

BURNING FLAMES AND SEETHING BRAINS: PASSION, IMAGINATION, AND  
MADNESS IN KARAMZIN, PUSHKIN, AND GOGOL

BY

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THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

My thesis begins with an overview of sensibility (*chuvstvitel'nost'*) and passion (*strast'*) in Russian Sentimentalism, with a focus on the prose fiction of Nikolai Karamzin. After describing the correlation between passion and madness (a commonplace of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century discourse) and the emergence of a positive Romantic model of madness (featured in the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Vladimir Odoevskii, among others), I go on to show that Aleksandr Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol—the most celebrated poet and prose writer of the Romantic era in Russia—both depict madness in a rather un-Romantic light.

In the second chapter, I discuss Pushkin's eclectic treatments of madness, identifying classic tropes of literary madness and several likely sources. I use *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* (concepts from Aristotelian poetics) to address the intersection of madness and plot, and I examine Pushkin's use of the fantastic in, and the influence of early French psychiatry on, his depictions of madness.

The remainder of the text is devoted to three of Gogol's Petersburg tales, linked by their mad protagonists and the influence of the *Künstlerroman*: "Nevskii Prospect," "The Portrait," and "Diary of a Madman." I suggest that Piskarev's story in "Nevskii Prospect" functions as a parody of Karamzin's fiction, with which it shares a narratorial mode (Dorrit Cohn's "consonant thought report"). I also maintain that *poshlost'* plays an important role in the story, and is itself connected to Sentimentalism and 'sentimentality.' Next, I outline three types of passion in "The Portrait"—divine, demonic, and petty—and argue that although Chartkov's downfall has supernatural (satanic) origins, it is also a product of *poshlost'*. Rather than the either/or of the fantastic, I contend that in "The Portrait," evil—and, by extension, madness—is both individual and social. Subsequently, I show that in both "Nevskii Prospect" and "The Portrait," the passions

are depicted in terms of physiognomy, which relates to Gogol's (negative) treatment of balls, fashion, and *comme il faut* in the Petersburg *haute monde*. I begin my reading of "Diary of a Madman" by discussing the depiction of madness in texts with first-person character narrators (which do not allow for thought report) and the interpretive difficulties posed by Poprishchin's radical narratorial unreliability. Taking seriously Robert Maguire's suggestion that "we could very well ... read Gogol's ["Diary of a Madman"] as a case study," I read "Diary" through a Freudian lens, tracing the progression of Poprishchin's madness from hallucination and paranoia to schizophrenic megalomania (65).

Ultimately, I argue that Gogol's treatment of madness is a profoundly negative response to Hoffmann and Odoevskii. Unlike the mad artistic geniuses of the positive Romantic model—who experience creative inspiration and metaphysical insight—Gogol's madmen are misled by the irrational (dreams, imagination, passions), and it is precisely the revelation of truth that drives them mad. I contend that deception is the basic feature of Gogolian *poshlost'* and Gogolian madness, both of which imply aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual deficiency.

*To My Family, Friends, and Wonderful Wife-to-Be (and Soon-to-Be Stepcats)*

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## CHAPTER 1: THE IRRATIONAL IN RUSSIAN SENTIMENTALISM: PASSION AND MADNESS BETWEEN CLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM

“The root of the passions is good and is planted by nature itself in our sensuous organism ... they arouse a wholesome energy in man, without which he would fall into lazy sleep. A completely passionless man is a fool and a lifeless block, incapable of doing either good or evil ... Hence moderation in passion is wise; the safest way is to travel in the middle of the road. Excess in passion is destructive; absence of passion is moral death ... if your passions are directed toward a good end by experience, reason, and affection, you may drop the reigns of anxious prudence, and let them soar at will; their goal will always be greatness.”

-Krest'tsy nobleman, *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*

Closely linked to the reason-emotion binary, the long-lived association between passion and madness probably stems from “the triumph of the Stoic theory of passion as an illness of the soul”: for the Stoics, “all passion comes from an error of judgment” (“Madness”). In the eighteenth-century Russian “Age of Reason,” the reason-emotion binary was bound to favor the ideal of the age. Emotions (*chuvstva*) were perceived as fundamentally irrational, and the passions (*strasti*), or particularly powerful emotions, as potentially dangerous, linked to foolishness, immorality, and madness.<sup>1</sup> With the rise of Sentimentalism, however, sensibility or sensitivity (*chuvstvitel'nost'*) took on a positive ethical valuation. Predicated on feeling, sensibility describes the subject’s response or responsivity to emotional stimuli—of paramount importance was the ability to be moved by the suffering of others, i.e. sympathy (*sostradanie*).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Aleksandr Sumarokov’s 1747 epistle on poetry-writing (Epistle II, *Dve epistoly. V pervoi predlagaetsia o russkom iazyke, a vo vtoroi o stikhotvorstve*), for example, the purpose of satire is “cleans[ing] ... coarse mores” (*gruby nruvy*), “expung[ing] vices” (*poroki*), “turn[ing] splendid madness [*bezumstvo pyshnoe*] laughable,” and “playfully scold[ing] passions and foolishness” (*strastiam i durostiam*) (121-22). According to Sumarokov, the main difference between satires and comedies is ultimately derived from the author’s attitude toward the passions: satires are based on abhorrence at their “darkness” (*t'mu strastei*), comedies on amusement at their follies (125).

<sup>2</sup> *Chuvstvitel'nost'* was defined in a contemporary dictionary as 1) a “movement of the soul excited or stimulated ... through the impression of external objects acting on the sensory instrument [*Dvizhenie dushi vozbuzhdennoe ili vozbuzhdaemo ... chrez vpechatlenie deistvuiushchikh na chuvstvennyia orudiia vneshnikh predmetov*],” and 2) compassion or sympathy (*sostradatel'nost'*) (“*Chuvstvitel'nost'*”). Functionally, it reflects the parallel scientific theory of sensibility developed by Albrecht von Haller (*Febris Erotica* 27).

Together with the concept of delicacy or tenderness (*nezhnost'*), which it incorporated, sensibility was perceived as the sign of a good soul.<sup>3</sup>

According to the first (1789-94) and second (1806-22) editions of the *Dictionary of the Russian Academy (Slovar' Akademii Rossiiskoi)*, the word *strast'* (passion) denotes suffering (*stradanie, muchenie*) as well as “a strong feeling of desire or aversion, combined with the extraordinary movement of blood or animal spirits [*Sil'noe chuvstvovanie okhoty ili otrashcheniia, soedinennoe s neobyknovennym dvizheniem krovi i zhiznennykh dukhov*].”<sup>4</sup> In the latter case, passion is defined as a strong emotion (*chuvstvovanie*) which is correlated with (if not necessarily attributed to) two physiological processes which were presumed to be coextensive: the circulation of blood and the movement of animal spirits.<sup>5</sup> The classification of passion as

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<sup>3</sup> Among other definitions (“soft,” “gentle,” and “weak”), *nezhnyi* (adj. form of *nezhnost'*) denoted literal or metaphorical *chuvstvitel'nost'*: sensitive friendship, compassion, or love (e.g. a “tender heart,” *nezhnoe serdtse*) (*Chuvstvitel'nyi k družbe, k sostradaniuu, k liubvi*) (“*Nezhnyi*”).

<sup>4</sup> My translation of *zhiznennykh dukhov* as “animal spirits” is based on a contemporary (1783) text in which D.S. Anichkov translates the same phrase as “*spiritus animales*” (Anichkov). The Latin *animalis* (“animate” or “living”) comes from *anima*, meaning “psyche” or “soul.” I use “vital spirits” to designate *pneuma zootikon*, in keeping with the more traditional practice (see footnote two)—which, however, seems to be based on a transposition or mistranslation.

<sup>5</sup> The concept of animal spirits (Gr. *pneuma psychikon*, Lat. *spiritus animalis*) originated in the Stoic *pneuma*, or “breath,” meaning “wind and breath of life” (“Greek”). In Galenic physiology, *pneuma* was regarded as the life-giving element absorbed via inhalation, incorporated into the blood and transformed into vital spirits (*pneuma zootikon*), and finally ‘filtered out’ by the brain as animal spirits (*pneuma psychikon*) (Smith et al. 35-38). According to Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), “Spirit is a most subtle vapour, which is expressed from the blood, and the instrument of the soul . . . Of these spirits there be three kinds, according to the three principal parts, *brain, heart, liver; natural, vital, animal*. The *natural* are begotten in the *liver*, and thence dispersed through the veins, to perform those natural actions. The *vital spirits* are made in the heart of the *natural*, which by the arteries are transported to all the other parts: if the *spirits* cease, then life ceaseth, as in a *syncope* or swooning. The *animal spirits*, formed of the *vital*, brought up to the brain, and diffused by the nerves, to the subordinate members, give sense and motion to them all” (94, original emphases). In Thomas Willis’s influential works on madness (especially his 1664 *Cerebri Anatome cue Accessit Nervorum Descriptio et Usus*), animal spirits were associated with the nervous system: “The ‘animal spirits’ that chased around the body, ferrying messages to and from the brain, were what animated the human frame, and their derangement was the secret source of all manner of illness and pathology . . . Bedlam madness, and the milder forms of melancholy, hysteria and the like, were symptomatic of disorders of the brain or the jangling of the nerves” (Scull 167). Animal spirits also played a significant role in the works of René Descartes, (*Treatise of Man*, 1633, *Passions of the Soul*, 1649), John Locke (*Treatise Concerning Human Understanding*, 1698) and David Hume (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739). The important physiological function of animal spirits was also a commonplace in late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian discourse: in Nikolai Novikov’s 1781 essay “On the Upbringing and Instruction of Children” (“O vospitanii i nastavlenii detei”), the author warns that “wine should be excluded from children’s diets” in order to avoid potential “[impediment of] the separation of animal spirits and their entry into all the parts of the body” (448). In his 1836 article “Who are the Madmen?” (“Kto



either desire or aversion follows Thomas Hobbes, who (in his 1651 *Leviathan*) described the passions on the basis of “endeavors,” or the “initial movements” that impel us toward or repel us from objects (“Pathos”). According to Nicolas Malebranche’s *Recherche de la vérité* (1674-75), the “extraordinary” movement of animal spirits is a response to the appearance of an object of passion (i.e. one that inspires desire or aversion): “Most of the spirits are forced into the muscles in the arms, the legs, the face and all the exterior parts of the body in order to give it the specific disposition of the dominant passion, and give it the countenance and movement necessary for the acquisition of the good, or flight from the evil that has appeared” (qtd. in Foucault 226).

In its association with suffering (*stradanie*), *strast'* reflects classical conceptions of passion: “The idea that passion is essentially a form of suffering is present in both Greek *pathos* [πάθος] and Latin *passio*” (“Stradanie”). *Strast'* in this sense corresponds to the English “passion of Christ,” as shown by the examples provided in the 1794 dictionary entry.<sup>6</sup> *Stradanie* also connotes passion (as emotion), as well as intense activity: it “stems from the common Slavic root *strad-*, which means principally suffering and passion: and yet *strada* [страда] from which Slavonic *stradati* [страдати] (suffering) is derived, signifies first of all, ‘effort, painful labor’” (“Stradanie”). Etymologically, *strast'* is active—corresponding to the Latin *actio* rather than *passio*—unlike the more passive *chuvstvitel'nost'* (“Stradanie”). Although *strast'* and *chuvstvitel'nost'* both suggest movement, the “movement of the soul” characteristic of *chuvstvitel'nost'* is in response to external stimuli, while the movement of *strasti* is more

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sumasshedshie?”), Vladimir Odoevskii refers to “the thought of Thomas Willis, author of the famous book about madmen [i.e. *Cerebri Anatome*], that animal spirits, being in uninterrupted motion and strongly flowing into the brain, effect in it explosions, like gunpowder” (264). As indicated by the fact that Odoevskii places him alongside Christopher Columbus, Benjamin Franklin, and William Harvey (who discovered blood circulation), Willis’s work had a lasting impact: “*Cerebri Anatome* was in use for nearly 200 years” (Molnár 332).

<sup>6</sup> The Russian religious tradition places an “exalted moral and cognitive value” on suffering, which connects *stradanie* to the Sentimental valorization of secondhand suffering (*sostradanie*, “suffering with”), i.e. compassion (from Lat. *com-* + *pati*, “to suffer together with”) or sympathy (*syn-* + *pathos*, “having a fellow feeling”) (“Stradanie,” “compassion, n.,” “sympathy, n.”).

independent—in Derzhavin’s “The Waterfall” (“Vodopad,” 1791-94), they “seethe” internally (*Kipit stremlenie strastei*)—and in this sense closer to instinct or *Trieb* (Derzhavin 180).<sup>7</sup>

Sentimentalist writer Nikolai Karamzin frequently used *strast'* as shorthand for love: as the “tenderest passion of the human heart [*nezhneishaia strast' chelovecheskogo serdtsa*],” love is the Sentimental passion *par excellence* (I:535).<sup>8</sup> Love is also associated with emotional suffering, the possibility of which necessitates sensibility (*chuvstvitel'nost'*) as well as a certain weakness or tenderness (*nezhnost'*). For the narrator of Karamzin’s “Natalia, the Boyar’s Daughter” (“Natal'ia, boiarskaia doch',” 1792), the “most tender, most ardent [or ‘fiery’ (*plammeneishaia*)] of the passions” is characterized by suffering from its very beginning—since love is initially imagined to be unreciprocated, it is “born always with woe” (I:635). The experience of love can also impede perception by turning one’s attention away from external reality (cf. English phrases like “blinded by love”): “the enchantment of the tender passion presented the world to him in a single object and life in a single feeling ... The blissful lover, having forgot the universe, remembered only his friend and flew to him to speak of his own happiness” (“The Emotional and the Cold” 204 [I:745]). Karamzin’s positive treatment notwithstanding, this aspect of love bears some resemblance to the privative model of madness as blindness, insofar as it cuts off the lover from reality itself (as opposed to a rational, “dispassionate” perception of the outside world).

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<sup>7</sup> “The vocabulary of feeling in European languages is organized around these two poles: on the one hand, the idea of a turbulence, a becoming, an instability—something starts moving and transforms itself; there is a psychic activity; on the other hand, such an activity is the effect of an external cause to which the mind finds itself exposed, which it undergoes, passively. Something happens to it and transforms it. Agitation is the form that passivity takes” (“Pathos”). See “Pathos” for a brief history of active and passive conceptions of emotion from Plato to psychoanalysis. See also: “Drive.”

<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, parenthetical citations with a Roman numeral refer to Karamzin’s *Izbrannye sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*. Page numbers preceding these citations refer to English translations listed in the bibliography; where no secondary citations are present, translations are my own.

The passionate life also has more severe negative consequences, such as the destructive effects of passion on the body: “‘the fiery passions,’ according to the words of one Englishman, ‘are the couriers of life: traveling with them, it is not far to the grave.’ Love and glory feed the soul but not the body” (“The Emotional and the Cold” 210 [I:750]). Extreme emotional states produce various illnesses (often fevers), madness, and even death in a plethora of contemporary literary works, and in many later ones as well (including Pushkin’s “Queen of Spades” and Gogol’s “The Portrait”).<sup>9</sup> Where passion is a national trait, the results can be dire, as demonstrated by the example of the French: “Sensitive to the extreme, [the Frenchman] passionately loves truth, glory, and great undertakings. But lovers are not constant! The moments of his passion, his rapture, his hate can have terrible consequences—the revolution, for example” (*Letters* 253 [I:506]).<sup>10</sup>

Passion (as emotion) is ontologically prior to sensibility: if sensibility represents response to stimuli, the existence of emotion is the basis for such a response. As particularly powerful emotions, the passions delineate the outer limits of emotional experience, providing the possibility for either ecstasy or torture: in Karamzin’s programmatic *povest’* “The Emotional and the Cold” (*Chuvstvitelnyi i kholodnyi: Dva kharaktera*, 1803), the emotional Erast is “either blissfully happy or suffering torment, or, in the absence of real feelings, languishing in

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<sup>9</sup> In Radishchev’s *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (*Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, 1790), a pregnant wife’s shock at seeing her husband wrongfully arrested leads to her death—after fainting, she immediately goes into labor (a month early), and even after giving birth, “Her anguish of soul was not assuaged . . . indeed it grew even more violent and threw her into a fever . . . [she] died the third day after the child was born” (64). In both versions of Gogol’s “The Portrait” (“Portret,” 1835, rev. 1842), his protagonist Chartkov is the victim of more violent passions, leading to outbursts of “rage and madness,” a “cruel fever combined with galloping consumption,” and death (373). Jillian Porter notes that the Countess in Pushkin’s “Queen of Spades” (“Pikovaia dama,” 1833) dies from a “strong emotion” (*sil’noe chuvstvo*): “the feeling (*chuvstvo*) [Germann] provokes in her with his passionate appeal acts as a deadly force” (68). Cf. Ivan Karamazov’s “brain fever” in *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat’ia Karamazovy*, 1879-80).

<sup>10</sup> As Sara Dickinson observes, “generalizations about ‘national character’ became standard *topoi* during Catherine’s era. Elite tourists of the late eighteenth century frequently scoured foreign cultures for evidence of distinctions between, for example, ‘the’ French and ‘the’ Russian, and overlaid their descriptions of travel with observations on this theme” (17).

unendurable boredom” (contra the cold Leonid, who “did not know happiness”) (205 [I:746]). Furthermore, the soul that is *oversensitive* (*slishkom chuvstvitel'naia*) to the vicissitudes of the passions is subject to dangerously extreme emotional vacillations—because “heaven and hell” are neighbors in the passionate soul, “rapture is succeeded by despair or melancholy,” which “often opens the door ... to the madhouse” (I:538).<sup>11</sup>

In Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (*Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika*, 1791-92), the narrator describes a July 1790 visit to London’s infamous “Bedlam” psychiatric hospital (i.e. the Bethlem Royal Hospital).<sup>12</sup> Citing the unprecedented prevalence of “suicides from love,” the narrator asserts that madness is much more common than it was in the past, a fact which he attributes to the “powerful effect of the passions” (I:537). According to him, physical causes of madness are much less common than “moral [*nrvastvennykh*]” ones, and the passions are the most common moral cause of all (I:537).<sup>13</sup> *Nrav* refers to both morality (“good or evil”) and social mores, but Karamzin probably meant the latter, in keeping with the conception of the early French psychiatrist Phillipe Pinel (1745-1826) for whom “moral causes” of insanity were those associated with the mind or soul, “social and psychological factors” rather than physical/bodily causes (e.g. brain lesions) (“*Nrav*”; Gerard 383).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Karamzin’s narrator describes passion as historically contingent (i.e. socioculturally specific) rather than a universal principle: “the

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<sup>11</sup> On melancholy (*melankholiia*) as mental illness in Catherine’s court, see Vinitsky (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Karamzin’s narrator is quite impressed by Bedlam: “The order and cleanliness that prevail here, the service and care given these unfortunates are truly amazing ... Many of the inmates recover. On leaving, each receives, gratis, medicine to strengthen the body and soul” (285). Among other inmates, he describes “women whom love has made mad,” now “always submissive and silent,” apropos of which he remarks that “even in madness, the most tender passion of the human heart still continues to possess the soul and render it insensible to external objects!” (284 [I:536]). An insensibility to the outside world is common in literary depictions of both love and madness.

<sup>13</sup> For Karamzin’s narrator, physical factors in emotional constitution include food, weather, and industrial pollution: he attributes the “drowsy and phlegmatic hearts of the Britons” to “the perpetual fog from the sea and the perpetual smoke from the coal,” as well as their meat-heavy diet, which “causes their blood to thicken and makes them phlegmatic, melancholy, and unbearable to themselves – and, not infrequently, suicides” (265 [I:518]).

<sup>14</sup> Taken in the sense of morality, “moral causes” of madness would instead suggest the opposition between passion and virtue, the most common theme of Russian neoclassical tragedies.

ancients knew nothing about romantic love” (286 [I:537]).<sup>15</sup> Unlike the classical and medieval eras, which “did not permit love to become excessively intense,” the modern age encourages passion (“the inflammable substance which feeds the fire of love”) by means of its “quiet, luxurious, and refined lifestyle,” as well as through the popularity of the theater (“which might be called the ‘theater of love’”) and books (“which are strewn, so to speak, with love’s flowers”) (286 [I:537]).<sup>16</sup> The narrator contends that the passion of ambition (*slavoliubie*, lit. “love of glory”) also “has a more powerful effect today than it had before” (286 [I:538]). Whereas ancient warriors and medieval knights were more motivated by “religious fanaticism” and national interests than ambition, “Today a Frenchman or a Spaniard serves as a volunteer in the Russian army only for glory. He fights valiantly and dies. That is ambition” (287 [I:538]). Notably, Karamzin’s “ambition” (*slavoliubie*) represents the desire for military glory rather than an inherently sinful passion (*liubochestie*) or inordinate craving for wealth or social advancement (*chestoliubie*, *ambitsiia*), more critical conceptions of ambition featured in “Queen of Spades,” “Portrait,” and “Diary of a Madman.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite his somewhat negative portrayal of madness as a pitiable state that involves suffering (a shift in emphasis from the earlier conception of insanity as the deprivation of reason), Karamzin provides glimpses of a positive model. In “The Emotional and the Cold,” madness is also associated with “great deeds” and creative genius: “some emotional people make great sacrifices to virtue, astonish the world with their great deeds, in which, in Montaigne’s

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<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, this phrase can be translated as “the ancients did not know novels” (*romanov*); the narrator later identifies literature as one of the causes of the enflamed passions he attributes to contemporary society (I:537).

<sup>16</sup> Karamzin’s notion of the relationship between social change and madness echoes the Western European understanding of madness—widespread since the early eighteenth century—as “a disease of civilization” (Scull 225). In the wake of the French Revolution, the psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol (Pinel’s protégé) “spoke of ‘our revolutionary torment’ as the most powerful cause of the rapid rise in the number of the mad. Time drove home this lesson for him, and reinforced his belief that: ‘Madness is the product of society and of moral and intellectual influences’” (Scull 226).

<sup>17</sup> See Porter’s “Conceptual History of Ambition” in *Money and Mad Ambition: Economies of Russian Literature, 1830-1850*, pp. 5-17.

words, ‘a little admixture of madness’—*un peu de folie*—is always necessary; these people shine by the talent of their imagination and creative mind: poetry and eloquence are their gifts” (199-200 [I:741]). Due to its associations with emotion, imagination, and creativity, madness is linked to artistic achievement, a conception which harkens back to classical models of madness (Greek *mania* and Latin *furor*) as “exceptional states” (“Madness”). Through the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann and similarly inclined Russian writers like Vladimir Odoevskii (both influences on Gogol), such a model of madness played a prominent role in the literature of Romanticism.

