go out this morning, only two hours... our passports for abroad... Oh, God! if only I had come back five minutes, only five minutes earlier!... (p.398)

The desperation of the character-bound narrator widens and becomes evident with excessive emotional outbursts, completely diverse from what was seen in the first part, when rationality restrained the emotions and determined the behavior. The protagonist now has a bad feeling about losing his wife and this makes suffering even more acute, until it overflows when he finds her after she has committed suicide. After the tragic outcome, the narrating character wants to understand the facts. However, facing the reality is difficult because at the same time the character is searching for the truth, he creates a simulacrum to hide it from himself, or to delay its acknowledgment. As the character wanders through his past, he questions himself, speaks about the other, wishes to know the one he suffocates, the one he wanted to efface and finds himself in need, depending on her presence-absence. The process of self-analysis though diatribe, from which the narrative originates, starts from the point the character faces his dead wife.

[...] I suddenly suggested to her giving all our money to the poor except the three thousand left me by my godmother, which we would spend on going to Boulogne, and then we would come back and begin a new life of real work. [...]. And I believe she smiled chiefly from delicacy, for fear of disappointing me. [...]. I saw it all, all, to the smallest detail, I saw better than any one; all the hopelessness of my position stood revealed!

I told her everything about myself and about her. [...] Oh, of course, I changed the conversation. I tried, too, not to say a word more about certain things. And, indeed, she did revive once or twice — I remember it, I remember it! Why do you say I looked at her and saw nothing? And if only this [suicide] had not happened, everything would have come to life again. (p.396-397).

“The horror of it for me is that I understand it all!” (p.357) – says the protagonist. It causes him deep pain to know that he could have expressed his love, understood his wife, shared close moments with her, but had kept himself blind to the truth. From Aristotle's teachings on *Oedipus*, we can apprehend two elements of the tragic outcome that can be applied to *The Meek One*: fear and pity. The violence of the wife's suicide when the husband longs to save her and supposedly wishes to lead a new life far from usury, causes the reader to “tremble and feel pity at what is happening” (ARISTOTLE, 1997, 1453b 1-8 / p.99).

In this threshold between the dreams of restarting a new life and the inevitability of death caused by the humiliation and nullification imposed by him on his wife, the protagonist experiences multiple emotions: guilt, regret, impotence. All these emotions force the character to notice he belongs to an irremediable solitude, which follows a circular line in the narrative, linking the beginning with the end. The diatribe becomes the medium which gives birth to the ideas that lead the character from ignorance to the tragic understanding of everything.

Following the course between the initial and final questioning, the memory acts in the intervals of the current moments and in the frequency of the axiological framework of the other, the wife. The confrontation between past and present gives the character, little by little, the exact range of his acts, the acknowledgment of his personality, a lucidity, which does not redeem him in this transit of the threshold, permeated by pain and disgrace.

[...] and how shall I be left alone? (p. 357)

[...] when they take her away tomorrow, what will become of me?
(p.403)

The elegiac tone, more dominant in the second part of the text, does not allow sadness to be sheltered by lucidity; on the contrary, it deepens the tragic meaning of existence, the inexorability of fate.

On human truth

In *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity (ca.1920-1923)* (1990), Bakhtin discusses the subject of death and the emotional-volitional implications related thereto in the literary text. In his considerations, the philosopher of language comments that, in this moment in which the individual is free from transitivity, “[he] becomes emotionally measurable, musically expressive, and self-sufficient (sufficient to itself as totally present-on-hand); [his] being-already-determined becomes a *valuable* determinateness” (1990, p.108. Emphasis added by the author), in opposition to the individual that is constructing the meanings of existence in the temporal course. Although the memory of the other represents an axiological conclusion of the same, this presence-absence concluded for itself may become esthetically significant. In *The Meek One*, it works as an unchaining element of the ethical-cognitive tension for the character-bound narrator that follows the flow of memory, intersected by the current times, but guided by emotions that struggle with each other in the game of temporality, by the axiological frameworks that deepen the differences, question the certainties and manifest openly the pain of loss. This presence-absence functions as a Socratic provocation which instigates the hero to the dialogic experience of the idea, to self-knowledge.

By casting doubt on the compromised thought with a watchfulness intended to be permanent and unconditional, ruled by a world gravitating around binary oppositions (man x woman; dominator x dominated), a world which silences and obliterates the other, the dialogue on the threshold shows the human realism of which Dostoevsky speaks in the preface of the story herein analyzed. This realism created by the architecture of the dialogic relation reveals man’s complex psychology, presenting him as an individual living in an ethical-cognitive tension, an individual who gives himself a new meaning

with the other. In the confrontation of distinct values resulting from the experimentation of ideas, the diatribe acts as a decisive rhetorical means to aesthetically elaborate the inner speech that comes into contact “with speech received from outside.” (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.118). It exposes the character’s unease and (un)certainities and leads him to the transit of the threshold, space-time of memory, consciousness, guilt and remorse without redemption. By means of this rhetorical instrument the word builds up, in *The Meek One*, the condition of the romanesque truth as a consequence of the author’s mastery in dealing with the linguistic materiality with the purpose of showing the tensional existence of the human being and offering a concise, sensitive picture of the dialogic nature of human life.

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Received August 15, 2012

Accepted November 26, 2012