During the Enlightenment, the relationship between passions and madness was clear: as extreme irrational states, passions could easily lead to madness. In the age of Sentimentalism, emotions were imbued with a new, positive moral value. This set the stage for the emergence of the Romantic depiction of the mad artistic genius, in which madness provides insight into a higher order—or, as in Odoevskii’s works, “the ecstasy of inspiration, creativity, and spiritual insight is perceived by ordinary people as insanity” (Odesskaya 201). Romanticism placed a greater value on extremes: the sublime took the dominant role formerly occupied by the beautiful, and active passion (not an etymological oxymoron in Russian) replaced passive sensibility. Although the formula “passion leads to madness” remained unchanged, the reversal of a sign changed its outcome: in conjunction with a renewed emphasis on the limits of rational knowledge, valorized passion led to the positive Romantic model of madness. (Notably, however, the most celebrated figures of Russian Romanticism never fully embraced this model: Pushkin and Gogol always depict madness in an ambiguous or negative light.) At the same time, the emphasis on sensibility characteristic of Sentimental literature fell out of fashion after the 1790s—in England, “Coupled with increasing sensationalism in the depiction of ever-more pathetic victimization ... and ultimately associated with the excesses of the French Revolution,

sentiment became a synonym for emotional excess, sensibility for self-indulgence, and sentimentality for hypocrisy” (“Sensibility”). Sentimentalism followed a similar trajectory in Russia, increasingly becoming the target of ridicule and parody (as in Gogol’s ironic use of Karamzinian tropes).<sup>18</sup> The tension produced by these conflicting literary models—corresponding to changing cultural values—helps to explain Pushkin and Gogol’s ambivalent treatments of passion and madness.

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<sup>18</sup> According to Richard Peace, “by the time Gogol was writing Sentimentalism had done its work and had been superseded (indeed Vissarion Belinsky said that people already laughed at Poor Liza). Nevertheless Gogol attempted to begin his literary career with a sentimental poem: *Gants Kukhelgarten*. His debt to Karamzin can be seen in ‘The Old World Landowners’, and it was the presence of a sentimental passage in the most famous of all his short stories ‘The Overcoat’ which led to its acclaim as a work with a humanist message. Sentimentalism had already fused with German Romanticism, the sensitive soul formed by Sentimentalism was now searching for high ideals in life and art, and was actually shocked by those of his fellow creatures who did not show such refinement of spirit—the Philistines. In essence this is the theme of Gogol’s story ‘The Nevsky Prospekt’ ... In *Dead Souls* Gogol mocked the ‘pure’ sentimentalist in the portrait of Manilov as well as the ‘Karamzinian’ language of the two ladies of the town of N” (8-9).

**CHAPTER 2: MADNESS IN PUSHKIN’S “GOD GRANT THAT I NOT LOSE MY MIND,” *POLTAVA*, *THE BRONZE HORSEMAN*, AND “QUEEN OF SPADES”**

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact:  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,  
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:  
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.  
Such tricks hath strong imagination,  
That if it would but apprehend some joy,  
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;  
Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

-Theseus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.1.3-23)

Madness is one of the major motifs in Russian literature of the 1820s and 1830s, and it plays a significant role in Pushkin’s oeuvre, appearing in several literary forms—the lyric, the narrative poem (*poema*), and the short story (*povest'*). In some ways, his treatment of madness is strikingly pre-Romantic: it is more indebted to older sources—classical myth, neoclassical tragedy, Shakespeare, Ariosto—and more negative than those of many of his contemporaries. In his depictions of mad insight and Napoleonic ambition, however, Pushkin’s use of the madness motif is very much of his time.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Here and elsewhere, I use “Romantic” and similar terms of literary periodization primarily in the limited context of the madness motif in Russian literature. As Boris Gasparov has observed, although Pushkin is undoubtedly “a poet of the romantic era,” the question of whether he can be considered a Romantic writer is much trickier to answer (537). For more on Pushkin and Romanticism, see Gasparov and Golburt.



Pushkin's most positive depiction of madness occurs in his 1833 lyric "God Grant That I Not Lose My Mind" ("Ne dai mne Bog soiti s uma")—as the title suggests, he has some reservations.<sup>20</sup> The lyrical persona states that it's not the loss of reason that he fears (*Ne to, chtob razumom moim/Ia dorozhil; ne to, chtob s nim/Rasstat'sia byl ne rad*)—rather than the conventional reason-emotion binary as such, the emphasis is on the opposition between freedom and unfreedom, corresponding to that between nature and civilization (which are traditionally associated with the irrational and the rational, however) (II:384).<sup>21</sup> The second and third stanzas present a Romantic daydream of madness: "If they would let me be/Free, how swiftly I would/Plunge into a dark forest!/I would sing in flaming delirium,/I would forget myself in the intoxication/Of discordant, marvelous dreams./And I would listen, spellbound, to the waves,/And I would look, full of happiness,/Into the empty heavens;/And I would be strong, free/Like a whirlwind that tears up the fields,/That breaks the forest" (II:384). Here, madness involves absolute freedom from society, communion with nature, passionate and "elemental" happiness, strength, and even chaotic and violent destruction, in implicit contrast to the constricting order of rationalism and civilization.<sup>22</sup> This depiction resembles Plato's "poetic mania," a madness which "is not the loss of reason but rather liberation from the captivity of reason" (Epstein 271).

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Act 1, Scene 5 of *King Lear*: "O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven/Keep me in temper: I would not be mad!" (5.1.45-46).

<sup>21</sup> Parenthetical citations with Roman numerals in this chapter refer to Pushkin's *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*. Accompanying page numbers without Roman numerals refer to Gillon R. Aitken's translation of "Queen of Spades" in *The Complete Prose Tales of Alexandr Sergeevitch Pushkin*; other translations are my own.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Wachtel writes that "these violent images of madness ['like a whirlwind that tears up the fields,/That breaks up the forest'] ... are probably borrowed from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* ... (Here he gave a show of his excellent abilities/Destroying a tall pine with the first blow:/And after that one destroying several others/As if they were stalks of fennel, elderberry or anise.)" (*Commentary* 272). Some types of insanity were believed to endow the madman with supernatural strength and insensibility to pain—a notion which was also used to justify the more painful "treatments" that were employed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England (and in Russia into the nineteenth), including beating patients with sticks. In the context of Pushkin's poem, however, this hypothetical destructive power may be intended metaphorically rather than literally.

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, however, the lyrical persona describes the downside of poetic madness (*Da vot beda*): “if you go insane,/And become scary like the plague,/They’ll just lock you up,/They’ll put the fool on a chain,/And through the bars, like a little beast,/They will come to tease you./And at night I will hear/Not the clear voice of the nightingale,/Not the muffled noise of the oak grove—/But the cry of my comrades,/And the scolding of night attendants,/And screams, and the jangling of chains” (II:384-385). Madness entails incarceration, hence the loss of freedom and access to nature (here functionally equivalent), which is why the lyrical persona finds poverty and homelessness—with the unrestricted movement of the wandering vagabond implied by “staff” (*posokh*)—preferable to madness (*Net, legche posokh i suma;/Net, legche trud i glad*) (II:384). (Pushkin’s lyric thus implies the advent of what Foucault called “the Great Confinement,” the mass institutionalization of the insane and other ‘undesirables’ that began in the seventeenth century.) As Ilya Vinitsky observes, “God Grant” suggests that “there is no room for beauty, happiness, and sense of freedom in madness in this world. The absolute freedom, glorified by radical romanticists, is senseless (the skies are empty for the madman) ... It inevitably ends with a dismal incarceration in the hellish cell of a madhouse” (“Madness in Western literature” 163). Pushkin even deflates poetic madness stylistically in the fourth stanza, which describes society’s treatment of the mad in the poem’s most colloquial (least elevated or traditionally ‘poetic’) language.

Notably, the outcome described in the fourth and fifth stanzas would have been highly unlikely for someone in Pushkin’s position. Asylums were exclusively the domain of the poor—relatively prominent or wealthy individuals who went mad, like Pushkin’s fellow poet Konstantin Batiushkov, received private treatment. Pushkin visited Batiushkov—to whom he alludes in the line “Not the clear voice of the nightingale” (*Ne golos iarkii solov'ia*)—in April

1830 (*Commentary* 272).<sup>23</sup> As Pushkin knew, Batiushkov received the best treatment available: he spent four years (1824-1828) in a German sanitarium under the care of Dr. Anton Dietrich, who subsequently moved to Russia and treated his patient for two more years. Rather than Pushkin's contemporary reality, the last two stanzas of "God Grant" resemble the treatment of the mad in eighteenth-century England and France, where visiting asylums to look at the inmates was a popular pastime (visitors to Bedlam were charged a penny). This depiction may not be entirely anachronistic, however—the "moral treatment" advanced by William Tuke in England at the end of the eighteenth century didn't make it to Russia until the middle of the nineteenth, and according to Liah Greenfeld, "As late as 1828 ... houses for the mentally ill, including the ones in St. Petersburg, operated not only without participation of a psychiatrist, for the reason that there 'was no psychiatrist' in Russia at the time, but without any medical involvement; they were welfare, rather than medical establishments" (515).<sup>24</sup>

Pushkin's treatment of madness in "God Grant" is a unique combination of positive and negative models. Although madness is associated with the irrational (nature, passion, and the imagination), it is not associated with metaphysical insight, nor is it explicitly linked to poetry or creative genius (as in Odoevskii's works).<sup>25</sup> In its refusal to privilege the rational over the

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<sup>23</sup> Wachtel (following Nabokov) notes that this phrase recalls Batiushkov's "The Last Spring" ("Posledniaia vesna," 1815), "a translation of the then enormously popular Charles Millevoeye ... Batiushkov describes the spring in terms of 'яркий голос филомелы' ('the bright voice of Philomele' – according to Greek mythology the raped princess Philomele was turned into a nightingale)" (*Commentary* 272). Like Pushkin in "God Grant," Millevoeye refers to a nightingale's voice ("Le rossignol était sans voix") in his original poem, "La Chute des feuilles." However, Pushkin's specific usage of a nightingale (*solovei*) also recalls a line spoken by Edgar in *King Lear*—in the guise of a wandering madman named Tom o'Bedlam (after the anonymous early 17<sup>th</sup>-century lyric of the same name)—who claims, "The foul fiend haunts poor Tom in the voice of a nightingale" (3.6.30). The image of the nightingale in *King Lear* is connected to demonic influence ("The foul fiend," i.e. the Devil) in the context of *feigned* madness.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault sees a "conflict between the humanitarian conception of therapeutics witnessed in the methods used by Esquirol and the infamous 'moral treatment' that used confinement as the major means of submission and repression (Guislain and Leuret)" (522).

<sup>25</sup> The contention that madness is not linked to poetry here is arguable—the phrase "I would sing" (*Ia pel by*) may be taken as a reference to poetry-writing—and has been argued: for a brief overview of the scholarly debate, see Rosenshield 75.

irrational, however, “God Grant” also diverges from typical eighteenth-century conceptions of madness. The poem suggests that unfreedom is inherent to society and that shared social norms—including, presumably, the fear of insanity and subsequent mistreatment of the insane—are a sort of prison. Such an opposition between the individual and society, with an emphasis on the disadvantages of the latter, is characteristically Romantic. Nevertheless, the lyric posits that any benefits that madness may grant to the individual are outweighed by the negative outcome imposed by society’s fear of the insane. Such an ambivalently devalorized depiction of madness is also evident in Pushkin’s earlier narrative poem *Poltava* (1828).

In *Poltava*, Pushkin tells the story of the Hetman Mazeppa’s rebellion against Peter I. He portrays Mazeppa as a demonic traitor, opposing him to the divine Peter—an opposition which was institutionalized in the annual anathematization of Mazeppa (along with Dmitrii the Pretender and Pugachev) in an official Russian Orthodox prayer. In Pushkin’s *poema*, Mazeppa absconds with his old friend and comrade Kochubey’s daughter Mariia, the disgrace of which drives Kochubey to seek revenge by warning Peter of Mazeppa’s treachery. When Mazeppa finds out, he has Kochubey tortured and executed, and Mariia is ultimately driven mad.

Gary Rosenshiel argues that “Mazeppa’s rebellion against Peter is presented as a form of madness, motivated by personal [rather than] national interests,” specifically the petty desire to avenge himself on Peter for the insult of grabbing him by the moustache (113).<sup>26</sup> As such, Mariia’s madness can be interpreted as a fitting response to her love for the traitorous Mazeppa,

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<sup>26</sup> Pushkin’s thoughts on rebellion evolved throughout his life: although initially sympathetic to the Decembrists, “After 1825 he became increasingly disillusioned with radical change, especially brought about by the nobility” (Rosenshiel 178). As in the panegyric prologue to *The Bronze Horseman*, Pushkin valorizes Peter in *Poltava* (wherein he crushes an attempted rebellion)—but he later described Peter himself as a revolutionary: “[Peter the Great] tamed the nobility by promulgating the *Table of Ranks*, and the clergy by abolishing the patriarchate (N.B.: Napoleon said to Alexander: ‘You are *Pope* at home; that is not so stupid’). But it is one thing to make a revolution, and another to enshrine the results ... The means by which one carries out a revolution are not the same as those by which one consolidates it—Peter I is at one and the same time Robespierre and Napoleon—the Revolution incarnate” (qtd. in Rosenshiel 177-8).

as well as one in keeping with the classical formula of madness as divine punishment (“Whom God wishes to destroy, He first makes mad”) (Rosenshield 103). However, the implicit question of Mariia’s moral responsibility for her actions is answered ambivalently in the text.

Kochubey alternately places the blame on Mazeppa—the “old kite” who he swears will rue the night when he first “pecked” their “little dove”—and Mariia: “[Kochubey] does not wish Mazeppa ill; it’s all his daughter’s fault alone, but he forgives his daughter: let her answer to God, [for] covering [her] family with her disgrace, forgetting heaven and the law” (III:200). The narrator is sympathetic to Mariia’s plight: in a long aside devoted to “poor [*bednaia*] Mariia,” he laments the reckless love that drew her toward such a “ferocious and depraved soul [*K dushe svirepoi i razvratnoi*]” (III:205). Despite Mariia’s sympathetic portrayal, however, the narrator affirms her guilt, calling her “offending daughter [*doch' prestupnitsa*]” and “sinful maiden [*greshnoi deve*]” in the final stanza of the *poema* (III:236). In the context of the older literary model of morality that seems to be at play in *Poltava*—the conflict between passion and virtue (a variant of the emotion-reason binary) typical of neoclassical tragedy—Mariia’s culpability is beyond doubt.<sup>27</sup>

Pushkin suggests that Mariia’s love for Mazeppa is already a form of madness, a “mad rapture [*bezumnom upoen'e*]” that “lulled [her] conscience into sleep [*V tebe on sovest' usypil*],” “blinded [her] gaze [*osleplennyi vzor*],” and led her to consider her disgrace pleasant (*Tebe priiaten tvoi pozor*), having lost the “tender charm of shame” in her fall from grace (*Ty prelest'*

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<sup>27</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, the passions were still widely considered to be a primary cause of insanity in the 1820s and 1830s, and love was certainly such a passion: the protagonists of I.I. Kozlov’s “Madwoman” (“*Bezumnaia*,” 1830), N.A. Polevoi’s “Bliss of Madness” (“*Blazhenstvo bezumiia*,” 1833), and Gogol’s “Nevskii Prospect” (1835) are all driven mad by love.

*nezhnuiu styda/V svoem utratila paden'e*) (III:206).<sup>28</sup> For the most part, this passage reads as a lament on the potentially deleterious effects of passionate love on morality. However, it also mitigates Mariia's moral responsibility somewhat, suggesting that she was spellbound by Mazeppa (*Tebia starik zavorozhil*), whose "soft words" inundated her conscience and blinded her to his true nature and her own disgrace (III:206).

The tragic irony is that Mariia is doubly deceived: she does not yet know the extent of Mazeppa's inhumanity ("what kind of serpent [she] caresses on her bosom") or that he has already condemned her father to death ("what all Ukraine knew already") (III:205-6). The narrator tells us that "as of yet the deadly secret [*ubiistvennaia taina*] remained concealed from her," which can be understood as either the imminent death of her father at the hands of her lover or the demonic nature of Mazeppa's character as revealed by such an action (III:206). The revelation of these horrible truths leads Maria into madness.

For Mariia, the notion that her lover would condemn her father to death is irreconcilable with her positive conception of Mazeppa's character, as indicated by her confused reply to her mother's plea for intercession on her father's behalf: "What's wrong with me? Father ... Mazeppa ... execution – with a supplication, here, in this castle, my mother – No, either I have lost my mind, or this is a vision" (III:218). After being forcibly confronted with the inhumanity of the man she has chosen over her own father and mother, she exclaims "God, God! ... Today! – my poor father!" and faints (III:219). When Mariia appears to Mazeppa after the battle, she has

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Nikolai Yazykov's "Away from the Contemptible Crowd!" ("Proch' s prezrennoiui tolpoiui!"), in which "mad rapture" is associated with poetic mania ("wild, frenzied striving" animates the poet [*Diko, besheno stremlen'e, / Chem poet odushevlen*]) and violence ("Thus in a mad rapture/The god of poets, Apollo, / Flayed Marsyas [*Tak v bezumnom upoen'e/Bog poetov, Apollon, / S Marsiasa sodral kozhu!*]"). Madness and blindness, like blindness and love, have been linked since antiquity in myth and literature. For the Stoic philosopher and dramatist Seneca, "*furor* refers to a state of ingratitude that has become so general that it threatens the foundation of all social bonds ... or the blindness comparable to that of the clown who, having lost his sight, believed that the house had gone dark ... It is the state of all who can no longer perceive that they are affected, since the organ of judgement is too sick" ("Madness").

apparently been driven mad from grief. In addition to more superficial traits (i.e. visible signs) associated with madness—a disheveled and unhealthy appearance (“with unwound hair ... all in rags, lean, pale”) and mad gaze (“sunken eyes glittering”)—she delusionally believes that her parents have just gone to bed and might hear them speaking: “quieter, quieter, friend! ... Father and mother closed their eyes ... Wait a bit ... they can hear us” (III:233). Although partially motivated by the fact that Mazeppa has camped next to her childhood home, Mariia’s delusion evinces denial of the reality of her father’s death, as if the execution—the scene of which she describes as a “festival” or “holiday” (*prazdnik*)—never took place (III:233). Instead, she believes that someone is trying to play a trick on her—first a “them” (“What is with their ridiculous tale?”), then a “she” (“In secret she told me that my poor father died, and quietly showed me a gray head”), apparently her mother (“Wasn’t she ashamed to scare me? And for what? So I would not dare to run off with you tonight!”)—and that Kochubey’s severed head “was absolutely not a human’s, but a wolf’s” (III:233).<sup>29</sup> In the middle of her speech, Mariia makes an abrupt turn: after telling Mazeppa, “Let’s go home ... it’s already late,” she suddenly ‘realizes’ that she “took [him] for another”: “Your gaze is mocking and horrible. You are ugly. He is beautiful: love shines in his eyes, such comfort in his words! His whiskers are whiter than snow, but blood is dried up in yours!” (III:234). Mariia’s words reveal two incommensurate

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<sup>29</sup> Roman Jakobson considers this image to be a combination of two motifs preceding that of the “*myth of the destructive statue*” in Pushkin’s work: in the period “beginning with the execution of the Decembrists and [Pushkin’s] return from exile, the source of horror in the poet’s epic is the monstrous merging of different creatures (in Tat’jana’s dream [1826]) ... or a human face distorted by violent death ... In *Poltava* ... these two motifs merge in the deranged Marija’s raving about the wolf head of her executed father” (329). However, the same confusion between wolf and man recurs in *The Captain’s Daughter* (*Kapitanskaia dochka*, 1836), in which a coachman identifies an approaching figure in a snowstorm (who turns out to be Pugachev) as either a wolf or man (*Dolzno byt’, ili volk, ili chelovek*) (V:296). This also resembles an image in “Demons” (“Besy,” 1830), in which another coachman in a blizzard suggests that an object in the distance could be either a tree stump or a wolf (*pen’ il’ volk*) (II:298). It seems to me that this image is probably indebted to a short passage in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (excerpted above as this chapter’s epigraph), which was translated by Fedor Tiutchev in 1830 as “Liubovniki, bezumtsy i poety.” Describing the “tricks” of a “strong imagination”—a trait shared by “The lunatic, the lover, and the poet”—Theseus says, “in the night, imagining some fear,/How easy is a bush supposed a bear?” (5.1.22-23). Thus, while Jakobson’s contention is certainly correct, this image is also connected to the theme of the imagination’s power to deceive.

images of Mazeppa: the beautiful (*prekrasen*) man she fell in love with, a loving, comforting, and untainted presence, and the ugly (*bezobrazen*) one who killed her father, a frightening and demonic figure stained with blood.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, Mariia “scream[s] with a wild laugh,” springs away “lighter than a young chamois,” and disappears in the darkness.<sup>31</sup>

Pushkin’s depiction of madness in *Poltava* features plot elements identified by Aristotle as *peripeteia* (whereby “the protagonist’s change of state is ... caused by a sudden and unexpected reversal of fortune”) and *anagnorisis* (a moment of revelation or recognition, “a change from ignorance to knowledge”); as a rule, the former precedes (and often leads to) the latter (“Classical Poetics”). Mariia’s fate is altered by Mazeppa’s torture and execution of her father, and the revelation of this unbearable truth drives her mad: it is precisely her inability to accept it as real that constitutes her delusion. Lina Steiner argues that Mariia also has a moment of insight (or “tragic anagnorisis”) when she appears before Mazeppa as a madwoman: “At this point, she finally sees Mazeppa as he truly is—a gray-haired and terrifying old man—and recoils from him in fear and disgust” (111). According to this interpretation, Mariia fails to recognize Mazeppa—a classic sign of insanity, and one that Pushkin experienced personally in his April 1830 visit with Batiushkov, who did not recognize her—because she now sees his *true* self,

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<sup>30</sup> Notably, Mariia’s positive characterization of her former love resembles the narrator’s description of Peter, who is also beautiful (*prekrasen*) and whose gaze is “proud, and bright, and full of glory” (III:228, 230).

<sup>31</sup> Like fog and storms, night and darkness have long been associated with negative conceptions of madness as unreason. The chamois (*serna*) is a species of goat-antelope, one subspecies of which (the Tatra chamois) is endemic to Poland; Mariia is also compared to a chamois earlier in the poem, as she waits for her parents’ response to Mazeppa’s marriage proposal as a trembling chamois hides from an eagle under a crag (III:194). More to the point, Mariia is metaphorically animalized in her madness, more like a wild beast than a human being. Cf. the lyrical persona’s animalization in “God Grant” (“through the bars, like a little beast,/They will come to tease you”) and Evgenii in *The Bronze Horseman*, who in his madness is “neither beast nor man” (II:384-5; III:296).



affirming that her earlier love for Mazeppa was based on a false (idealized) image of her beloved, a form of self-deception fatally at odds with reality (*Commentary* 272).<sup>32</sup>

Pushkin presents another character tragically driven mad by grief in *The Bronze Horseman* (*Mednyi vsadnik*, 1833), which tells the story of the catastrophic 1824 flood in St. Petersburg. The protagonist Evgenii loses his fiancée Parasha in the flood, after which he loses his mind. In an insane and almost blasphemous gesture of rebellion, Evgenii ultimately blames Peter himself. Whether the narrator or inferred author share the belief that Peter is responsible for Evgenii's fate is open to debate (but outside the scope of the present argument).<sup>33</sup>

Evgenii is a minor civil servant, like the “little men” of Gogol's Petersburg tales: he resides in Kolomna—an unfashionable suburb of Petersburg where poor gentry lived—and “serves somewhere” (*gde-to sluzhit*) (III:288).<sup>34</sup> Like Poprishchin in “Diary of a Madman,” Evgenii considers himself poor (*O chem zhe dumal on? o tom,/Chto byl on beden*), wants to improve his position, and envies wealthy loafers, those “idle happy men, short on brains ... for whom life comes easy” (III:289). Unlike Poprishchin, Evgenii is relatively new to the civil service (“he had served for all of two years”) and his dreams are relatively modest—a “humble

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<sup>32</sup> The notion of insight in madness was a prominent feature of the positive Romantic model as depicted by Odoevskii and N.A. Polevoi. Odoevskii associated madness with artistic genius and the creative imagination, juxtaposing the transcendental vision of the “madman” to the banality of reality—Margarita Odesskaya notes that such juxtapositions are “characteristic for Romanticism,” in which “the poetry of creativity and the vulgarity of everyday life are always set off against each other” (201).

<sup>33</sup> “In *The Bronze Horseman*, Pushkin ties all types of rebellion with madness”—including Peter's “rebellion” against the former status quo (Rosenshield 175). To Rosenshield, the Neva's rebellion represents “revolutions from below” (the type that Pushkin “*most feared*,” e.g. the Pugachev rebellion), Evgenii's is “a rebellion from the side” (“a rebellion or revolt of the dissatisfied or disillusioned from various classes of the nobility,” e.g. the Decembrists), and the Petrine revolution was a “rebellion from above,” the one which “most preoccupied Pushkin personally, since it was the rebellion responsible for the decline of the class to which he belonged and the class he believed was the best hope of preserving and promoting the values essential to the health of the Russian state” (175-6).

<sup>34</sup> “The painter B.” in “The Portrait” describes Kolomna thusly: “there it is neither capital nor province; you seem to feel, as you enter the streets of Kolomna, that all youthful desires and impulses are abandoning you. The future does not visit there, everything there is silence and retirement; everything has settled out of the movement of the capital.... [the residents of Kolomna are] often the most wretched sediment of mankind, whose condition no philanthropic political economist could find the means to improve” (376-378 [III:119-21]).

and simple” house, a promotion (“after, maybe, a year or two”), marriage, children—and he is “prepared to work day and night” to make them a reality (III:289). Evgenii acknowledges that he must “provide independence and honor for himself” through his own labor—in other words, he subscribes to the Petrine ideal of meritocracy and embodies the humility espoused by Faddei Bulgarin in his “Three Pages from a Madhouse” (“Tri listka iz doma sumasshedshikh,” 1834), in which “ambition acts as a ‘worm of doubt’ corroding the patient’s faith in the Russian social order” (III:289; Porter 27).<sup>35</sup> Although Evgenii is of ancient noble lineage, he “avoids the high-placed and does not grieve over [his] departed kinfolk, nor over forgotten antiquity,” i.e. his family’s loss of status in the Russian social order after Peter’s reforms (III:288). Unlike Gogol’s *poshliaki*, he is not pathologically ambitious, vain, or inordinately proud of his status as a nobleman.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, like Poprishchin and Germann (or “Hermann”) in Pushkin’s “Queen of Spades,” the frustration of Evgenii’s dreams for the future precipitates his descent into madness—their modest scope doesn’t prevent this outcome, although it may increase his pathos (and correspondingly, the reader’s sympathy).

Unlike Mariia in *Poltava*, Evgenii is unambiguously innocent—free of overweening passion, sin, or hubris—yet is cursed with madness all the same. As Rosenshield notes, this renders problematic the formula of madness as divine punishment: Evgenii’s madness can hardly be considered retribution for his “rebellion” against Peter (the divine figure of the poem), as he is driven mad before his rebellious act (Rosenshield 103). Particularly given the biblical language of Pushkin’s depiction of the flood, Evgenii is comparable to Job: despite his blamelessness, his

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<sup>35</sup> In this regard, he also resembles Piskarev in Gogol’s “Nevskii Prospect” (1835), who is also willing to work hard to ensure his independence: “we’ll work; we’ll vie with each other in our efforts to improve our life. There’s nothing more pleasant than to owe everything to oneself” (266).

<sup>36</sup> A *poshliak* is someone characterized by *poshlost'*, a concept described in more detail below.

life is destroyed.<sup>37</sup> However, he does not stoically accept the death of Parasha and her mother as a manifestation of divine will—rather, he goes mad, apparently in the belief that all our life is “nothing, like an empty dream, the mockery of heaven at Earth” (III:291). The destruction caused by the flood and Evgenii’s subsequent madness pose an implicit question—“why?”—which is never answered. Perhaps it is precisely this lack of reason—the apparent victory of nature over civilization, of the random and chaotic over the ordered and rational—that drives Evgenii mad. In the apparent absence of divine (or Petrine) order, the tragedies of life are revealed as a cruel joke, the mockery of the gods.<sup>38</sup>

Some typical features of literary depictions of madness are already present before Evgenii’s breakdown. While he rides out the flood on the back of a marble lion, Evgenii’s fear for his fiancée renders him insensible to the outside world (“He did not hear how the greedy wave rose ... how the rain lashed his face ... how the wind ... had suddenly taken his hat”) and fixes his gaze in the direction of her “dilapidated little house” (“His desperate looks directed at one corner were immobile ... very near to the waves ... there they were, the widow and [her] daughter: his Parasha, his hopes”)—for the time being, however, these ‘mad’ traits are motivated by his emotional state and the reality of the flood (III:291). As he runs to the (former) location of Parasha’s home, the narrator emphasizes Evgenii’s incomprehension and disorientation: “He

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<sup>37</sup> According to Wachtel, “Pushkin uses the biblical word for ‘flood’ (‘potop’, II.147) and explicitly introduces the notion of divine retribution when ‘the populace sees God’s wrath and awaits execution (‘Narod/Zrit [B]ozhii gnev i kazni zhdet’, I.104). [Note: *kazni* may refer to a plague rather than “execution”; *kazn'* also denotes the Biblical plagues inflicted on the Egyptians, as brought to my attention by Valeria Sobol. (M.M.)] In this line the thematic allusion to Genesis is poetically amplified through lexicon (archaisms [*zrit*] and Biblicisms [*gnev*]) and diction (the monosyllabic words and consonantal clusters are typical of the eighteenth-century ode)” (“Pushkin’s long poems” 83).

<sup>38</sup> Jakobson notes that in Pushkin’s earlier drafts of *The Bronze Horseman*, “the role of Peter, the tamer of the rebellious nobility both during and after death (‘Peter’s shade stood threateningly in the midst of the boyars’), had prepared and motivated the bronze tsar’s cruel intervention against the descendant of this rebellious nobility” (345). Similarly, although Pushkin “depersonalized [Evgenii] as much as possible” in the final version, he had initially “defended his right ... to defy the establishment (*dlja tebjazakona net* [for you there is no law]). In the final edition there is not even a trace of the poet’s pugnacity that had originally accompanied the appearance of Evgenij” (345-6).

sees, [but] he cannot understand ... [he runs] headlong, not remembering anything” (III:294).

When Evgenii realizes that the house has been swept away, he “talks loudly to himself, and suddenly, striking his brow with his hand, he burst out laughing”—his chillingly inappropriate laughter (like Mariia, who “screamed with a wild laugh”) suggests that something is terribly amiss (III:295).

The narrator states that Evgenii’s “agitated mind” could not withstand these “dreadful shocks” (*ego smiatennyi um/Protiv uzhasnykh potriasenii/Ne ustoiat*), identifying his madness as a result of the flood’s destruction (III:295). Having internalized the storm’s mad chaos and disorder, “the rebellious noise of the Neva and the winds resounded in his ears” even after the flood—taken literally, this amounts to an ongoing auditory hallucination (III:295).<sup>39</sup> His traumatic experience leaves him with “terrible thoughts” or a tormenting dream, which drives him into speechless, aimless wandering and the abandonment of his home and possessions (*Uzhasnykh dum/Bezmolvno polon, on skitalsia./Ego terzal kakoi-to son./Proshla nedelia, mesiats — on/K sebe domoi ne vozyrashchalsia.*) (III:295).<sup>40</sup> After the destruction of Evgenii’s future, he falls out of the rhythm of the present (day-to-day existence, his place in the Petersburg social order) and is condemned to ceaselessly relive the past, the night of the storm. He becomes alien to human society (*On skoro svetu/Stal chuzhd*), “neither beast nor man, not this or that, not an inhabitant of the world, not a lifeless phantom”—described only in negative terms, the

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<sup>39</sup> Pushkin also links catastrophic weather with madness in “God Grant” and (arguably) “Demons,” chaos and disorder being associated with both nature and unreason.

<sup>40</sup> “In Greek literature and culture there existed a common metaphoric and physical convergence of wandering and madness. All types of wandering were viewed as dishonorable ... the proper place to be was at home.... Wandering is not only alienation from home, it is also alienation from self, mind, and the gods, and ... a form of divine punishment” (Rosenshield 98-99). In early modern England, patients discharged from Bedlam were “allowed to roam the country on [their] discharge, soliciting alms, provided [that they] wore a badge” (“Abraham-Men”).

madman is an ambiguous, liminal creature (III:296).<sup>41</sup> He turns inward and becomes lost in his own mind, leaving him oblivious to the outside world, apparently even numb to the pain of being “not infrequently lashed [by] coachmen’s whips, because he never parsed [*razbiral*] the road; it seemed that he didn’t notice. He was deafened by the noise of an inner disquietude” (III:296).<sup>42</sup>

The flood represents a reversal of Evgenii’s fortune (peripeteia), and his realization that Parasha is dead drives him insane. In his madness, however, Evgenii has a moment of clarity—recognition, if not revelation (anagnorisis)—when he finds himself before the Bronze Horseman once more: “fearfully clear became his thoughts” (III:297). After a panegyric aside on Peter (the “mighty potentate of fate”), the narrator describes Evgenii’s reaction to the statue, which is characterized by several traits typically associated with madness: blindness (“His eyes filmed over with dimness”), passionate anger (he “cast fierce glances” at the statue; “Flame ran over his heart, his blood seethed”), and the suggestion of demonic possession or black bile (“As though possessed by a black power [*siloi chernoï*], ‘All right then, wonder-working builder!’—he whispered with a shudder of spite—‘You’ll get yours!’”) (III:297-298).<sup>43</sup> It is unclear (intentionally, one suspects) whether these actions are an extension of the “fearful clarity” of his thoughts or a return to the murkiness and confusion of madness.<sup>44</sup> Interpreted as a moment of

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Poprishchin’s lament that “there’s no place for him in this world”—ironically, his name suggests “sphere” or “field” (*poprishche*) (300).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Petr Viazemskii’s 1853 poem on the German sanatorium where Batiushkov spent 1824-1828: “In an inner world of night visions/He lived locked up, like a prisoner in a jail,/And he was dead to outer impressions,/For him God’s world was an empire of darkness” (qtd. in “Madness in Western literature” 158-9).

<sup>43</sup> “Ever since the ancients, melancholia, literally black bile, has been associated with madness, anger, and violence. As Rosen shows, one of the most common words for madmen was *melancholon*, he who is afflicted with black bile. ‘If you put these ideas together—invasion and eviction, plus black flooding passion—the image of madness as a black, angry, inner flood seems inevitable.’ ‘The organic source of madness is black liquid.’ ‘The philological basics suggest that in Greek thought, madness is indissoluble from anger’ . . . darkness and night (a common threat throughout the *povest*) have always been associated with melancholia and madness” (Rosenshiel 118).

<sup>44</sup> In his correspondence, Pushkin (like Gogol) frequently used terms relating to madness as a shorthand for foolish or extremely reckless behavior, in keeping with the first definition of *bezumie* in the *Slovar’ Akademii Rossiiskoi po azbuchnomu poriadku raspolozhennyi*: “stupidity, foolishness [*glupost’*, *nerazumie*]” (“Bezumie”). This is the sense in which he described Radishchev’s “crime”—the opposition to the established social order perceived by Catherine (and, apparently, Pushkin) in his *Journey From St. Petersburg to Moscow*—as a form of madness: “When we realize

mad insight, however, Rosenshield observes that Evgenii's rebellious gesture is "perfectly in accord with the romantic notion of madness, the commonplace that a moment of insight—a variation of a moment of bliss—is worth a lifetime ... From a romantic point of view, Evgenii's terrible end detracts neither from his understanding nor his actions; it enhances the romantic aura of one who has paid the price for his insight and courage" (121).<sup>45</sup>

Evgenii's "rebellion" incites an immediate response in the titular horseman, which can be understood as a persecutory hallucination. Indeed, a psychological interpretation seems the most reasonable, as the narrator's description of the statue's animation is explicitly mediated by Evgenii's consciousness (i.e. thought report): "*It seemed to him that [Pokazalos'/Emu, chto] the dread tsar's face, instantly aflame with wrath, was slowly turning ... And he runs down the empty square and hears behind him [slyshit za soboi]—as if it were the rumbling of thunder—a heavily ringing gallop over the quaking pavement*" (III:298, my emphasis).<sup>46</sup> However, the following lines raise the possibility of a supernatural interpretation, insofar as they describe the events as if they are actually happening: "twilit by the pallid moon, arm reaching forth on high, there speeds after him the bronze horseman upon the clangorously galloping steed; and all night, wherever the poor madman might turn his steps, behind him everywhere the bronze horseman was galloping with heavy clatter" (III:298). Because the narrator pointedly refers to Evgenii as a "poor madman" (*bezumets bednyi*), the most plausible interpretation remains psychological

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what harsh people surrounded the throne of Catherine, the crime of Radishchev appears to be the act of a madman. A petty official, a man without any authority, without any backing, dares to rise up against the general order, against the autocracy, against Catherine!" (qtd. in Rosenshield 226). In this context, given Evgenii's relative powerlessness vis-à-vis the mighty tsar, the rebellious anger which his madness allows him to voice amounts to madness in itself.

<sup>45</sup> Of course, this is very different from Romantic madness as formulated in the works of Odoevskii or "God Grant"—which *does* involve "bliss"—but it shares Odoevskii's attribution of transcendental or prophetic vision to madness.

<sup>46</sup> Thought report is "the presentation of characters' thoughts in the narrator's discourse," versus direct thought, which is "a verbal transcription that passes as the reproduction of the actual thoughts of a character" ("Thought and Consciousness Representation (Literature)"). Following Tsvetan Todorov, Anne Basom points out that "Hesitation in the discourse of the narration is frequently marked by qualitatives such as: as if, as though, it seems, it appears (Todorov, 81). Such qualitatives establish hesitation by making it possible for the reader to disbelieve the perceptions of the protagonist, for something which seems to be so is not necessarily so" (423).

rather than supernatural—the narrator seems to adopt the perspective of Evgenii, who perceives these objectively unreal events as real (i.e. free indirect thought).<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, neither option is foreclosed: Pushkin maintains an atmosphere characteristic of the fantastic, as he does on a larger scale in “The Queen of Spades.”<sup>48</sup>

In the first chapter of Pushkin’s 1833 povest’ “The Queen of Spades,” the protagonist Germann hears an interesting anecdote: his comrade Tomskii relates the tale of his grandmother, a wealthy countess who (he claims) learned the secret of correctly guessing three cards in a row, thereby recouping a huge gambling debt. Germann becomes obsessed with the story, and he decides to seduce the Countess’s ward Lizaveta Ivanovna in order to learn the supernatural secret—but unfortunately for him, he scares the aged Countess to death. Apparently, however, her ghost appears in his room and reveals the three cards. At first, the secret seems to work—Germann wins a massive sum with the first two cards—but after he inexplicably plays the queen of spades instead of the third winning card (the ace), he loses his mind and is consigned to an asylum.

“The Queen of Spades” differs from the preceding works, formally (as a prose tale rather than a lyric or *poema*) and otherwise. The narrator maintains an emotional distance from the characters, and his ironic observations on Germann, the Countess, and Lizaveta Ivanovna provide most of the story’s humor (in contrast to the humorless *Poltava* and *Bronze Horseman*). Germann is also a less tragic figure than Mariia or Evgenii, a result of his more negative characterization and the lack of narratorial expressions of sympathy or empathy. These features encourage the interpretation of Germann’s ultimate madness and incarceration as an appropriate

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<sup>47</sup> Free indirect thought “combines the subjectivity and language of the character, as in direct thought, with the presentation of the narrator, as in thought report” (“Thought and Consciousness Representation (Literature)”).

<sup>48</sup> Here I refer to the fantastic as defined by Todorov, which hinges on the reader’s hesitation between an “uncanny” (realistic/psychological) and “marvelous” (supernatural) reading of a given text.

outcome, perhaps even as retribution “visited upon him by the god of the story, whether a mysterious agent of justice, the narrator, or Pushkin himself, the implied author” (Rosenshield 103).<sup>49</sup>

Germann’s transgressions include ambition, avarice, the cynical manipulation of the innocent Lizaveta Ivanovna, and a lack of remorse for his role in the Countess’s death. He is twice compared to Napoleon: Tomskii tells Lizaveta Ivanovna that Germann “is a truly romantic individual: he has the profile of Napoleon, and the soul of Mephistopheles”—later, Lizaveta Ivanovna is struck by his “astonishing resemblance to a portrait of Napoleon” (V:252, 254).<sup>50</sup> This comparison recalls an aside in *Evgenii Onegin* on the lack of true friendships in contemporary society, in which people are unfeeling and narcissistic (“We esteem all as zeroes, and ones—[only] ourselves”) to the point of sociopathology: “We all look to Napoleons; the millions of bipedal creatures are only tools to us; to us feeling is absurd and laughable” (IV:42-43). Germann certainly fits the latter description: his “hardened soul” is not disturbed by “the tears of the poor girl [Lizaveta Ivanovna] nor the astounding charm of her grief ... He felt no remorse at the thought of the dead old lady. He felt dismay for only one thing: the irretrievable loss of the secret upon which he had relied for enrichment” (297 [V:253]). Like Gogol’s Poprishchin and Chartkov, Germann is consumed by a Napoleonic desire to increase his status, “a strange impulse that drives a protagonist of humble background to wish to become a *tuz*, a

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<sup>49</sup> Pushkin was writing his *History of Pugachev* at the same time as “Queen of Spades”; for him, it seems, inordinate ambition and dissatisfaction with one’s place in the social order were potentially connected to rebellion and “pretendership” (*samo-zvanstvo*). According to Rosenshield, Pushkin “abhorred and feared the materialistic culture he saw arising in Europe and Russia, a culture whose idea he distilled in Germann’s monomaniacal pursuit of gain ... Passionate, rash, and determined, Germann is potentially a dangerous rebel against the established order ... Germann constituted a threat to the author’s society, class, and ethos. The author thus not only destroys Germann, he discredits his idea by showing it to be a form of madness or something that must inevitably lead to madness” (59, 103).

<sup>50</sup> In fact, Germann is closer to Faust than Mephistopheles: he tells the Countess, “Reveal your secret to me! ... Perhaps it is bound up with some dreadful sin, with the loss of eternal bliss, with some contract made with the devil ... I am prepared to take your sins on my own soul” (Pushkin 1966:294).



‘big-shot’” (Clayton 12). His ambition is the core of his moral transgression and—in its influence on his “fiery imagination”—the passion that drives him mad, as well as the manifestation of “a real social hypnosis ... [Germann] could have remarked like Sorel [the protagonist of Stendhal’s 1830 novel *The Red and the Black*]: ‘I have been ambitious; I have acted in accordance with the conventions of the time’” (Jackson 109).<sup>51</sup>

“The Queen of Spades” is renowned for its fantastic quality, whereby both ‘realistic’ (i.e. psychological) and supernatural interpretations are possible. Dostoevsky called Pushkin’s story “the pinnacle of the art of the fantastic”:

One believes that Germann actually saw an apparition ... And yet, having finished the tale, one does not know how to decide: did this vision emerge from Germann’s own nature [realistic solution], or is he actually one of those who have come into contact with another world, a world of spirits, evil and hostile to man [supernatural solution] [ ... ]  
Now this is what I call art! (qtd. in Davydov 309-10).

Although Germann is undoubtedly driven mad at the end of the story, a realistic reading entails the interpretation of otherwise supernatural elements—the Countess’s corpse winking at Germann and giving him a “mocking glance,” her ghostly appearance in his room and revelation of the three winning cards, the fact that Germann plays the queen of spades instead of the ace (which he knows to be the third winning card), and the fact that the queen of spades (who bears

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<sup>51</sup> “During the first post-revolutionary decades French psychiatrists identified unbridled ambition as a pervasive cause of madness; however, the definitive rise of the middle class in French society eventually normalized ambition as an essential, even celebrated feature of bourgeois society” (Porter 5). For a comprehensive overview of the influence of French attitudes toward ambition and madness on Russian literature, see Porter.

an “unusual likeness” to the Countess) seems to wink and smile at Germann—as psychological phenomena, possibly indications of incipient insanity (V:256, 261).<sup>52</sup>

Germann’s personality traits predispose him to madness: his “resoluteness” (*tverdost’*) may have “saved him from the usual errors of youth,” but it is clearly no match for his “strong passions and fiery imagination” (*sil’nye strasti i ognennoe voobrazhenie*)—Germann is a gambler at heart (*v dushe igrok*), and his nature ultimately wins out over his self-control (V:242). Like the passions, a powerful imagination was linked to madness in both literary tradition and contemporary medical thought.<sup>53</sup> Dr. Dietrich diagnosed his patient thusly:

The essence of Batiushkov’s mental illness lies in the limitless dominance of the power of imagination (*imaginatio*) over the other powers of his mind. As a result they are all slowed and suppressed, so that the intellect is in no condition to recognize the absurdity and groundlessness of those thoughts and images which parade before him in an endless colorful sequence ... he lives only through dreams, through daydreams. (qtd. in “Madness in Western literature” 160)

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<sup>52</sup> In an ingenious argument based on intertextual references to Diderot’s saucy satirical novel *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), J. Douglas Clayton suggests that in Tomskii’s story, “The countess is ‘piqued’ when her husband refuses to pay the debt, and takes her revenge on her husband, not only by banishing him from the bedroom, but also by selling her *bijou* [i.e. vagina]. The business of the three cards was a story told to her ‘imbecile of a husband’ to disguise the truth. Here is perhaps the meaning of her assertion [to Germann] that ‘that was a joke’: a joke at her husband’s expense. The countess might thus be the ultimate unreliable narrator, and her *désordre* the source of all that follows” (8-9). If this is the case, then the supernatural option is foreclosed: rather than learning the secret of three “magic cards” from St. Germain, the Countess merely exchanged sex for money. Of course, the biggest hurdle to such an interpretation is the fact that the three winning cards supposedly given to Germann by the Countess—three, seven, and ace—*do win*. The odds of winning one such bet (i.e. that a card of a given rank will be chosen) are 1 in 13 (7.69%), and the odds of doing so three times in a row are 1 in 2,197 (0.05%). Nevertheless, such an outcome is not impossible, despite being extremely improbable.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the aforementioned passage in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: “Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,/Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend/More than cool reason ever comprehends./The lunatic, the lover and the poet/Are of imagination all compact” (5.1.2-6). In the opinion of the influential German psychiatrist J.C. Reil (1759-1813), “the classic cases of insanity would arise from energetic imagination, in which the sufferer could not distinguish manufactured images from reality. This last condition produces those archetypal examples in which ‘the sick person plays a king, a general, or soldier’” (Richards 262).

Unfortunately for Germann, “the story about the three cards made a strong impression on his imagination” (*sil'no podeistvoval na ego voobrazhenie*)—he becomes obsessed with the possibility of gaining wealth by means of the supernatural secret (V:242). After plagiarizing his first love letter to Lizaveta Ivanovna from a German novel, Germann later “wrote them inspired by passion [*vdokhnovennyi strastiiu*] and spoke in a language of his own: in them the intransigence of his desires [*nepreklonnost' ego zhelanii*] and the disorder of his unconstrained imagination [*besporiadok neobuzdannogo voobrazheniia*] manifested themselves” (V:246). However, the passion that inspires Germann is not love, but rather the ambitious desire for material gain that has captured his imagination: “those passionate letters, those ardent demands, the whole impertinent and obstinate pursuit—all that was not love! Money—that was what his soul craved for! It was not [Lizaveta Ivanovna] who could satisfy his desire and make him happy” (297 [V:253]). Germann’s imagination also provides support for reading the appearance of the dead Countess as a dream or hallucination (irrational states commonly attributed to the imagination), possibly resulting from intoxication: just before the arrival of his ghostly visitor, “contrary to his usual custom, [Germann] drank very much in the hope of silencing his inner agitation. But the wine fired his imagination still more [*vino eshche bolee goriachilo ego voobrazhenie*]” (V:256). The story’s two other moments of possible hallucination—at the Countess’s funeral (“At that very moment it seemed to him that [*pokazalos' emu, chto*] the dead woman gave him a mocking glance, and winked at him”) and after playing the queen of spades instead of the ace (“At that moment it seemed to him that [*emu pokazalos', chto*] the queen of spades winked at him and smiled”)—are explicitly depicted from Germann’s point of view (300, 305 [V:256, 261]). As in *The Bronze Horseman*, the use of thought report foregrounds

Germann's subjective perception, leaving the door open to an interpretation in which these events are attributed to his "disordered" and "unconstrained" imagination.

Some depictions of madness in Romantic literature—including Hoffmann's in *The Golden Pot* (*Der goldne Topf. Ein Märchen aus der neuen Zeit*, 1814) and Gogol's in "The Portrait" ("Portret," 1835, rev. 1842)—involve overtly supernatural elements.<sup>54</sup> Pushkin employs occult trappings in "Queen of Spades," but he treats them equivocally throughout the story. The narrator's description of St. Germain—who ostensibly gave the Countess the secret of the three cards—is surrounded by a fog of conflicting opinions: "[St. Germain] held himself out to be the Wandering Jew, and the inventor of the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone and so forth. Some ridiculed him as a charlatan and in his memoirs Casanova declares that he was a spy" (277 [V:235]). Germann himself seems to be under the sway of a mysterious power that draws him into the Countess's orbit: he decides to forget about her supernatural secret and stick with his "three winning cards" of "economy, moderation and industry," after which he immediately finds himself (*ochutilsia*) outside her house (286 [V:243]). The next day, he "again went out to wander about the town and again found himself outside the house of the Countess \*\*\*. Some unknown power seemed to have attracted him to it [*Nevedomaia sila, kazalos', privlekala ego k nemu*]" (286 [V:243]). Like Evgenii in *The Bronze Horseman*, who makes his rebellious gesture "as though possessed by a black power [*Kak obuiannyi siloi chernoi*]," Germann's madness involves apparent compulsion by an external force (III:297). However, this seemingly supernatural control is presented ambivalently (*kazalos'*) and may be mediated by Germann's perspective (i.e. Germann *feels as if he were* drawn by an "unknown power") in another instance of free indirect

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<sup>54</sup>According to Neil Cornwell, Odoevskii "[depicted] poetical moments in the world of the marvelous, the mysterious" in order "to instil[l] into his readers a deeper understanding of life as a great riddle, largely still unknown to people" (61).

thought.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Germann's failure to play the ace on the third night can be read as another manifestation of this force—alternatively, it can be read as in psychological terms, as the manifestation of an unconscious (and heretofore repressed) desire to gamble. Rosenshield favors the latter interpretation: realizing that by playing the cards revealed to him by the Countess, he would not be risking anything,

[Germann] expresses his inner desire by finally engaging not only in real risk but ultimate risk ... he indulges the desire to play that always haunted him ... Germann is crushed by his loss, but, romantically understood, he scores a victory for himself, by participating in life at its most intense, by being ready to sacrifice his life for one moment of intense experience ... To have achieved fortune and independence with the ace ... would have been a continuation of death-in-life ... To gamble and lose, to choose the queen, the femme fatale, is of course to choose destruction, but by comparison with the choice of the ace it can be considered a kind of spiritual or poetic victory. (208)

Whether “Queen of Spades” is read in realistic or supernatural terms, the outcome for Germann is presented unambiguously in the story's brief conclusion: after the frustration of his ambitions and loss of his patrimony, he goes out of his mind (*Germann soshel s uma*) and is confined to an asylum (*On sidit v Obukhovskoi bol'nitse v 17-m numere*) where “he answers no questions, but merely mutters with unusual rapidity: ‘Three, seven, ace! Three, seven, queen!’” (305 [V:262]). Like Evgenii, Germann's madness involves an ‘inward turn’ (*ne otvechaet ni na kakie voprosy*) which is foreshadowed by an earlier moment of insensibility to the outside world:

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<sup>55</sup> The text also refers to “fate” (*uchast'*) and “chance” (*sluchai*): when Germann sees Lisaveta Ivanovna through the window, the narrator remarks that “That moment decided his fate” (*Eta minuta reshila ego uchast'*); after learning the three cards, “He wanted to try his luck in the public gaming-houses of Paris. Chance spared him the trouble” (*Sluchai izbavil ego ot khlopot*) (286, 302 [V:243, 258]). Whether conceived of as chance, fate, or his own unconscious desires, Germann is not the master of his own destiny. Ultimately, of course, the godlike figure who determines Germann's fate is the author.

he “[felt] neither wind nor snow [*ne chuvstvuia ni vetra, ni snega*]” while waiting to enter the house of the Countess, despite wearing only a “frock-coat” (*Germann stoial v odnom sertuke*) in the “terrible” weather (V:247). Germann, Evgenii, and Mariia all become fixated on a moment in the past (for Mariia, one in which both her father and her loving image of Mazeppa still live), dropping out of the inexorable forward movement of ‘rational’ linear time. Unlike Evgenii and Mariia, however, Germann’s single-minded obsession had already pushed every other thought out of his mind *before* the event that ostensibly drives him mad—fittingly, it is all that remains in his madness: “Two fixed ideas can no more exist in one mind than, in the physical sense, two bodies can occupy one and the same place ... ‘Three, seven, ace’ never left his thoughts, were constantly on his lips ... To the exclusion of all others, one thought alone occupied his mind—making use of the secret which had cost him so much” (301-2 [V:258]).<sup>56</sup> Particularly given his use of the term “fixed ideas [*nepodvizhnye idei*],” Pushkin’s description recalls what Jan Goldstein identifies as “one of [Jean-Étienne Dominique] Esquirol’s theoretical contributions to [early psychiatry]—the disease entity monomania,” which originally “denoted an *idée fixe*, a single pathological preoccupation in an otherwise sound mind” (153, 155-6).<sup>57</sup> In France, “the perception of many lay and medical observers that individuals in post-Revolutionary society were likely to fall prey to the ‘torments of ambition’ was translated into assertions about the prevalence of a subspecies of monomania called *monomania ambitieuse*,” or ambitious monomania (Goldstein 160). As Jillian Porter demonstrates, “Romantic literature carried the

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<sup>56</sup> According to Mikhail Epstein, “Coherence and mobility are two complementary qualities of any living system, including that of reason. When one of these qualities is lost, reason falls into a madness either of *incoherence*, or of *immobility*. *Circularity* of reason, its concentration on one immobile point, is no less fraught with madness than *unbalance* of reason, which wanders without direction. What is more mad: a chaotic dance of images, an orgy of imagination, or an organ of reason stuck on one super-valued idea?” (272).

<sup>57</sup> “Named by Esquirol around the year 1810, ‘monomania’ had already percolated down to the nonmedical French intelligentsia and been incorporated into their language by the late 1820s ... even the Académie française succumbed and officially admitted the neologism ‘monomania’ into the French lexicon in 1835 ... In the years 1826-33 ... [monomania] was the single most frequent diagnosis made of patients entering Charenton and accounted, on average, for a staggering 45 percent of the inmate population” (Goldstein 153-4).

discourse on mad ambition abroad to Russia,” where it “inspired original works on the same subject”—the most famous of which are undoubtedly Pushkin’s “Queen of Spades” and Gogol’s “Diary of a Madman” (25).

As shown above, Pushkin’s depictions of madness vary considerably. “God Grant That I Not Lose My Mind” combines positive and negative models, but it ends on a note of skepticism toward Romantic madness à la Odoevskii. Mariia’s insanity is the closest Pushkin came to the treatment of madness in classical and neoclassical tragedy, wherein it often functions as punishment for moral transgressions. Evgenii’s tragic fate cannot be understood solely as a divine punishment—madness is treated more ambivalently in *The Bronze Horseman* than in *Poltava*, although the protagonists of both narrative poems are depicted sympathetically. Germann’s madness, like Mariia’s, can be read as a punishment, but for a thoroughly modern condition: the ‘French malady’ of ambition.<sup>58</sup> In general, Pushkin treats madness much more negatively than does Odoevskii—his mad characters end up dead (Evgenii), incarcerated (Germann), and effaced from historical memory (Mariia)—but traces of a positive model of madness are evident in his use of anagnorisis. In all of Pushkin’s narrative works under consideration, insanity is brought on by a particular event or has a discernable (if ambiguously represented) cause: as in Gogol’s “Nevskii Prospect,” “Portrait,” and “Diary of a Madman,” madness follows the foreclosure of a character’s future as he or she had imagined it.

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Catherine’s note on Radishchev’s *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*: “The purpose of this book is clear on every page: its author, infected and full of the French madness, is trying in every possible way to break down respect for authority and for the authorities, to stir up in the people indignation against their superiors and against the government” (Radishchev 239).

## CHAPTER 3: GOGOLIAN MADNESS: “NEVSKII PROSPECT,” “THE PORTRAIT,” AND “DIARY OF A MADMAN”

“Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination . . . Men of bright fancies may in this respect be compar’d to those angels, whom the scripture represents as covering their eyes with their wings.”

-David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*

“The passions are good or bad qualities, only intensified.”

“Great passions are hopeless diseases. That which could cure them is the first thing to make them really dangerous.”

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*

“They say that a psychosis is like a monastery—a refuge. It’s easier to imagine oneself as a dog than to live as a man.”

-Viktor Shklovsky, *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love*

### INTRODUCTION

Curiously, it is seldom noted that the protagonists of all three of Gogol’s Petersburg tales first published in *Arabesques (Arabeski)* in 1835—Piskarev in “Nevskii Prospect,” Chartkov in “The Portrait,” and Poprishchin in “Diary of a Madman”—are linked by madness. The contemporary understanding of passion as the cause of madness informs “Nevskii Prospect” and “The Portrait,” if not necessarily “Diary of a Madman” (which presents special interpretive challenges outlined below). These stories are also connected by influence of a literary trend popularized by Hoffmann and taken up in Russia by Odoevskii, among others: the genre of *Künstlerroman* (or *Künstlernovelle*), characterized by its artist-protagonists.<sup>59</sup> Piskarev and

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<sup>59</sup> Gogol was particularly influenced by Odoevskii: after meeting in 1831 or 1832, the two men “became close friends; Gogol’ became a regular visitor to Odoevsky’s and they took a keen interest in each other’s literary work” (Cornwell 248-49). In a November 1832 letter to I.I. Dmitriev, Gogol praised Odoevskii’s story “Beethoven’s Last Quartet” (“Poslednii kvartet Betkhovena”), first published pseudonymously in the journal *Northern Flowers (Severnnye tsvety)*: “Prince Odoevsky will soon delight us with a collection of his stories of the type of *Beethoven’s*



Chartkov are both painters, and the first manuscript version of “Diary of a Madman” was entitled “Diary of a Mad Musician” (*Zapiski sumasshedshogo muzykanta*).<sup>60</sup> Hoffmann and Odoevskii favored composers, but a more striking difference lies in their depictions of madness, which often involve states of rapturous joy, access to higher truths, and creative genius.<sup>61</sup> As in Pushkin’s works, Gogol’s treatment of madness and its irrational correlates (including passions, dreams, and the imagination) is profoundly negative, and arguably even parodic.<sup>62</sup>

In “Nevskii Prospect,” the narrator introduces Piskarev in what Richard Peace calls a “feigned ‘sociological’ manner” (possibly inspired by that of the *physiologies* then popular in

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[*Last*] *Quartet*, which appeared in *Northern Flowers* for 1831. There will be about ten of them and those which he is writing now are even better than the earlier ones. Imagination and intellect – heaps! It’s a series of psychological phenomena incomprehensible in man! They are coming out under the one title – ‘House of Madmen’” (qtd. in Cornwell 249). “Beethoven’s Last Quartet” and other pieces originally intended for the unfinished cycle Gogol refers to, *House of Madmen* or *The Madhouse* (*Dom sumasshedshikh*), were later included in *Russian Nights* (*Russkie nochi*, 1844). Gogol only read Hoffmann in translation, but at least two of his works seem to have influenced “Diary of a Madman”: the story “News of the Latest Fortunes of the Dog Berganza” (1814) and the novel *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (1819-1821), the latter of which Gogol particularly admired (*uvleksia ‘Kotom Murom’*) (Chudakov 104). According to Chudakov, Hoffman’s *Murr* and “Golden Pot” were published in Russian in 1831 (127).

<sup>60</sup> As Peace observes, the figure of the artist is related to “a basic motif of all the St Petersburg tales: the relationship between surface and content” (95). The plot of “Diary of a Madman” in its final incarnation seems to have originated in Gogol’s unproduced comedy *The Order of St. Vladimir, Third Class* (*Vladimir tret’ei stepeni*), abandoned by early 1833 “because it could never be passed by the censors” (Porter 34). According to Donald Fanger, “The play as a whole was to center on a bureaucrat’s obsessive efforts to be decorated with the order of Vladimir, Third Class—‘only so that people might see the authorities’ kindness to me’ (V, 107)—and was reportedly to end in frustration and madness, with the protagonist imagining that he himself is a third-class Vladimir” (127).

<sup>61</sup> Gogol was fascinated with Odoevskii’s work on the theme of “supposed or real madness in highly gifted (‘genius’) natures,” which includes four stories in *Russian Nights*: “Sebastian Bach” (“Sebast’ian Bakh”), “The Improviser” (“Improvizator”), “Opera del Cavaliere Giambatista Piranesi,” and “Beethoven’s Last Quartet” (III:701).

<sup>62</sup> Maguire contends that Piskarev is a “parody ... of the Romantic artist,” insofar as he “embodies the values of a borrowed, superficial, and now thoroughly decadent Romanticism, values much like those than animate Chartkov in ‘The Portrait’” (78). Similarly, Susan K. Morrissey argues that Gogol “parod[ie]d romantic suicide” in “Nevskii Prospect” by “plac[ing it] within an environment of social artifice, including the quest for honor and status”: “[Piskarev’s] demise fails to articulate any genius or talent. Instead, the tale systematically parodies the romantic cult of interiority and beautiful death. Like Pirogov, Piskarev is solely concerned with attaining social recognition and status ... Similarly, his identity as a Petersburg artist is fatally undermined; both his artistic ideals and his specific fantasies of saving the fallen woman are clichéd ... Piskarev embodies the values of his society too completely. He is just as banal as Pirogov” (169). However, such readings—with which I agree, as will soon be evident—are rare exceptions to the standard interpretation of Piskarev as an innocent dreamer depicted unironically.

France), depicting him as a representative of the “type” of the Petersburg artist (102).<sup>63</sup> As a member of this group, Piskarev is an eccentric figure by definition: “in a city in which everyone is either an official, a shopkeeper, or a German artisan,” the artist “belongs as much to the citizens of Petersburg as a person who comes to us in a dream belongs to the real world” (cf. Poprishchin’s lament that “there’s no place for him in the world”) (252, 300 [III:16, 214]).<sup>64</sup> (Given the role of the artist as outlined in “The Portrait,” such ‘not-belonging’ is probably a positive quality.) Petersburg artists “are for the most part kind and meek people, bashful, lighthearted, with a quiet love for their art” and a total indifference to all “superfluity” (*vovse nebregushchii ob izlishne*) (252 [III:16-17]).<sup>65</sup> Other traits of the Petersburg artist include timidity toward those of higher social status (“a star or a thick epaulette throws them into such confusion that they unwittingly lower the price of their works”), an occasional but ill-fitting tendency toward dandyism (which “always stands out in them and looks something like a patch”), and a sort of double vision—or half-blindness:

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<sup>63</sup> Walter Benjamin coined the phrase “panoramic literature” to describe the physiologies (“inconspicuous, paperback, pocket-sized volumes” which “investigated ... human types”) and anthologies—which, he argues, were “products of the same collective belletristic endeavor for which Girardin had provided an outlet in the *feuilleton*”—prevalent in France in the 1830s and 1840s (66-7). Benjamin writes that these works “consist of individual sketches which, as it were, reproduce the dynamic foreground of those panoramas with their anecdotal form and the sweeping background of the panoramas with their store of information” (67). It seems likely that panoramic literature, which was also taken up in Russia, influenced both Gogol’s (masterfully ironic) introductory sketch of Nevskii Prospect and the subsequent ‘physiology’ of the Petersburg artist.

<sup>64</sup> Madness and eccentricity are closely linked: according to N.M. Ianovskii’s *Novyi slovotolkovatel’* (1803-6), “As [melancholy] increases and turns chronic, it becomes a *disease* that can confuse the reason, and it is now called an *eccentricity* [*sumabrodstvom*], and it often results in *insanity*” (qtd. in “A Cheerful Empress” 28). Julie A. Buckler notes that in “The Fool and the Madman,” Yurii Lotman “describes [the process of semiosis] in connection with the spectrum of behavior exhibited by a fool, a sensible person, and a lunatic ... The fool’s behavior is too predictable in its violations of appropriate conduct for specific situations, while the sensible person behaves in dull accordance with established norms. The lunatic is the most creative of the three because his behavior diverges from the expected in unexpected ways. Eccentricity and madness both exhibit ‘unmotivated innovation,’ the first stage in the journey from nonsemiotic existence to semiosis. It is no coincidence that eccentricity and madness are attributes of the cultural mythologies surrounding creative artists. The lunatic has been perceived differently from the eccentric, however, since Western and Russian societies imprison and repudiate madmen, while reveling in the legendary antics of eccentrics” (Buckler 303). As Buckler observes, St. Petersburg itself is an eccentric city, “unexpectedly constructed at the margins of an empire that was often described as a cultural oddity” (309).

<sup>65</sup> In this and the following chapters, citations with Roman numerals refer to Gogol’s *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*; where they are accompanied by page numbers without Roman numerals; quotations are excerpted from Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky’s translations in *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*. Other translations are my own.

He never looks you straight in the eye; or if he does, it is somehow vaguely, indefinitely ... The reason for that is that he sees, at one and the same time, both your features and those of some plaster Hercules standing in his room, or else he imagines a painting of his own that he still means to produce. That is why his responses are often incoherent, not to the point, and the muddle of things in his head increases his timidity all the more. (253 [III:17-18])

Due to the primacy of the creative imagination, the Petersburg artist either superimposes art onto reality or is drawn away from reality into fantasy. Although *in* the world, Piskarev is not entirely a part of it (unlike the worldly and unimaginative Pirogov)—instead, he exists in a liminal space, somewhere between reality and a world of imagination. As such, Piskarev’s very nature would seem to predispose him to madness.

In addition to a powerful imagination, Piskarev “[bears] in his soul sparks of feeling [*iskry chuvstva*] ready on the right occasion to burst into flame” (253 [III:18]). In both “Nevskii Prospect” and “The Portrait,” Gogol uses sparks (*iskry*) to represent youthful artistic talent and a concomitant potential for greatness: “[Piskarev] bore in himself a spark of talent [*iskru talanta*] which in time might have blazed up broadly and brightly”; “[Chartkov’s] whole being, his whole life was awakened in one instant, as if youth returned to him, as if the extinguished sparks of talent blazed up again ... the spark of fire that had perhaps flickered in his breast” (266, 371 [III:33, 133]). Given the traditional metaphorization of passion as heat and attribution of passion to youth (particularly common in the poetry of Derzhavin and Pushkin)—described in “The Portrait” as the time of life “when the touch of beauty ... transforms virginal powers into fire and flame”—the image of the spark suggests a connection with the positive model of passion Gogol delineates in “The Portrait” (outlined in the next chapter) (368 [III:110]). Initially, Piskarev and

Chartkov both bear within themselves the spark of talent, which—if fueled by a “quiet, heavenly passion” and developed through lifelong devotion to one’s craft—allows for the creation of true art, which “contains a hint of the divine” and thereby provides those who see it with a transcendental aesthetic experience (391 [III:135]). Unfortunately for Piskarev and Chartkov, “Everything transforms quickly in man; before you can turn around, a horrible worm [*cherv*] has grown inside him, despotically drawing all life's juices to itself” (*Dead Souls* 278 [VI:242]).<sup>66</sup> In other words, everything depends on the *type* of passion that either fuels or extinguishes the spark of talent, which itself only signifies the potential for artistic greatness—and according to the narrator of *Dead Souls*, “Numberless as the sands of the sea are human passions, and no one resembles another, and all of them, base or beautiful, are at first obedient to man and only later become his dread rulers” (278 [VI:242]).

#### PISKAREV’S MAD PASSION: DREAMS, SENTIMENTALISM, AND *POSHLOST* IN “NEVSKII PROSPECT”

When his friend Pirogov suggests that he should pursue a dark-haired beauty who catches his fancy, Piskarev initially demurs, replying, “how could I? ... As if she were the kind to walk about Nevsky Prospect in the evening. She must be a very noble lady [*znatnaia dama*] ... her cloak alone is worth about eighty rubles” (251 [III:16]). Here and elsewhere, Piskarev is deceived by appearances: he assumes that a beautiful girl with an expensive cloak could never be

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<sup>66</sup> In this passage from *Dead Souls* (*Mertvye dushi*, 1842), the “horrible worm” represents a destructive passion, a metaphor which Gogol had already used in “Diary of a Madman”: Poprishchin asserts that “ambition [*chestoliubie*] is caused by a little blister under the tongue with a little worm [*cherviachok*] in it the size of a pinhead” (295-6 [III:210]). As Porter points out, the image of ambition as a worm was also used in Faddei Bulgarin’s “1834 story ‘Three Pages from a Madhouse, or the Psychological Healing of an Incurable Disease (The First Extract from the Notes of an Old Doctor)’ (‘Tri listka iz doma sumasshedshikh, ili Psikhicheskoe itselenie neizlechimoj bolezni [Pervoe izvlechenie iz Zapisok starogo vracha]’) (25, 27).

a prostitute—and of course, she is by definition “the kind to walk about Nevsky Prospect in the evening,” as this is precisely when and where he first sees her. Given the narrator’s sympathetic depiction of Piskarev as an innocent, however, his misperception is coded as naïveté: “he was not heated with the flame of earthly passion [*plamenem zemnoi strasti*], no, at that moment he was pure and chaste, like a virginal youth, still breathing the vague spiritual need for love. And that which in a depraved [*razvratnom*] man would arouse bold thoughts, that same thing, on the contrary, made him still more radiant [or ‘made his thoughts all the more holy’ (*eshche bolee osviatilo ikh*)]” (254 [III:19]). Rather than “depraved” sensuality, Piskarev is animated by a feeling more akin to courtly love: “This trust which a weak, beautiful being had shown in him, this trust imposed on him a vow of chivalric rigor, a vow slavishly to fulfill all her commands” (254-5 [III:19-20]).

Throughout this passage, the young beauty is repeatedly described as divine by Piskarev and/or his narrator (more on this ambiguity below), highlighting her perceived purity and heavenly beauty: she “seemed to have flown down from heaven [*kazalos', sletelo s neba*] right onto Nevsky Prospect ... God, what divine features! [*Bozhe, kakie bozhestvennyye cherty!*] ... how lose this divinity [*bozhestvo*] without even discovering to what holy [*sviatyni*] place she had descended for a visit?” (251, 253 [III:16, 18]). When she flashes him a smile, Piskarev initially refuses to believe his eyes, ascribing it instead to the “deceitful light” of the street lamp or his own proclivity for fantasy, “his own dreams laughing at him” (253-4 [III:18-19]). Nevertheless, his body reacts to the stimulus as if it were real: “He trembled all over ... It stopped the breath in his breast, everything in him turned into a vague trembling, all his senses were aflame, and everything before him was covered with a sort of mist [*vse chuvstva ego goreli i vse pered nim okinulos' kakim-to tumanom*]” (254 [III:19]). The narrator’s description of the passion that

overtakes Piskarev resembles Evgenii's reaction to the *Bronze Horseman*: "His chest tightened ... His eyes filmed over with mist [*tumanom*],/Flame ran over his heart [*Po serdtsu plamen' probezhal*]" ([Pushkin] III:298). Although Piskarev's response is based on attraction and Evgenii's on rage, the physiological and perceptual effects of the passions are similarly depicted: both are marked by inner "fire" and blindness attributed to (and in "Nevskii Prospect," externalized as) mist or fog (*tuman*).<sup>67</sup>

After being enflamed and blinded by his chaste passion, Piskarev experiences an apparently hallucinatory state in which time and space are radically distorted:

The sidewalk rushed under him, carriages with galloping horses seemed motionless, the bridge was stretched out and breaking on its arch, the house stood roof down, the sentry box came tumbling to meet him, and the sentry's halberd, along with the golden words of a shop sign and its painted scissors, seemed to flash right on his eyelashes. All this was accomplished by one glance, by one turn of a pretty head. (254 [III:19])<sup>68</sup>

The sentences that follow indicate Piskarev's insensibility to the outside world and lack of control, traits traditionally associated with both love and madness: "Unhearing, unseeing, unheeding [*Ne slysha, ne vidia, ne vnimaia*], he raced in the light tracks of beautiful feet ... the beating of his heart, the invincible force and agitation of all his feelings, urged him onward

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<sup>67</sup> The metaphorical association between flame and passionate love is ancient: Sobol mentions the "tradition of the physiology and vocabulary of love ... that goes back to Sappho's famous fragment II, discussed by Longinus in his *On the Sublime*, with its symptoms of 'fire,' pallor, and fainting" ("Nerves, Brain, or Heart?" 7).

<sup>68</sup> Julian Graffy attributes the "alarming disorder and instability" that characterizes space in Gogol's Petersburg (here and elsewhere) to demonic forces; see Graffy 243-8 (244). Cf. the following passage from Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821): "The sense of space, and in the end the sense of time, were both powerfully affected. Buildings, landscapes, &c., were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity" (95). Later in "Nevskii Prospect," Piskarev takes opium in order to alleviate his insomnia and return to the world of dreams. Notably, "De Quincey claimed that he wrote his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) more to reveal the mysteries and potential grandeur of dreams than to outline the dangers and pleasures of opium. His battle with his dreams ... also reveals the underlying assumption that the dream can possess the dreamer" ("Dreams and Dreaming"). Carl R. Proffer points out that De Quincey's book "was published in Russia under [Charles] Maturin's name" in 1834 (125).

[*nepreodolimaia sila i trevoga vsekh chuvstv stremila ego vpered*]. He did not even notice how a four-story house suddenly rose before him” (254 [III:19]). When the girl motions for Piskarev to follow her inside, he still cannot decide between belief and disbelief, reality and dreams: “his senses and thoughts were on fire; a lightning flash of joy pierced his heart with an unbearable point! No, it was no dream! ... But was it not a dream? Could it be that she, for one of whose heavenly [*nebesnyi*] glances he would be ready to give his whole life ... could it be that she had just shown him such favor and attention?” (254 [III:19]). After Piskarev realizes that the girl has invited him into a brothel—a fact which he (and/or the narrator) attributes to an external demonic force, “the terrible will of some infernal spirit who wishes to destroy the harmony of life”—his capacity for self-deception becomes increasingly apparent (257 [III:22]).

In an episode retrospectively revealed to be a dream—a device through which Gogol momentarily tricks his readers into (like his protagonist) confusing fantasy with reality—Piskarev is invited to a magnificent ball by the young beauty, who tells him that she is not a prostitute at all: “Could you really think that I belong to that despicable class of creatures among whom you met me?” (260 [III:26]). Upon waking, Piskarev finds that he prefers this beautiful vision to reality: “God, what a dream! And why wake up? ... Oh, how repulsive reality is! What is it compared with dreams!” (261 [III:27]). He loses interest in the external world and waking life—“he did not think of eating anything; without any interest, without any life ... The everyday and real struck oddly on his ear”—and his passion fuels the development of his artistic predisposition toward fantasy (262 [III:28]). Piskarev chooses to live in a world of dreams (“one might say he slept while waking and watched while asleep”), thereby fulfilling a desire to see the beautiful prostitute as he first saw her on Nevskii Prospect: as pure, divine, and ideal. His “lover’s passion [*strastiiu liubovnika*]”—which amounts to a single-minded fixation (cf.

Germann's 'monomania') on a love object that only exists in dreams—"finally acquired such power over his whole being and imagination that the desired image came to him almost every day, always in a situation contrary to reality, because his thoughts were perfectly pure, like the thoughts of a child. Through his dreams, the object itself was somehow becoming more pure and totally transformed" (264 [III:33]). Unfortunately for Piskarev, the *real* object of his love is not transformed by this imaginative exercise—instead, his idealized image increasingly diverges from reality.

After his obsessive passion causes his health to decline and he is afflicted with insomnia, Piskarev procures opium to restore sleep, "his only possession" (262 [III:28]). However, "opium enflamed his thoughts [*raskalili ego mysli*] still more, and if anyone was ever in love to the utmost degree of madness, impetuously, terribly, destructively, stormily [*vliublennyi do poslednego gradusa bezumiia, stremitel'no, uzhasno, razrushitel'no, miatezhno*], he was that unfortunate man" (264 [III:30]). In effect, Piskarev's madness amounts to the uncontrollable destructive force of a passion and imagination unconstrained by (and incompatible with) reason or reality. The outcome of his story is decided by two moments of realization (anagnorisis), moments in which terrible reality creeps in. Piskarev's discovery that the girl is a prostitute drives him into a world of dreams and madness, and the second revelation of reality—of the fact that she doesn't *want* to be rescued from her "depravity"—drives him to suicide.

His final dream of the girl (in which she is his wife) inspires the "light-minded [*legkomyslennyi*] plan" that seals his fate: "Strange thoughts were born in his head ... 'If she shows pure repentance and changes her life, then I'll marry her ... my deed will be an unmercenary and perhaps even a great one. I'll restore to the world its most beautiful ornament'" (264-5 [III:31]). In what Victor Erlich calls "a pathetic attempt to make the dream come true,"



Piskarev returns to the brothel, and—after delivering “a long and instructive admonition”—proposes a life of humble labor: “There’s nothing more pleasant than to owe everything to oneself. I’ll sit over my paintings, you’ll sit by me, inspiring my labors, embroidering or doing some other handiwork, and we won’t lack for anything” (79; 266 [III:32]). When the young prostitute objects to the terms of his proposal (“I’m no laundress or seamstress that I should do any work!”), the narrator (and/or Piskarev) condemns her in no uncertain terms: “God! in these words all her low, all her contemptible life was expressed—a life filled with emptiness and idleness, the faithful companions of depravity [*razvrata*]” (266 [III:32]). Piskarev’s subsequent actions include a cavalcade of tropes—insensibility, clouded reason, stupidity, aimless wandering, disheveled appearance, ‘insane’ physiognomy—associated with madness:

He rushed out, having lost all feeling and thought [*poteriavshi chuvstva i mysli*]. His reason was clouded [*Um ego pomutitsia*]: stupidly, aimlessly, seeing, hearing, feeling nothing [*glupo, bez tseli, ne vidia nichego, ne slysha, ne chuvstvuia*], he wandered about for the whole day. No one could say whether he slept anywhere or not; only the next day, following some stupid instinct [*glupym instinktom*], did he come to his apartment, pale, dreadful-looking, his hair disheveled, with signs of madness [*priznakami bezumiia*] on his face. (266 [III:33])

Apparently, Piskarev has lost all that made him human in any conventional sense: “having lost all feeling and thought,” the reason-emotion binary goes out the window altogether. Deprived of mental clarity, visual and auditory perception, feeling (*chuvstvo* can denote both emotions and the senses), and purpose, he wanders aimlessly and mechanically, totally insensible to the outside world. The term *instinkt* also suggests an irrational, even subhuman state (cf. Pushkin’s Mariia and Evgenii): it is described in an 1847 dictionary as that which separates man from beast

(*Zhivotnymi upravliaet instinkt, a cheloveku dan razum*), an “inner impulse” inherent to animals (*Vnutrennee pobuzhdenie, vrozhdennoe zhivotnykh*) through which they “find for themselves [that which is] beneficial [*poleznoe*] and avoid [that which is] harmful [*vrednogo*]” (“Instinkt”).<sup>69</sup> Piskarev’s “stupid instinct” does just the opposite—it leads him to his apartment, where he promptly locks himself in his room, slits his throat with a razor, and dies a slow, painful death: “From his convulsively spread arms and terribly disfigured appearance, it could be concluded that ... he had suffered a long time before his sinful soul left his body” (266 [III:33]). Although the narrator condemns Piskarev’s suicide by referring to his “sinful soul [*greshnaia dusha*],” his brief eulogy is as sentimental as anything in Karamzin: “Thus perished the victim of a mad passion [*zhertva bezumnoi strasti*], poor Piskarev, quiet, timid, modest, childishly simple-hearted [*detskii prostodushnyi*], who bore in himself a spark of talent which in time might have blazed up broadly and brightly. No one wept over him” (266 [III:33]).

In fact, the similarities between Piskarev’s story and Karamzin’s fiction are extensive and revealing. The suicide of an innocent protagonist in response to unhappy love immediately brings to mind the plot of Karamzin’s “Poor Liza.” Furthermore, Piskarev’s emotional nature and capacity for compassion—the latter demonstrated by his “rending pity [*razryvaiushcheiu zhalost'iu*]” in response to the prostitute’s terrible depravity—were valorized by and ubiquitous in Russian Sentimentalist prose (such qualities, epitomizing *chuvstvitel'nost'*, are more or less the *sine qua non* of Sentimentalist protagonists), and romantic love was one of its most frequent subjects (257 [III:22]). Even the narration of Piskarev’s story resembles that of Karamzin’s *povesti*, in which the narrator frequently identifies with and sympathetically responds to the

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. the definition of passion as “a strong feeling of desire or aversion” (“Strast”). *Instinkt* is not defined in the *Slovar' Akademii Rossiiskoi*, although it was used at least as early as 1774 (in Aleksei Vasil'ev’s “Slovo na zakliuchenie mira Rossii s Ottomanskoi Portoiu”). According to John C. Burnham, “since Antiquity, it has been thought that animals in particular are guided in their actions by instincts ... in the nineteenth century instinct was generally conceived ... as more specifically animal than human” (qtd. in “Drive”).

protagonist's emotional state (cf. "Poor Liza," "Natalia, the Boyar's Daughter," "The Emotional and the Cold"). The narratorial reflection on pity is a case in point, insofar as it echoes and endeavors to justify Piskarev's feelings for the young prostitute: "Indeed, pity never possesses us so strongly as at the sight of beauty touched by the corrupting breath of depravity ..." (256 [III:22]).

As parenthetically alluded to above, it is often impossible to determine whether a given thought should be attributed to Piskarev, the narrator, or both; the "speech category approach" to the literary representation of consciousness helps explain why. In addition to direct thought and thought report, the narration of Piskarev's story frequently verges on free indirect thought, but can be better understood in terms of Dorrit Cohn's "consonant thought report," in which

the effaced or covert narrator readily fuses with the narrated consciousness. The narrator tends not to make general statements, indulge in speculative or explanatory commentary, [employ] analytical and conceptual terms, or use cognitive and ethical privilege. The language of the narrator is often coloured by the idiom of the character. ("Thought and Consciousness Representation (Literature)")

In the aside on Petersburg artists and descriptions of Piskarev's character, the narratorial perspective is clearly distinct from that of the protagonist. However, ambiguous moments are ubiquitous in the narration of Piskarev's shifting emotional state, particularly with regard to the prostitute (whether in dreams or reality). When she first glances at him, for example, the response "God, what divine features!" and subsequent description of her wondrous beauty are certainly attributable to Piskarev, but it is unclear whether they are also attributable to the narrator. In such cases, we cannot distinguish the subjectivity of the narrator from that of Piskarev. Such ambiguity creates an impression of empathy: the narrator "fuses with the narrated

consciousness,” sharing Piskarev’s emotional responses from moment to moment. This impression is heightened by the absence of narratorial “I”s (in any of the six Russian cases) in Piskarev’s story, in which every first-person singular pronoun is embedded in the direct thought or speech of the characters—in contrast to the introduction, Pirogov’s story, and the conclusion, which include impressions and asides conveyed directly by the narrator in the first person. In Piskarev’s story, the narrator’s subjectivity (including attitudes, beliefs, and other potentially distinctive personality features) is less overt—in its indistinguishability from that of the protagonist, more “effaced or covert”—than in any other part of “Nevskii Prospect.”

In this Karamzinian narratorial mode, there is no place for (overt) irony—rather, the emotional tenor is demonstrably compassionate and apparently sincere, like Piskarev himself. The narrator encourages us to see Piskarev as a victim rather than a transgressor, to pity rather than judge him—the idealization of his love-object in fantasy is depicted not as a tragic flaw, but as the understandable response of a passionate but innocent “young dreamer [*molodomu mechtateliu*]” (253 [III:18]). Piskarev, the text suggests, is simply too pure to survive in a corrupt world: upon discovering that his beauty is a prostitute, “Instead of taking advantage of this favor, instead of being glad of such an occasion, *as anyone else in his place would undoubtedly have been*, he rushed out headlong” (256 [III:21], my emphasis). According to such a reading, Piskarev’s real tragedy is falling in love with an unworthy, ‘depraved’ girl.<sup>70</sup>

This interpretation is seemingly reinforced by Pirogov’s story, which functions as a retrospective commentary on Piskarev’s. In contrast to the compassionate depiction of Piskarev,

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. the fatherly advice imparted in *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*: “your youth needs above all moderation in the passion of love. It has been implanted in our hearts by nature, for our good. Hence it can never err in its awakening, but only in its object and through excess. Therefore you must take care not to be mistaken in the object of your love, and not to mistake false seeming for true love. With a worthy object for your love, excess in this passion will be unknown to you” (118-9).

narratorial irony toward—and implicit judgment of—Pirogov is evident throughout the second half of “Nevskii Prospect.” Immediately after the description of Piskarev’s pathetic funeral (“even without religious rites”), the narrator notes that “Not even Lieutenant Pirogov came to look at the body of the unfortunate wretch upon whom, while he had lived, he had bestowed his lofty patronage. However, he could not be bothered with that; he was occupied with an extraordinary event” (267 [III:33]).<sup>71</sup> There are no moments of consonant thought report in the narration of Pirogov’s story, possibly because he lacks the powerful passions and emotional sensitivity (*chuvstvitel'nost'*) that could merit empathy from a Karamzinian narrator. Instead, Pirogov’s vulgar, petty passions are depicted ironically, and his moral mediocrity and boundless (but wholly undeserved) self-confidence lead him into a humorously absurd situation rather than a tragic one. The stories of Piskarev and Pirogov share the same premise—both chase women down Nevskii Prospect and fail to attain their amorous aims—but after Pirogov is rebuffed by his beauty and beaten up by German artisans, he forgets his “wrath and indignation” almost immediately (which even seems to puzzle the narrator, who remarks, “all this ended somehow strangely ...”) and continues with his life of “self-satisfied inferiority” (276 [III:45]; Mirsky 158).<sup>72</sup> According to Erlich, “The contrast between the tragic ends of Piskarëv and the happy ending of the Pirogov story speaks for itself. The smug, the vulgar, the callous are here to stay. The pure of heart are crushed by the unbearable discrepancy between their dreams and ‘revolting’ actuality” (79).

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. the ending to Karamzin’s “The Emotional and the Cold” (1803), in which the ‘cold’ Leonid refuses to visit his ‘emotional’ best friend on his deathbed “because the doctors had termed his illness infectious; he also did not attend the burial, saying: ‘That soulless body is not my friend!’” (214). Like “Nevskii Prospect,” “The Emotional and the Cold” concerns two friends with different personalities and correspondingly different fates. Furthermore, Karamzin’s narrator seems to prefer the emotional Erast—who falls ill “in the delirium of grief” and dies from passion—to his callous friend (213).

<sup>72</sup> “[S]elf-satisfied inferiority” is D.S. Mirsky’s translation of *poshlost'*.

At first, Piskarev and his narrator both seem to blame his downfall on the prostitute's depravity (for which demonic forces may be responsible). After Piskarev's suicide, the narrator attributes his protagonist's tragic end to a destructive "mad passion," of which he is the innocent "victim." In the conclusion, the narrator ascribes the events of "Nevskii Prospect" to the inexplicable and apparently random vicissitudes of fate, which does not mete out its rewards in accordance with merit or desire:

How strangely, how inconceivably our fate plays with us! Do we ever get what we desire? Do we ever achieve that for which our powers seem purposely to prepare us? Everything happens in a contrary way. To this one fate gave wonderful horses, and he drives around indifferently without ever noticing their beauty—while another, whose heart burns with the horse passion, goes on foot and contents himself with merely clicking his tongue as a trotter is led past him. (277 [III:45])

Shortly thereafter, the narrator implicitly imputes Piskarev's tragic fate to Nevskii Prospect itself, where "Everything is deception, everything is a dream, everything is not what it seems to be"—particularly at night, when, "Along with the street lamp, everything breathes deceit. It lies all the time, this Nevsky Prospect, but most of all at the time when night heaves its dense mass upon it ... and the devil himself lights the lamps only so as to show everything not as it really looks" (277-8 [III:45-6]).

However, these interpretations somehow fail to convince. To some extent, our skepticism stems from apparent interpretive failures on the part of Piskarev and his narrator, both of whom constantly externalize that which is properly internal—the fault always lies elsewhere.<sup>73</sup> There is

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<sup>73</sup> Maguire observes that in the hallucinatory passage during Piskarev's pursuit of the young lady, "A new kind of reality suddenly intrudes as a derangement of the senses. The proximate cause is external—'And all this was

an implicit tension between the far-from-impartial narrator's sympathetic depiction of his protagonist and Piskarev's own motivations and decisions, which suggest more responsibility for his fate than the narrator is willing to concede (thereby raising the possibility of narratorial unreliability). Piskarev's perception is consistently superficial: as Peace astutely observes, his inability to go beyond the surface of things is in keeping with his artistic medium, and he "sees his girl as a painting" from the very beginning ("a perfect Perugino Bianca")—as such, he "is not seeing her as a human being but as an idealised object" (100; 251 [III:15]). Like Pirogov, Piskarev is only drawn to his amorous object because of her beauty—everything else is projection and fantasy—and his initial assumption that outer beauty must correspond to inner nobility suggests the proximity of innocence to ignorance (the Edenic "tree of the knowledge of good and evil"). Piskarev is twice described as "simplehearted" (*prostodushnyi*), which can denote sincerity, guilelessness, or naïveté—the equivocal nature of this term is suggested by examples provided in the *Slovar' Akademii Rossiiskoi*: "Simpleheartedness can be beneficial or harmful [*Prostodushie byvaet i polezno i vredno*] ... A simplehearted person is often deceived [*Prostodushnyi chelovek chasto obmanyvaetsia*]" ("Prostodushie"; "Prostodushnyi").

Such deception is a common factor in all three of Gogol's Petersburg tales dealing with madness—Piskarev, Chartkov, and Poprishchin are all misled by appearances. Chartkov, like Piskarev, is no "connoisseur of human nature": unable to perceive the inner nature of the subject of his first society portrait, he sees only her physical attributes (360 [III:100]). Piskarev, like Chartkov, privileges superficial external qualities (beauty) over crucial but intangible inner ones

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produced by one glance, by one turn of a pretty head'—but the pathology is internal, and the city becomes an extrusion of Piskaryov's obsessive fantasy" (77). Peace notes that "the painter's imagination of Piskarev, like the artistic imagination of the narrator himself, reduces human beings to objects, then flies from their surface into fantasy, rather than penetrat[ing] the essence within" (101).

(passions, character)—and unfortunately for him, “his feminine ideal of beauty is fused not only with vice, but with vulgarity (*poshlost'*) and with stupidity too” (Peace 107).

The word *poshlyi*, often translated as “banal” or “trite,” is used twice in “Nevskii Prospect.” In the first instance, it refers to the young beauty’s words just after Piskarev realizes she is a prostitute: “She opened her pretty lips and began to say something, but it was all so stupid, so trite [*tak glupo, tak poshlo*] ... As if intelligence left a person together with chastity” (256 [III:21]). Later, the narrator refers to a dream in which the girl is absent (i.e. one that does not interest Piskarev in the least) as “some trite [*poshlyi*], vile dream ... Again he waited till evening, again fell asleep ... Again the mist, again some stupid dream [*glupoe snovidenie*]” (262 [III:28]).<sup>74</sup> In both cases, *poshlyi* is used as a term of denigration and linked to stupidity. Although “trite” is a perfectly adequate translation in this context, *poshlost'* has a long history in Gogol scholarship, which—given its importance for Gogol’s representation of madness—is worth exploring in greater detail.

The centrality of *poshlost'* (often rendered as “banality” or “vulgarity”) to Gogol’s work was affirmed by Gogol himself. In an 1843 letter, he wrote that Pushkin “always told [him] that no other writer before has had this gift of presenting the banality [*poshlost'*] of life so vividly, of being able to describe the banality of the banal man [*poshlost' poshlogo cheloveka*] with such force that all the little details that escape notice flash large in everyone’s eyes. That is my main quality, which belongs to me alone” (qtd. in Pevear xix). D.S. Mirsky translated *poshlost'*—which he called “the aspect under which [Gogol] sees reality”—as ““self-satisfied inferiority,’ moral and spiritual” (158). Dmitrii Merezhkovskii highlighted the connection between Gogolian *poshlost'* and the demonic: “The Devil is the noumenal median of being, the denial of all heights

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<sup>74</sup> The presence of “mist” (*tuman*) in Piskarev’s dreams recalls the blinding mist of his passionate pursuit.



and depths—eternal planarity (*ploskost'*), eternal banality (*poshlost'*). The sole subject of Gogol's art is the Devil in just this sense ... the Devil as the manifestation of 'man's immortal banality'" (qtd. in Lyssakov 3). According to Vladimir Nabokov,

Russians have, or had, a special name for smug philistinism—poshlust. Poshlism is not only the obviously trashy but mainly the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive. To apply the deadly label of poshlism to something is not only an esthetic judgment but also a moral indictment. The genuine, the guileless, the good is never poshlust. (313)<sup>75</sup>

Svetlana Boym describes poshlost' as "the Russian version of banality ... encompass[ing] triviality, vulgarity, sexual promiscuity, and a lack of spirituality" (*Common Places* 41).<sup>76</sup>

"Poshlost' is not exactly prostitution, but rather a taste for the obscene, or for excessive sentimentality ... it trivializes both high culture and low folk culture and blurs the distinctions between cultural levels. Poshlost' risks 'prostituting' national culture, turning tradition into

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<sup>75</sup> Nabokov's characterization of the "smug vulgarian" applies to several of Gogol's *poshliaki* (he cites Chichikov in *Dead Souls* as an example) and is worth quoting at length: "Philistinism implies not only a collection of stock ideas but also the use of set phrases, clichés, banalities expressed in faded words. A true philistine has nothing but these trivial ideas of which he entirely consists [cf. Pirogov] ... The character I have in view when I say 'smug vulgarian' is, thus, not the part-time philistine, but the total type, the genteel bourgeois, the complete universal product of triteness and mediocrity. He is the conformist, the man who conforms to his group, and he also is typified by something else: he is a pseudo-idealist, he is pseudo-compassionate, he is pseudo-wise. The fraud is the closest ally of the true philistine [cf. Chichikov] ... The philistine likes to impress and he likes to be impressed, in consequence of which a world of deception, of mutual cheating, is formed by him and around him [cf. the characters and plot of *The Government Inspector (Revizor, 1836)*] ... The philistine in his passionate urge to conform, to belong, to join, is torn between two longings: to act as everybody does, to admire, to use this or that thing because millions of people do; or else he craves to belong to an exclusive set [cf. Poprishchin, Kovalev] ... The philistine is often a snob. He is thrilled by riches and rank [cf. Poprishchin, Pirogov, Kovalev, Chartkov] ... A philistine neither knows nor cares anything about art, including literature—his essential nature is anti-artistic—but he wants information and he is trained to read magazines. He is a faithful reader of the *Saturday Evening Post*, and when he reads he identifies himself with the characters [cf. Poprishchin] ... The philistine does not distinguish one writer from another [cf. Poprishchin, Pirogov]" (Nabokov 310-11).

<sup>76</sup> Boym argues that the sexual aspect of poshlost' "does not refer explicitly to prostitutes ... [who] are extreme enough to be redeemed," but rather to "everyday sexuality, which presents a larger cultural threat" (*Common Places* 45). However, Boym has in mind the prostitutes depicted in later works by Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (who are indeed "often represented as saintly")—as indicated above, the *poshlaia prostitutka* in "Nevskii Prospect" is an exception to this rule (*Common Places* 45).

fashion, love into sexuality, spirituality into triviality” (*Common Places* 45-6). It is “frequently linked to a kind of theatricality in manners, behavior, and self-fashioning” (*Common Places* 47). Following Pushkin, Merezhkovskii, and Mirsky, Boym contends that “The poshlost' of life is the major source of [Gogol's] artistic inspiration, and the embodiment of the evil spirit that he is trying to exorcise” (*Common Places* 48).<sup>77</sup>

Based on the above definition, the earnest and pure-hearted Piskarev can hardly be considered a *poshliak*. He is consistently presented sympathetically by the narrator—the only apparent irony in his story is situational (i.e. dramatic or tragic) and does not produce a comic effect. Unlike most of Gogol's characters who are typically considered *poshlye*, Piskarev doesn't seem to be overly concerned with his social position; indeed, he is willing to sacrifice his reputation (such as it is) in order to marry the young prostitute. Gogolian *poshlost'* often involves poor taste or the inability to discriminate between good and bad art (cf. Pirogov, Poprishchin, Chartkov), but from the little we know about Piskarev's aesthetic sensibilities, he doesn't qualify as a *poshliak* in this sense either. As “Nevskii Prospect” insists, however, things are not always what they seem to be.

Arguably, Piskarev's last dream of the girl is a rather *poshlyi* one:

[He] imagined his studio, he was so happy, he sat holding the palette with such pleasure!

And she was right there. She was his wife now. She sat beside him, her lovely elbow

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<sup>77</sup> According to Boym, “only in the nineteenth century, in the epoch of the Romantic cult of genius and authenticity, did [*poshlyi*] acquire its present-day [morally and aesthetically negative] connotations” (*Common Places* 44). She sees Pushkin and Gogol as key figures in this transition: in *Evgenii Onegin* and “Queen of Spades,” Boym contends that the word *poshlyi* “stands for an intricate tangle of aesthetics, everyday life, and Pushkin's ironic flirtation with German Romanticism” (*Common Places* 43). She also argues that it is precisely “Gogol's fascination with [*poshlost'* that] will later be interpreted as his ‘realism.’ The debate concerning *poshlost'* is ... key in the polemic between Belinsky and Gogol. Belinsky prefers to substitute more elevated and socially significant terms like ‘reality’ and ‘truthfulness.’ He considers Gogol's gift not merely that of ‘clearly exhibiting the *poshlost'* of life but rather a gift of exhibiting the phenomena of life in their fullness, reality, and truthfulness (*istinnost*).’ *Poshlost'* is a key term in the transformation of the Romantic aesthetic into the aesthetic of realism” (*Common Places* 48).

resting on the back of his chair, and looked at his work. Her eyes, languid, weary, showed the burden of bliss; everything in his room breathed of paradise [*dyshalo raem*]; there was such brightness [*svetlo*], such order [*ubrano*]! O Creator! she leaned her lovely head on his breast... (264 [III:30])

Like a painting of a scene of domestic bliss, Piskarev's dream is curiously static, as well as banal almost to the point of self-parody. This banality—admittedly a subjective quality (Boym: “Poshlost', like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder”)—can be attributed to the Karamzinian narratorial mode (and correspondingly hackneyed representation of domestic bliss and/or outdated idyllic model), or to Piskarev's virginal inexperience (i.e. a bland, secondhand conception of romance based on conventional artistic depictions, such as those of Karamzin), or even to Gogol's apparent inability to convincingly depict romantic love (*Common Places* 46).<sup>78</sup> Regardless of the interpretation, the Sentimental language in this passage (as in Piskarev's first dream) resembles Poprishchin's effusions over Sophie—whose handkerchief “exudes excellency” (*dyshit ... general'stvom*) and in whose bedroom are “wonders” and “paradise, such as is not even to be found in heaven” (*rai, kakogo i na nebesakh net*)—and recalls the saccharine Manilovs in *Dead Souls*, characterized by Boym as representatives of “domestic poshlost'” (III:197, 200; *Common Places* 49).<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, Boym attributes this form of poshlost' to both the Manilovs and the eponymous “Old-World Landowners” (“Starosvetskie pomeshchiki,”

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<sup>78</sup> In her monograph on Karamzin's prose fiction, Gitta Hammarberg remarks that “The idyll space, the *locus amoenus*, can be seen as an extension of the poet's harmonious, beautiful soul. It is the externalization of an inner world, an artistic vision, rather than actual outward reality ... in all types of idyll there is a tendency to demarcate an intimate living space” (46-7).

<sup>79</sup> In his first dream, Piskarev's rapturous exclamation “Aie, aie, aie, what beauty!” echoes Poprishchin's repeated variations on the same phrase (*Ai, ai, ai*), and his “what heaven! what paradise! [*kakoe nebo! kakoi rai!*]” recalls Poprishchin's description of Sophie's bedroom (259, 285 [III:25, 200]).

1835), who number among Gogol's most Karamzinian characters (per Peace 8-9).<sup>80</sup> In keeping with Gogol's other depictions of *poshlost'*, ironic distance is evident at least in the former case, as noted by Peace: "Gogol mocked the 'pure' sentimentalist in the portrait of Manilov" (9).<sup>81</sup> As it seems to me, the depiction and interpretation of these characters as *poshlye*—particularly in the sense of "excessive sentimentality" (certainly applicable to the Manilovs)—reflects the fact that *poshlost'* first acquired its morally and aesthetically negative connotations "only in the nineteenth century, in the epoch of the Romantic cult of genius and authenticity": that is, when the emotional tenor of Sentimentalist literature already rang false ("Belinsky said that people already laughed at Poor Liza") (*Common Places* 44; Peace 8). Such perceived inauthenticity is one of the defining features of both *poshlost'* and kitsch, which Boym calls the "twin sister" of *poshlost'*—and, as imputed to Sentimentalism by later writers and commentators, is more or less identical to the primary modern usage of 'sentimental' (*Future of Nostalgia* 279).<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the understanding of Sentimentalism as anachronistic (applicable to the "Old-World Landowners") suggests the earlier, neutral meaning of *poshlost'*, which "comes from *poshló*: something that has been, has occurred, or has passed. Among the old meanings of the word are 'traditional,' 'ancient'" (*Common Places* 42).

Whether or not Sentimentalism à la Karamzin is always already *poshlyi*, Piskarev's dreams resemble both kitsch and 'sentimentality,' insofar as they amount to a form of self-

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<sup>80</sup> John Bayley reached the same conclusion about Manilov, who (he contends) "resides whole and entire in the essential vacancy of *poshlost'*" (137). Maguire describes the setting of "Old-World Landowners" as "the timeless world of the idyll, a favored genre of Sentimentalism" (23).

<sup>81</sup> Commentators differ in their interpretations of "Old-World Landowners" vis-à-vis irony—according to Peter Butler (who recently argued that irony pervades the entire story), most regard it "as an idyll into which elements of the tragi-comic intrude" (1).

<sup>82</sup> In his article "In Defense of Sentimentality," Robert C. Solomon first cites some of the arguments against it: "sentimentalists have such poor taste, and sentimental literature is, above all, literature that is cheap, superficial, and manipulative—in other words, verbal kitsch ... It is often said that the problem is that sentimentality and sentimental literature alike give us a false view of the world, distort our thinking and substitute a 'saccharine' portrait of the world in place of what we all know to be the horrible realities ... Sentimentality [in literature] substitutes a cheap manipulation of feeling for careful calculation of form or judicious development of character" (304, 307).

deception that nonetheless provides a (false and fleeting) sense of satisfaction. According to Boym, “Kitsch imitates the effects of art, not the mechanisms of conscience. In the words of Theodor Adorno, it is a ‘parody of catharsis,’ a secondhand epiphany ... it domesticates every possible alienation, satiates the insatiable thirst with artificially sweetened drinks that quench the very need for longing” (*Future of Nostalgia* 279).<sup>83</sup> Also relevant is Rick Anthony Furtak’s definition of sentimentality as “the habit of having emotions that involve either impaired or mistaken judgment”—Furtak contends that “Sentimental emotion, since it needs to be tender, depends upon the representation of its objects as pleasant and ingenuous. If the properties that would elicit a sentimental response are absent in a given object, then the sentimentalist can sustain his mood only by projecting them onto it” (207, 209). This is precisely what Piskarev does in his dreams: like kitsch, his fantasy “overlooks the unsettling features of reality in order to appeal exclusively to the tender sentiments” (Furtak 211). In light of Furtak’s conception of sentimentality, Piskarev seems to bear more responsibility than the narrator would have us believe:

Sentimentality involves a wistful turning-away from reality and an escape into a safe fantasy world that is fully under control. But, as Epictetus continually says, every emotion involves an element of uncontrol, by virtue of its relation to some aspect of a world in which we are not omnipotent. The most pernicious risk of sentimental emotion

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<sup>83</sup> Adorno also criticizes the Sentimental idyll in his “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” describing Eduard Mörike’s “On a Walking Tour” (“Auf enier Wanderung,” 1845) as a poem in which “not the slightest concession is made to the pseudo-Gothic small-town idyll ... [it is] not disfigured by *Gemütlichkeit* [a term encompassing warmth, friendliness, and a sense of belonging] and coziness, not sentimentally praising narrowness is opposition to the wide world, not happiness in one’s own little corner” (48). Adorno takes issue with what he considers to be the bourgeois ideals underlying Sentimentalist and Romanticist aesthetics: “the idea of humankind as something whole, something self-determining, was renounced by the bourgeoisie, in aesthetic form as in politics. It is the stubborn clinging to one’s own restricted sphere ... that makes ideals like comfort and *Gemütlichkeit* so suspect” (49).

is that, by seeing things as they are not, we lose the basic engagement with reality that emotion depends upon in the first place. (212)

Upon waking from his second dream, Piskarev exclaims, “It would be better if you didn’t live in the world, but were the creation of an inspired artist! I would never leave the canvas ... I would live and breathe by you, as the most beautiful dream, and then I would be happy ... What is the use of her being alive?” (263 [III:29-30]). In this context, another explanation for the static nature of Piskarev’s final dream reveals itself: because the young prostitute’s expression of “pathetic insolence” and “stupid,” “trite” words reveal her inner qualities, Piskarev can only maintain the ideal dream-image of his beloved by depriving her of motion and speech—like an anti-Pygmalion, he turns her into a painting (256 [III:21]).

Piskarev is a far cry from the Romantic artist as depicted by Hoffmann and Odoevskii: his dreams and imagination do not provide access to artistic inspiration, higher reality or transcendental truth (as in Odoevskii’s 1837 povest’ “The Sylph” [*Sil’fida*], for example)—rather, they represent an *escape from* reality (like Poprishchin’s megalomaniacal delusion that he is the king of Spain).<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Piskarev’s mad passion compels him to *choose* fantasy (i.e. falsehood), despite his awareness that such behavior is itself ‘mad’: “‘what a terrible life! ... Is the life of a madman [*sumasshedshego*] pleasant for his relations and friends who once used to love him? God, what is our life! An eternal discord between dream and reality!’ Thoughts much like these constantly occupied him” (263-4 [III:30]). In place of the conflict (typical of Romantic artist-madman narratives) between the individual and society, the obsessive passion that takes

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<sup>84</sup> According to *The Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850*, “The Romantic imagination ... [is] always vulnerable to the charge that its visions represent an escape from the real rather than a return to its source. This is Thomas Love Peacock’s argument in ‘The Four Ages of Poetry’ (1821), where he claims that the Lake Poets (Coleridge, Robert Southey, and Wordsworth), ‘remaining studiously ignorant of history, society, and human nature, cultivated the phantasy only at the expence of the memory and the reason.’ De Quincey develops an analogous, though more equivocal, case in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), where the purportedly ‘vital’ powers of imagination are mimed by the ‘artificial’ powers of opium” (“Imagination”).

hold of Piskarev's imagination puts him at odds with reality itself. In this sense, "Nevskii Prospect" presupposes the pre-Romantic view that, "If not governed by reason, the imagination's ability to associate ideas could be a potent source of error, superstition, and even madness. The mad are those who have, as John Locke argues in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), 'by the violence of their imaginations ... taken their fancies for realities'" ("Imagination"). In "Nevskii Prospect," passions and dreams are dangerous because they are beyond distinctions like 'true and false.' Although Piskarev's dreams are ipso facto unreal, the emotion they invoke is certainly real *for him*. This is the peril of powerful passions in the Petersburg tales: they are overwhelming and, like dreams, involuntary forces that produce destructive physical (and in "The Portrait," spiritual) effects and *operate independently of reason, morality, and reality*—whence the connection between passion and madness.

#### MADNESS IN "THE PORTRAIT": THREE SHADES OF PASSION

Unlike in "Nevskii Prospect," the passions in "The Portrait" are explicitly linked to Orthodox beliefs, and the opposition between the demonic and divine—which in "Nevskii Prospect" can be understood as explanation, metaphor, or projection—is quite literal. As such, the psychological and the spiritual are inextricably intertwined. The extent to which each remains independently valid as an interpretive mode is what allows for the story's 'fantastic' quality—which, however, ultimately favors the religious-supernatural interpretation over the secular-psychological one (making "The Portrait" more 'marvelous' than fantastic).

In the artist-monk's speech to his son ("the painter B.") in part two of "The Portrait," Gogol differentiates between positive and negative passions. The former category includes the passion that inspires the artist, a "quiet, heavenly passion, without which man is powerless to rise

above the earth and is unable to give the wondrous sounds of peace” (391 [III:135]). When combined with total sacrifice to “lofty artistic creation,” such passion allows the artist to create art which contains and conveys “a hint of the divine”—for “artistic creation comes down to earth to pacify and reconcile all people” (391 [III:135]). The monk juxtaposes the divine passion of the devoted artist with negative passions also characterized in religious terms, both sinful (“passion that breathes of earthly lust [*zemnym vozhdeleniem*]”) and satanic (“the proud passions of Satan”) (391 [III:135]). According to the monk, the “stormy [or ‘rebellious’], troubling feelings [*miatezhnye ... trevozhnye chuvstva*]” produced by the titular portrait of a demonic moneylender (which he himself had painted decades earlier)—“feelings of envy in an artist, a dark hatred for his brother, a spiteful yearning to persecute and oppress”—are the most terrible passions in existence (*khranit tebia vsevyshnii ot sikh strastei! Net ikh strashnee*) (392 [III:136]). Ultimately, such demonic passions drive the protagonist Chartkov—like the men who borrowed money from the usurer during the reign of Catherine II—into fits of rage, madness, “terrible suffering,” and death (380-2 [III:115-16]). However, they are prefigured by negative passions of a different sort, which Anne Basom describes as “The real demon in the second version [of ‘The Portrait’]”: “*пошлость* [*poshlost'*], the petty passions, to which the artist succumbs” (436).<sup>85</sup> As this suggests, Gogolian *poshlost'* can also be understood as a constellation of petty passions—unexceptional, everyday passions that can lead one astray (i.e. into ethico-aesthetic mediocrity

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<sup>85</sup> The original 1835 version of “The Portrait” published in *Arabesques*—in which the protagonist is named Chertkov (suggesting *chert*, “devil”) rather than Chartkov and the moneylender is explicitly identified as the Antichrist—is more explicitly supernatural than Gogol’s 1842 revision (analyzed in this chapter), which “was recast into the genre of the fantastic by eliminating the overtly supernatural elements in the story, in effect ‘modernizing’ the story” (Basom 433). Even in the 1842 version, however, a supernatural explanation remains the only plausible one. Otherwise, the fact that many of Chartkov’s experiences (e.g. his ‘dream’ of the moneylender jumping out of the painting) and the demonic passions that consume him (envy and rage) are identical to those of earlier owners of the portrait, and the fact that the packet that falls out of the frame “looked exactly the same as the one he had seen in his dream”—to say nothing of the appearance of the packet itself or the fact that the rubles it contains are “hot as fire”—are inexplicable (355 [III:96]). For an overview of the differences between the 1835 and 1842 versions of the story, see Basom.



and spiritual death). As the narrator of *Dead Souls* remarks, “it has happened more than once that some passion, not a broad but a paltry little passion [*nichtozhnaia strastishka*] for some petty thing, has spread through one born for better deeds, making him forsake great and sacred duties and see the great and sacred in paltry baubles” (278 [VI:242]). This is precisely how poshlost' functions in “The Portrait.” Despite being less extreme than their more overtly demonic counterparts, the petty passions of poshlost'—which “[breathe] of earthly lust” for fame, wealth, and social status—are no less damning: they lead Chartkov to become a “fashionable painter,” thereby extinguishing his divine artistic passion and ruining his talent, “God’s most precious gift” (391 [III:135]).

At the beginning of “The Portrait,” Chartkov’s artistic process resembles positive Romantic depictions of madness. The narrator compares Chartkov’s immersion in the creative act to dreams, another irrational state attributed to the imagination: “At times he was able to forget everything and take up his brush, and had to tear himself away again as if from a beautiful, interrupted dream [*prekrasnogo pervannogo sna*]” (346 [III:85]). Like madness or romantic love, artistic creation involves an insensibility to the outside world, here imbued with a positive moral value—Chartkov is never envious of wealthy society portraitists (“fashionable painters,” i.e. hacks) “when, all immersed in his work, he forgot drinking and eating and the whole world,” but only when the mundane realities of his poverty force themselves on him, “when he had no money to buy brushes and paints, when the importunate landlord came ten times a day to demand the rent. Then his hungry imagination enviously pictured the lot of the rich painter [*zavidno risovalas' v golodnom ego voobrazhen'i uchast' bogacha-zhivopistsa*]” (346 [III:86]). As in “Nevskii Prospect,” Gogol opposes mundane reality to creative activity, dreams, and the imagination, a dichotomy familiar from Odoevskii’s depiction of madness (e.g. in “Beethoven’s

Last Quartet” and “The Sylph”). In “The Portrait,” however, dreams can be infiltrated by the demonic, and the imagination can be corrupted and crippled by the pernicious influence of base desires.

Initially, the petty passions are adumbrated via negation—as a dedicated young artist, Chartkov’s “old overcoat and unstylish clothes showed him to be a man who was selflessly devoted to his work and had no time to concern himself with his attire” (341 [III:80]).<sup>86</sup> He is described as an artist “with a talent that promised much,” but his professor warns him against becoming a “fashionable [*modnyi*] painter” rather than a true artist, who sacrifices all worldly pleasures to his calling: “You already feel drawn to the world: every so often I see a showy scarf on your neck, a glossy hat” (345 [III:85]). However, the narrator ascribes Chartkov’s occasional desires to carouse (*kutnut'*) and show off (*shchegol'nut'*)—desires which he is able to master through self-discipline and creative immersion—to his young age (346 [III:85]). At the beginning of the story, the narrator treats Chartkov’s worldly impulses toward merrymaking, dandyism, and fashion (“which always has some mysterious attraction for the young”) as the relatively innocuous products of youthful energy and inexperience rather than potentially destructive passions (341 [III:80]).

The plot is set in motion by Chartkov’s acquisition of a striking portrait. The uncanny eyes of the figure in the painting both intrigue and disturb him (they “stared even out of the portrait itself, as if destroying its harmony by their strange aliveness”), and he buys it almost

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<sup>86</sup> In part two of “The Portrait,” in “The Portrait,” positive models are provided in the painter of the divine work (who “was not concerned if people commented on ... the humiliation he inflicted upon the estate of artists by his poor, unfashionable [or ‘not dandyish’ (*ne shchegol'skim*)] dress”) and “the painter B.” (“in his clothing there was no pretense to fashion [*pritiazanii na modu*]: everything in him spoke of the artist”) (369, 376 [III:111, 119]). Cf. the incongruous clothing of the Petersburg artist as described in “Nevskii Prospect”: “They like to play the dandy [*poshchegoliat'*] on occasion, but this dandyism [*shchegol'stvo*] always stands out in them and looks something like a patch. You will sometimes meet an excellent tailcoat on them and a dirty cloak, an expensive velvet waistcoat and a frock coat all covered with paint” (252 [III:17]).

involuntarily, as if under the control of a malevolent, supernatural force: “Chartkov quite unexpectedly bought the old portrait and at the same time thought: ‘Why did I buy it?’” (343 [III:83]). After bringing the portrait home, he experiences an apparent dream within a dream within a dream (or rather, a nightmare with three false awakenings) in which the old moneylender leaps out of the frame and drops a packet of gold (350).<sup>87</sup> He is still transfixed by the image of the gold the following morning:

in his imagination all the packets he had seen, with the alluring inscription of ‘1,000 Gold Roubles’ began to pour from the sack. The packets came unwrapped, gold gleamed, was wrapped up again, and he sat staring fixedly and mindlessly into the empty air, unable to tear himself away from such a subject—like a child sitting with dessert in front of him, his mouth watering, watching while others eat. (352 [III:92-3])

In his hunger for gold, Chartkov is entranced by his imagination and disconnected from reality: he already resembles a madman. In keeping with the description of Petersburg artists in “Nevskii Prospect”—and like Germann in “Queen of Spades,” whose dream of supernatural enrichment mirrors his own—Chartkov has a vivid imagination: “his imagination and nerves were sensitive [*voobrazhen'e i nervy ego byli chutki*]” (348 [III:88]).<sup>88</sup> Like Germann, his imagination is captured by a base passion for wealth (in religious terms, avarice motivated by envy).<sup>89</sup> Unlike Germann, however, Chartkov’s desire for enrichment comes to fruition—when a police inspector

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<sup>87</sup> In medical theories of the Romantic era, nightmares were “sometimes believed to be the prelude to epilepsy, insanity, or apoplexy” (“Dreams and Dreaming”).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Germann’s dream after hearing Tomskii’s story: “when at last he did drop off, cards, a green table, heaps of banknotes and piles of golden coins appeared to him in his dreams. He played one card after the other, doubled his stake decisively, won unceasingly, and raked in the golden coins and stuffed his pockets with the banknotes. Waking up late, he sighed at the loss of his imaginary fortune, again went out to wander about the town and again found himself outside the house of the Countess \*\*\*. Some unknown power seemed to have attracted him to it” (286 [V:243]).

<sup>89</sup> Money also has a negative connotation in the conclusion of “Nevskii Prospect,” in which the narrator warns us to “Peer less at the shop windows: the knickknacks displayed in them are beautiful, but they smell of a terrible quantity of banknotes” (278 [III:46]).

accidentally cracks the portrait's frame, a familiar-looking packet falls out: "The inscription '1,000 Gold Roubles' struck Chartkov's eyes. He rushed like a madman [*Kak bezumnyi*] to pick it up, seized the packet, clutched it convulsively [*sudorozhno*] in his hand" (354 [III:95]). This convulsive movement is the consummation of Chartkov's dream, in which he had "almost convulsively" seized an identical packet (*Pochti sudorozhno skhvatil on ego*) (350 [III:90]). Notably, the same word is used earlier to describe the "convulsively distorted [or 'corrupted'] face" (*sudorozhno iskazhennoe litso*) of the moneylender in the portrait, whose "features seemed to have been caught at a moment of convulsive movement [*sudorozhnogo dvizhen'ia*]" (347, 342-3 [III:87, 81]). The repetition of *sudorozhno*—expressing the extreme, spasmodic force of passion to the point of madness (cf. the "convulsively [*sudorozhno*] spread arms" of Piskarev's corpse)—links Chartkov to the moneylender, whose demonic influence proliferates through gold (266 [III:33]).<sup>90</sup>

After he finds the gold, Chartkov's first impulse—in accord with "the promptings of his reason [*rassudkom*]"—is to continue working: "Now I'm set up for at least three years ... And if I work some three years for myself, unhurriedly, not to sell, I'll beat them all, and maybe become a decent artist" (356 [III:97]). However,

another voice sounded more audibly and ringingly. And as he cast another glance at the gold, his twenty-two years and his ardent youth [*goriachaia iunost'*] said something different. Now everything he had looked at till then with envious eyes [*zavistlivymi glazami*], which he had admired from afar with watering mouth, was in his power ... To

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<sup>90</sup> Graffy notes three more examples of 'convulsiveness' in the first version of the story: "the 'convulsive movement' ... which Chartkov notices in the portrait is echoed in the refusal of the hands and head in his own painting to take on the desired position (3:423 [first version]), in the 'convulsions' (*konvul'sii*, 3:434 [first version]) of [the moneylender] at the point of death, and in the convulsive death (*sudorogi*) of the artist's wife (3:438 [first version])" (256). See also Mikhail Iampol'skii's study of the "convulsive body" in Gogol and Dostoevsky (the first chapter of his 1996 monograph *Demon i labirint*), called to my attention by Graffy's article.

put on a fashionable tailcoat, to break his long fast, to rent a fine apartment, to go at once to the theater, the pastry shop ... and, having seized the money, he was already in the street. (356 [III:97])

This “other voice,” contrary to reason, is that of the passions—and the appetites of Chartkov’s “ardent youth” shade imperceptibly into the petty passions of *poshlost'*, corresponding to sinful desires (envy, vanity, sensuality). The gold enables Chartkov to gratify his youthful impulses toward carousing, dandyism, and fashion, and he immediately gives in to the temptation. This is the critical error (in Aristotelian terms, *hamartia*) that seals his fate.

Before this point, Chartkov is consistently depicted sympathetically—however, the narrator’s description of his spree evinces considerable ironic distance and implicit judgment. As Chartkov runs around purchasing fashionable nonsense like “scents, pomades ... [and] an expensive lorgnette,” the narrator emphasizes his childish narcissism (“like a child, [he] began looking himself over incessantly” at the tailor’s), wastefully extravagant spending (he “rented, without bargaining, a magnificent apartment on Nevsky Prospect, the first that came along ... chanced to buy a quantity of various neckties, more than he needed ... took a couple of carriage rides through the city without any reason”), gluttony (he “stuffed himself with sweets in a pastry shop”), and inflated sense of self-importance (“casting very proud glances [*dovol'no gordye vzgliady*] at others ... He strutted down the sidewalk like a dandy [*Proshelsia po trotuaru gogolem*], aiming his lorgnette at everyone ... he noticed his former professor and darted nimbly past him as if without noticing him at all”) (356-7 [III:97-8]).<sup>91</sup> Chartkov is also filled with

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<sup>91</sup> Mirrors are often linked to the demonic in Gogol’s works. According to Graffy, mirrors “are widely held to be a demonic invention, since the shades of the dead can appear in them” (26). Of course, mirrors also distort reality by presenting a mirror-image of things (a potentially demonic inversion), and they are associated with vanity. The source of this phrase is a species of duck that shares Gogol’s surname: *Bucephala clangula*, or the common goldeneye. Gogol’s grandfather added “Gogol” to his surname (Ivanovskii) “in an attempt to claim more noble

ambition (in the entirely negative form of a desire for glory)—“An irresistible desire [*zhelan'e nepreoborimoe*] was born in him to catch fame [*slavu*] by the tail [*za khvost* (suggesting a devil)] at once and show himself to the world”—and he orchestrates publicity for himself by paying a newspaper publisher to write an article (or advertisement) “entitled ‘On the Extraordinary Talents of Chartkov,’” which presents him as one of the fashionable portraitists his professor warned him about (357 [III:98]).<sup>92</sup>

Although initially immersed in the work of his first society portrait (even “forgetting about his model’s aristocratic origin”), Chartkov soon betrays his gift, removing the ‘imperfections’ at the behest of his subject’s aristocratic mother: “Unfeelingly [*beschuvstvenno*], he began to lend it the general color scheme that is given by rote and turns even faces taken from nature into something coldly ideal” (362-3 [III:103-4]). Being a society portraitist is shown to be inimical to being a true artist: “everything had to be replaced by adroitness and quick, facile brushwork ... to follow nature to the utmost was decidedly impossible” (364-5 [III:106]). Soon thereafter, Chartkov abandons any attempt at the ‘imitation of nature’ (i.e. faithful mimetic representation) in order to satisfy the vanity of his clients and gain the admiration he craves, as well as entrance into a previously inaccessible social sphere.<sup>93</sup> He gives the people what they want—flattering depictions in keeping with the fashions of the day: “if someone aimed at Byron, he gave him a Byronic pose and attitude. If a lady wished to be Corinne, Ondine, or Aspasia, he agreed to everything with great willingness and added a dose of good looks on his own, which,

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Cossack ancestry”; Gogol dropped the “Ivanovskii” (“Gogol”). To “walk like a goldeneye” (*khodit' gogolem*) means to strut or prance.

<sup>92</sup> According to Anne Lounsbury, “frequent repetitions of the noun *slava* and other words formed from the same root work to reinforce the association between Chartkov’s ‘glory’ (one meaning of *slava*) and ‘rumor, reputation, fame, public praise’ (other possible translations of *slava* in different contexts), thus contributing to the story’s new emphasis on the kinds of publicity being made possible by the dissemination of printed texts” (204).

<sup>93</sup> According to the artist-monk, even faithfulness to nature can be an artistic sin: when the artist creates “soullessly, having stifled everything,” failing to purify his subject in “the purgatory of his soul,” the result is “not a work of art” (391-2 [III:135-6]). See also Maguire 133-154.

as everyone knows, never hurts, and on account of which an artist may even be forgiven the lack of likeness” (366 [III:107]). Chartkov becomes a mass producer of artistic falsehoods: like the devil at the end of “Nevskii Prospect”—the street on which his new studio is located—he “show[s] everything not as it really looks” (278 [III:46]).

However, Chartkov is lavishly rewarded for his transgressions against art, and he takes the praise of his clients—itsself based on the flattery of their own vanity that his portraits entail—at face value: he comes to believe that the “wonderful quickness and facility of his brush” (i.e. speedy production) is the essence of artistic genius (365-6 [III:107]). The use of the imperfective aspect conveys the repetitive banality of his platitudes: “‘I do not understand,’ he would say [*govoril on*], ‘why others strain so much, sitting and toiling over their works’ ... So he spoke [*Tak rasskazyval on*] to his visitors” (366 [III:108]). In turn, his visitors “even uttered exclamations on hearing how quickly he worked, and then said to each other: ‘That’s talent, true talent! See how he speaks, how his eyes shine! *Il y a quelque chose d’extraordinaire dans toute sa figure!*’ The artist was flattered to hear such rumors about himself” (366-7 [III:108]).<sup>94</sup> Chartkov is “intoxicated” (*upoennyi*) by an endless cycle of regurgitated praise—including “printed praise” which “had been bought for him with his own money”—based on a false notion of artistic merit (367 [III:108-9]).

In this part of the story, narratorial distance is conveyed through small connecting phrases: “those [Chartkov] painted, it goes without saying [*samo soboiu razumeetsia*], were delighted and proclaimed him a genius”; “he maintained that too much merit was granted to painters of the past .... True brilliance, power of the brush and of colors should be looked for only now, in the present age. Here, naturally [*natural'no*], things would turn inadvertently

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<sup>94</sup> French is also associated elite social status in “Nevskii Prospect” and “Diary of a Madman”; here, it seems indicate high-society falseness (as in *War and Peace*, the classic example of this indexical function).

[*nevol'nym obrazom*] to himself" (366 [III:107-8]). The rhetorical irony is hard to miss: Chartkov's desire for glory motivates all his actions, which are anything but "natural"—and if they are truly "inadvertent," they indicate his unconscious vanity and utter lack of self-awareness, as befits the true poshliak.

Part one of "The Portrait" is entirely conveyed by "heterodiegetic" or "non-character" narration: the third-person narrator is always 'outside' the events of the story and apparently omniscient, and therefore relatively reliable.<sup>95</sup> The story contains numerous instances of direct (i.e. quoted) speech and thought, but Chartkov's inner life is primarily depicted via thought report—specifically, Cohn's "dissonant thought report," in which "the prominent or overt narrator is emphatically distanced from the character's consciousness and language. Explorations of psychic depth present and evaluate the inner life that the character is occasionally unwilling or unable to see. The narrator often makes confident ethical judgments" ("Thought and Consciousness Representation (Literature)"). After his discovery of the gold, Chartkov's moral values and aesthetic sensibilities are distanced from those of the narrator, who is much more critical of the protagonist than Piskarev's sympathetic Karamzinian narrator. This moral, aesthetic, and emotional distance reduces the ambiguity of the narratorial mode, making it easier to distinguish character from narrator—moments that can be interpreted as free indirect thought are much rarer here than in Piskarev's story—and allows for narratorial irony toward Chartkov, instances of which are rendered more readily discernible by the consistency of the narrative voice. However, irony in "The Portrait" is primarily dramatic rather than rhetorical, a product of the widening chasm—evident to the reader and narrator, but not Chartkov himself—between his current and former habits, values, and aesthetic sensibilities.

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<sup>95</sup> Heterodiegetic (vs. homodiegetic) narration is Gérard Genette's term; non-character (vs. character) narration is James Phelan's.



After becoming “a fashionable painter in all respects,” Chartkov’s lifestyle and personality change completely: he “changed several times a day into various morning suits, had his hair curled, busied himself with ... the beautifying of his appearance by every means possible, so as to make a pleasing impression on the ladies; in short, it was soon quite impossible to recognize in him that modest artist who had once worked inconspicuously in his hovel on Vasilievsky Island” (366 [III:107]). As his fame (*slava*) increases, he loses his artistic passion and talent (“Before, he had still sought to give some new pose, to impress with force, with effects. Now that, too, became boring to him”), a process in which his relationship to society is implicated: “a distracted life and the society [*obshchestvo*] in which he tried to play the role of a worldly [*svetskogo*] man—all this took him far from [artistic] work and thought” (367 [III:108-9]). His brush, a metonym for his artistic ability,

was becoming cold and dull, and he imperceptibly [or ‘unfeelingly’ (*nechuvstvitel'no*)] locked himself into monotonous, predetermined, long worn-out forms ... [his brush] began to forget luxurious draperies, strong gestures and passions [*sil'nye dvizheniia i strasti*] ... Before him sat only a uniform, a bodice, a tailcoat, before which an artist feels chilled and all imagination collapses [*chuvstvuet kholod khudozhnik i padaet vsiakoe voobrazhenie*]. (367 [III:109]).

Chartkov approaches “the age of maturity in mind and years,” which corresponds to the zenith of his fame and ‘respectability’: he is described in newspapers and magazines as “our esteemed [*pochtennyi*] ... [and] our honored [*zasluzhennyi*] Andrei Petrovich” and “offered respectable [*pochetnye*] posts in the civil service, invited to examinations and committees” (368 [III:109]). The narrator notes that he was reaching the “respectable [*pochetnye*] age” (an obviously ironic descriptor) when he is no longer susceptible to transcendent encounters with

art—“when everything that breathes of impulse shrinks in a man, when a powerful bow has a fainter effect on his heart, when the touch of beauty no longer transforms virginal powers into fire and flame, but all the burnt-out feelings [*otgorevshie chuvstva*] become more accessible to the sound of gold” (368 [III:109]). At the height of his *poshlost'*, Chartkov is longer capable of experiencing the positive passions associated with youth: evidently, middle age is incompatible with aesthetic-emotional susceptibility to art.<sup>96</sup> Having lost the ability to be moved by beauty or reap the rewards of fame (which “cannot give pleasure to one who did not merit it but stole it; it produces a constant tremor only in one who is worthy of it”), he turns to the only thing that remains to him:

all his feelings and longings [*chuvstva i poryvy*] turned toward gold. Gold became his passion, his ideal, fear, delight, purpose [*strast'iu, idealom, strakhom, naslazhden'em, tsel'iu*] ... and he, like anyone else to whom this terrible gift is granted, began to be a bore, inaccessible to anything but gold, a needless miser, a purposeless hoarder [cf. Pliushkin in *Dead Souls*], and was about to turn into one of those strange beings who are so numerous in our unfeeling world, at whom a man filled with life and heart looks with horror, who seem to him like moving stone coffins with dead men instead of hearts in them. (368 [III:110])<sup>97</sup>

For Chartkov, gold—which enabled his fall from grace in the first place—becomes an end rather than a means. In keeping with Christian tradition (in which “the love of money is the root of all

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<sup>96</sup> The inability to be moved by the effects of music seems particularly damning, given that in the first article in *Arabesques*, Gogol called music “the highest stage” of art, in keeping with the view espoused by many of his contemporaries (particularly German Romantics like Hoffmann) (Kornblatt 187).

<sup>97</sup> Peace notes that “the imagery [in] the first version [of ‘The Portrait’] is less striking: ‘They seem like living bodies which contain within them a corpse’”—but it does still effectively convey the notion of spiritual death, of ‘dead souls’ (322).

evil”), the narrator suggests that wealth is inherently destructive, a “terrible gift” that deadens the soul once it becomes the object of passion.

Upon seeing the astounding painting produced by one of his former comrades—“Pure, immaculate, beautiful as a bride ... Modest, divine, innocent, and simple as genius”—Chartkov “wanted to assume the indifferent, habitual air, wanted to proclaim the habitual, banal [*poshloe*] judgment of callous [*zacherstvlykh*] artists” (369-70 [III:112]). However, the picture makes such an impression on him that he is unable to maintain his composure: “the words died on his lips, tears and sobs burst out in a discordant response, and like a madman [*kak bezumnyi*] he rushed from the hall” (371 [III:113]). The magnificence of the painting is such that it even overcomes uninformed and “wrongheaded” (i.e. *poshlye*) aesthetic sensibilities: “it became clear even to the uninitiated [*neposviashchennym*] what a measureless abyss separates a creation from a mere copy of nature ... It seemed that all tastes and all brazen or wrongheaded deviations of taste [*derzkie, nepravil'nye ukloneniia vkusa*] merged in a silent hymn to the divine work” (370 [III:112]). Chartkov’s encounter with this painting is the final turning point in his story—it “shook him deeply and awakened all his living constitution,” leading him to a revelation (anagnorisis): “The blindfold suddenly fell from his eyes. God! To ruin the best years of his youth so mercilessly; to destroy, to extinguish the spark of fire that had perhaps flickered in his breast” (368, 371 [III:110, 113]). For the first time in years, he feels (or seems to feel) youthful artistic passion: “His whole being, his whole life was awakened in one instant, as if youth returned to him, as if the extinguished sparks of talent blazed up again ... It seemed to him as if all those urges and impulses that used to be familiar to him suddenly revived all at once in his soul”—and tries to paint something original: “he was all one desire, burning with one thought: he wanted to portray a fallen angel” (i.e. himself) (371 [III:113]). However, he soon discovers that

he is constrained by self-imposed limitations: “His brush and imagination were confined too much to one measure, and the powerless impulse to overstep the limits and fetters he had imposed on himself now tasted of wrongness and error. He had neglected the long, wearisome ladder of gradual learning and the first basic laws of future greatness” (371 [III:113]).<sup>98</sup> In a state of vexation (*Dosada ego pronikla*), Chartkov glances at the titular portrait and sees it staring back at him, and he suddenly realizes that it “had been the cause of his transformation, that the hidden treasure he had obtained in such a miraculous way had ruined his talent” (372 [III:114]). The realization of what he has unwittingly sacrificed drives him to demonic passion: a state of “inner agitation” (*dushevnoe volnen'e*) is followed by

that terrible torment [*uzhasnuiu muku*] which, by way of a striking exception, sometimes occurs in nature, when a weak talent strains to show itself on too grand a scale and fails; that torment which gives birth to great things in a youth [*v iunoshe rozhdaet velikoe*], but in passing beyond the border of dream [*mechtanii*], turns into a fruitless yearning; that dreadful torment which makes a man capable of terrible evildoing [*zlodeianiia*]. A terrible envy possessed him, an envy bordered on rage [*zavist' do beshenstva*]. The bile [*Zhelch'*] rose in him when he saw some work that bore the stamp of talent. (372-3 [III:114-5])<sup>99</sup>

Chartkov’s “bile” recalls the yellow and black bile of the humoral theory—according to the *Slovar' Akademii Rossiiskoi*, *zhelch'* is “a yellow-green or sometimes black” substance produced

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<sup>98</sup> Maguire writes that “[Chartkov’s] reaction to the picture on exhibition in the Academy of Arts looks at first like a miraculous rebirth . . . But he cannot put off his habit of making ‘hackneyed forms’ in a ‘stereotyped manner.’ What he does is but a parody of life, like the spasms that may attend the movement of expiration” (153).

<sup>99</sup> Cf. B.’s description of his father as “a self-taught artist . . . one of those natural-born wonders whom contemporaries often abuse with the offensive word ‘ignoramus’ and whom the castigations of others and their own failures do not cool down but only lend new zeal and strength, so that in their souls they go far beyond the works that earned them the title of ‘ignoramus’” (383). When Chartkov’s reach exceeds his grasp—as an older man whose youthful passion and dedication to art have long since been abandoned—artistic failure produces a “terrible torment” rather than renewed “zeal and strength.”

by the liver.<sup>100</sup> Gogol doesn't specify what type of bile he has in mind (or whether the term is simply used as a metaphor), but both are applicable to Chartkov.<sup>101</sup> Traditionally, yellow bile was associated with heat and excess anger (the choleric temperament), while black bile was linked to melancholy (which means "black bile"). Since the eighteenth century—when the concept was imported to Russia from Western Europe—melancholy was linked to madness: according to N.M. Ianovskii, "As [melancholy] increases and turns chronic, it becomes a *disease* that can confuse the reason, and it is now called an *eccentricity*, and it often results in *insanity*" (qtd. in "A Cheerful Empress" 28). Per Vinitsky, "Melancholy was also discussed in the eighteenth century as a 'spiritual disease' or 'moral corruption' that threatened not only the melancholy man but all of society as well" ("A Cheerful Empress" 29). Chartkov's fate encompasses states of being associated with both types of bile: after being driven into a demonic fury by the revelation of the loss of his talent—described by his professor as "sinful" (*u tebia est' talant; greshno budet, esli ty ego pogubish'*) and by the artist-monk as "deviat[ing]" from a "pure" path and squandering "God's most precious gift" (i.e. a moral failure as well as an aesthetic one)—he is ultimately consumed by madness (345, 391 [III:85, 135]).

Filled with envy to the point of rage, Chartkov enacts a plan, "the most infernal [*adskoe*] a man ever nursed"—he uses his vast fortune to "buy up all the best art produced" and destroy it, "all the while laughing with delight ... No monster of ignorance ever destroyed so many beautiful works as did this fierce avenger" (373).<sup>102</sup> Chartkov abandons the petty passions of *poshlost'* for a "terrible passion" (*uzhasnaia strast'*)—accordingly, he is compared to ferocious

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<sup>100</sup> In reality, bile can be green or yellow, but never black; the claim to the contrary here seems to indicate that humorism still had some credibility in the early nineteenth century.

<sup>101</sup> Given that this state affects Chartkov's physiognomy (discussed in more detail below), giving him a "frightful coloration: his face was eternally bilious [*vechnaia zhelch'*]," his bile seems more physiological than metaphorical (373 [III:115]).

<sup>102</sup> Chartkov's inappropriate laughter recalls Pushkin's Mariia and Evgenii, but his "delight" in the wanton destruction of beauty suggests emotional distortion or spiritual corruption.

exotic or mythological creatures in a series of animalizing metaphors (“with the eyes of a basilisk ... with the fury of a tiger ... Like some sort of harpy”) (373 [III:115]). His passion is also described as demonic: “It seemed as if a wrathful heaven had sent this terrible scourge into the world on purpose, wishing to deprive it of all harmony ... He seemed the incarnation of that terrible demon whom Pushkin had portrayed ideally” (373 [III:115]). After the revelation of an unbearable truth, Chartkov responds with an overwhelming, diabolical rage (*beshenstvo*) based on envy (*zavist'*), his original sin—and like any sufficiently powerful passion, it destroys him physically:

Fortunately for the world and for the arts, such a strained [*napriazhennaia*] and violent life could not long continue: the scope of its passions was too exaggerated and colossal for its feeble forces. Attacks of rage and madness [*Pripadki beshenstva i bezumiia*] began to come more often, and finally it all turned into a most terrible illness. A cruel fever [*Zhestokaia goriachka*] combined with galloping consumption [*chakhotkoiu*] came over him with such fierceness that in three days nothing but a shadow of him remained. (373 [III:116])

“This was combined with all the signs of hopeless insanity [*sumasshestviia*],” which include unnatural strength (“Sometimes several men could not hold him back”), loss of reason and sensibility to the outside world (“The sick man neither understood nor felt anything except his own torments”), inability to communicate (he “uttered only terrible screams and incoherent talk”), and “terrible” rage (*beshenstvo ego bylo uzhasno*), as well as a hallucination in which he imagines (*chudit'sia*) the “living eyes of the extraordinary portrait” uncannily multiplied to infinity: “All the people around his bed seemed to him like terrible portraits. It doubled, quadrupled in his eyes; all the walls seemed hung with portraits, their motionless, living eyes

fixed on him. Frightful portraits stared from the ceiling, from the floor; the room expanded and went on endlessly to make space for more of these motionless eyes” (373-4 [III:116]).<sup>103</sup> Finally, Chartkov’s life ends in a “last, already voiceless strain of suffering [*bezglasnom poryve stradaniia*]” (373-4 [III:116]).

In the art shop where Chartkov finds the portrait at the beginning of the story, we learn about his aesthetic sensibilities (which play a larger role in “The Portrait” than do Piskarev’s in “Nevskii Prospect”). He understands the appeal of the *lubki* (Russian popular prints), as “the subjects portrayed were easily accessible and understandable for the people” (341 [III:80]).<sup>104</sup> It is another type of image that particularly troubles him:

[Chartkov] at first laughed to himself at these ugly pictures. In the end, an involuntary pondering came over him: he began thinking about who might have need of these works ... these motley, dirty daubings in oil? Who needed these Flemish peasants, these red and blue landscapes, which displayed some pretense to a slightly higher step of art, while showing all the depths of its humiliation? They seemed not altogether the work of a self-taught child. Otherwise ... some sharp impulse would have burst through in them. But here one could only see dull-witted, impotent, decrepit giftlessness arbitrarily placing itself among the arts, when it belonged among the lowest crafts ... The same colors, the

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. the association between the sublime and the infinite (e.g. in Edmund Burke’s *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*), as well as idioms like “the walls have eyes” (*u sten est’ glaza*) and “the walls have ears” (*u sten est’ ushi*), a variation of which appears in book seven of Rousseau’s *Confessions*: “The ceiling under which I live has eyes, the walls that enclose me have ears” (263). Such phrases indicate the intrusive presence of spies or enemies—but Chartkov’s case is somewhat different (it’s not paranoia if you really *are* being persecuted by a demonic power).

<sup>104</sup> Maguire remarks that “Chartkov has no interest in art for the masses, but only in ‘high’ art ... *Lubki* and engravings, being mass-produced, are imitations in the most literal sense of the word, but can be tolerated because they are not real art. Paintings, as the creations of individuals, should all be different, but here they are not” (144). According to Boym, “the key issue to understanding the Russian conception of taste is the separation between people who are not *comme il faut* and the common people who are beyond, if not above, this distinction” (*Common Places* 58).

same manner, the same practiced, habituated hand, belonging rather to a crudely made automaton than to a man! (341 [III:80-81])

According to Chartkov and/or the narrator (such confusion is still possible at the beginning of “The Portrait,” before the narrative shifts from consonant to dissonant thought report), such paintings require a modicum of artistic skill or experience, but the work of a “self-taught child” would be better: these are mere copies, devoid of all originality and humanity, beneath the level of what can be considered art. This passage—an apt description of some of the main attributes of kitsch—foreshadows Chartkov’s ironic fate. He becomes that which he once despised: a mass producer of non-art masquerading as art.<sup>105</sup>

The mechanism of evil in this story can be best characterized in terms of reproduction or proliferation, which suggests why an exact copy from nature (like the portrait of the moneylender) can be demonic.<sup>106</sup> As Stephen Hutchings observes, reproduction is pervasive in “The Portrait”—the kitsch in the art shop prefigures Chartkov’s non-art (copies made with “extraordinary quickness”), and the propagation of the moneylender’s gold is echoed by that of the uncanny eyes in Chartkov’s hallucination: “Thus, the very structure of the story imitates its own object—the infinite circulation, proliferation and pecuniary inflation of reproducible images abstracted from their originals” (20). Anne Lounsbury argues that Chartkov’s newspaper publicity resembles his non-art (he contributes to the dissemination of falsehood in both cases), ultimately asserting that “The Portrait” assumes ... what many of Gogol’s other works also

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<sup>105</sup> “I do not understand,” he would say, ‘why others strain so much, sitting and toiling over their work. The man who potters for several months over a painting is, in my opinion, a laborer, not an artist. I don’t believe there is any talent in him. A genius creates boldly, quickly ... I do not recognize art as something assembled line by line. That is craft, not art’” (366 [III:108]).

<sup>106</sup> The demonic nature of reproduction in the story is reminiscent of some early reactions to photography, which—given that the first photographs appeared in the 1820s—may be more than a coincidence. Gogol himself posed for a photograph (daguerreotype) in Rome in 1844 or 1845.



assume—that is, not only that imitation is bad, but that it is in part a consequence of modern technologies that have fostered a culture based on replication and dissemination” (206).<sup>107</sup>

Maguire connects Gogol’s preoccupation with imitation to fashion, and he contends that “convention, itself a form of imitation, bears no necessary relation to the underlying realities” (139).

Arguably, the demonic aspect of this mechanism lies not only in the fact that copies have no necessary relationship to the truth—like signs alienated from their referents (or possibly without referents altogether)—but also in its self-reproductive or memetic quality. Lounsbury identifies a related mechanism: “the more or less indiscriminate *mixing* of different kinds of things,” which she attributes to the “conflation of categories” in the modern city, paralleling the “leveling” which is “a manifestation of print culture’s failure to discriminate, indeed its very *basis in* indiscriminateness” (206, 208). “Indiscriminateness” is typical of high society in “The Portrait”—in which Chartkov’s reputation as a talented artist is taken for truth, non-art for art, appearance for essence—and is also a standard feature of Gogol’s treatment of rank (per Reyfman) and of the demonic, which often involves confusion and fragmentation (*How Russia Learned* 116).<sup>108</sup> According to Boym, such adulteration is also central to *poshlost'*, which “blurs the distinctions between cultural levels” (*Common Places* 45).

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<sup>107</sup> In “Diary of a Madman,” the dubious articles that appear in the pages of Bulgarin’s *Northern Bee* allow Poprishchin to justify his delusion of the talking dogs. The consumption of junk journalism is also typical of the members of high society who appear in “Nevskii Prospect” on Nevskii Prospect in mid-afternoon, “all those who have finished their rather important [*dovol'no vazhnye*] domestic business,” which—in a textbook example of rhetorical irony—is clearly anything but: among other things, it includes “reading an advertisement in the newspaper” and “an important [*vazhnuuiu*] article on arrivals and departures [*priezzhaiushchikh i ot'ezzhaiushchikh*]” (presumably the arrivals and departures of ‘important personages’) (247 [III:11]).

<sup>108</sup> At the ball in Piskarev’s first dream, “it seemed as if some demon had chopped the whole world up into a multitude of different pieces and mixed those pieces together with no rhyme or reason” (258 [III:24]). Maguire observes that fragmentation is typical of Gogol’s Petersburg, whose light he attributes to the Enlightenment, “a foreign concept, which Russians associated especially with France. I think this explains why Gogol’s later landscapes of Paris [e.g. in his 1842 story ‘Rome’] are virtually identical to his landscapes of Petersburg, built as

Chartkov's madness and death are the direct result of his demonic passion—for both the implied reader and narrator (“Fortunately for the world and for the arts . . .”), this outcome seems to be justified by his moral corruption, serving as a form of divine punishment. In part two of “The Portrait,” however, it is revealed that Chartkov's downfall has a supernatural source: the moneylender told B.'s father that “if he conveyed [‘his living features’] faithfully, his life by some supernatural force [*sverkh"estestvennoiu siloiu*] would be retained in the portrait,” and that demonic passions and madness also befell earlier owners of the portrait and those who took loans from the moneylender before his ‘death’ (385 [III:129]). The revelation of a demonic power at work in Chartkov's downfall complicates, but does not obviate, his guilt— from a theological viewpoint, the existence of Satan does not eliminate free will, and the artist-monk (like Chartkov's professor) suggests that the squandering of artistic talent is a sin. In the 1842 revision, the psychological line is strengthened, making the story more ‘fantastic’: although a supernatural explanation remains the only plausible one, we get the impression that the same fate would have befallen Chartkov if he had suddenly become rich through less obviously diabolical means—after all, his worldly impulses and envy are already evident at the beginning of the story. As Anne Basom observes, “[Chartkov's] temptation comes both from within and without” in the second version of “The Portrait,” and the “external evil” in it is “not . . . necessarily a supernatural (demonic) one, but could rather be attributed to society and the material values it propagates . . . In this sense, Gogol's texts are ultimately subversive in that they present the values of society as antithetical to the human spirit, as deadening, as producing ‘dead souls’” (433). I think Basom is right, with one small adjustment: rather than the either/or of the fantastic, evil is both worldly *and* otherworldly in “The Portrait”—the demonic is coextensive with and

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they are on images of light, disorder, fragmentation, and rapid movement” (78). In the Petersburg tales, light (e.g. the lamps on “Nevskii Prospect”) is often associated with the false gleam of high society and diabolical deception—Maguire notes that “glitter” is “usually demonic” in Gogol (77).

inescapable within Petersburg society (391 [III:135]).<sup>109</sup> Society is the medium in which evil circulates and reproduces—it is where the parasite of poshlost' eats away at the humanity of its hosts. The only recourse for the pure-hearted artist is flight, whether for Rome (like Chartkov's former comrade) or an "isolated monastery" (like the artist-monk) (369, 389 [III:110-11, 133]). Chartkov's temptation is rooted in his individual character and circumstances (youthful desires, poverty), but it is also a response to the deceptive allure of wealth, fame, and status. Although the demonic powers of the portrait and supernatural appearance of the moneylender's gold set in motion the chain of events leading to Chartkov's downfall, the sources of his aesthetic, moral, and spiritual decay are the sinful nature of the petty passions and the false values of his adopted social sphere—which, it seems, are two sides of the same coin.

#### "NEVSKII PROSPECT" AND "THE PORTRAIT": PHYSIOGNOMY, BALLS, FASHION

Notably, "Nevskii Prospect" and "The Portrait" function as cautionary tales with opposing (if not incompatible) lessons. Piskarev goes mad through losing contact with reality—his madness stems from the lack of constraints on his passion and imagination. In contrast, Chartkov loses the artistic passion and creative imagination that had given him the potential for artistic growth, and only loses his mind after realizing that they are irretrievably lost. The spark of talent is extinguished by the petty passions of poshlost', the realization of which ignites the

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<sup>109</sup> This, it seems, was the reason for Belinskii's harsh criticism of part two of "The Portrait," in both its original (1835) and revised (1842) form. In an 1842 article, he commented that the first part of the story had been vastly improved in the second version precisely in its "depiction of reality [*izobrazhenii deistvitel'nosti*]," but he took issue with the supernatural-religious content of the second part, arguing that "the thought of the story would have been beautiful if the poet understood it in the *modern* spirit [*v sovremennom dukhe*]: in Chartkov he wanted to depict a gifted artist who had destroyed his talent, and consequently himself, with the greed for money and the charm of petty renown [*melkoi izvestnosti*]. And the implementation of this thought should have been simple, without fantastic conceits, owing to everyday reality [*prostoto, bez fantasticheskikh zatei, na pochve ezhednevnoi deistvitel'nosti*]" ("Ob"iasnenie na ob"iasnenie," original emphasis). See also Belinskii (1835).

demonic passion that drives him to illness, madness, and death. Piskarev's madness is an extension of his artistic predisposition toward fantasy (albeit one that presupposes his deception), whereas Chartkov's stems from the betrayal of his artistic mission.

In both "Nevskii Prospect" and "The Portrait," dreams are treated ambiguously or negatively. Piskarev's "mad passion" leads him to chase after fleeting moments of illusory happiness in his dreams, and the irreconcilable "discord between dreams and reality" drives him to suicide. This suggests a departure from the "one of the central Romantic beliefs about dreams"—the belief that "dream activity is analogous to poetic creation" ("Dreams and Dreaming"). In contrast, Chartkov's immersion in painting is initially likened to dreaming, but shortly thereafter, the demonic moneylender invades his dreams, infects his imagination, and crosses over from dreams into reality (in the form of gold), which ultimately leads to Chartkov's downfall. (346 [III:85]). The confusion of reality with dreams—or the breaching of a barrier between them—opens the door to madness.

Piskarev's dreams suggest another parallel between the two artists. In the narrator's initial description of Petersburg painters (Piskarev's 'type'), their rooms are full of "all sorts of artistic clutter [*vzdor*]" which they paint "in dull, grayish [*serin'koi mutnyi*] colors—the indelible imprint of the north" (252 [III:17]). After his first dream, however, Piskarev is vexed by the "gray [*serom*]" and "dingy disorder [*mutnom besporiadke*]" of his room; in his "joyful" final dream ("he had never had a better one"), his bright (*svetlo*) and orderly (*ubrano*) studio is the antithesis of the reality of the Petersburg artist (261, 264 [III:27, 30]).<sup>110</sup> The studio of his dreams

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<sup>110</sup> Alternatively, the orderliness of Piskarev's studio in his final dream can be attributed to the young beauty's domestic efforts ("She was his wife now") (264 [III:30]). This would make his dream-studio the opposite of the brothel, where "Some unpleasant disorder [*nepriiatnyi besporiadok*], to be met with only in the carefree room of a bachelor, reigned over all ... the bare walls and curtainless windows showed no presence of a thoughtful housewife" (255 [III:20]).

is also strikingly similar to Chartkov's studio (after the latter becomes a "fashionable painter in all respects"), in which "he became accustomed to great neatness and cleanliness" (366 [III:107]).<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, like Chartkov, Piskarev seems to lose interest in his artistic pursuits—although he promises to paint a "beauty" for a Persian shopkeeper in exchange for opium (thereby 'prostituting' his talent), there is nothing to suggest that he so much as picks up a brush after his encounter with the prostitute—hence the lack of action in the dream: he sits in the studio, *not* painting, but "holding the palette with such pleasure" (263 [III:30]).<sup>112</sup> In the context of the artist's role as outlined in the "The Portrait," it appears that Piskarev's dreams lead him to abandon his calling for the sake of something doubly false: an idealized version of a *poshlaia prostitutka*.

The externalization of the sources of madness in "Nevskii Prospect" and "The Portrait" recalls the perceived influence of natural phenomena and demonic forces on human behavior in the classical and Christian traditions (cf. the "luna-" in "lunatic," indicating the moon as the source of madness and epilepsy), as well as the major etiological role accorded to society in early psychiatric conceptions of madness.<sup>113</sup> Broadly speaking, Gogol seems less interested in modern medical and philosophical conceptions of madness than many of his contemporaries (particularly

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<sup>111</sup> Poprishchin also takes pride in the cleanliness of his department, which for him is apparently an aspect of the "nobility" of his work: "It's true, our work is noble, it's clean everywhere, as you never see it in the provincial government: the tables are mahogany, and the superiors address each other formally. Yes, I confess, if it weren't for the nobility of the work, I'd long since have quit the department" (280 [III:194]).

<sup>112</sup> Citing both passages, Graffy contends that "Piskarev betrays his art both in reality, by agreeing to draw a 'beauty' with 'black brows, and eyes big as olives' (3:29) for a Persian in exchange for opium, and in his dreams" (262).

<sup>113</sup> Porter contends it was Pinel who first "popularized the idea that insanity has 'moral'—and hence social—rather than purely physiological causes," attributing this "[break] with the dominant eighteenth-century view that the roots of insanity are physiological" to his 1801 *Medico-Philosophical Treatise on Mental Alienation, or Mania*; this claim is apparently belied by the description of society's role in enflaming the passions in Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (published 1791-92) discussed in the first chapter (Porter 18). Andrew Scull's account seems to both confirm and complicate Porter's contention: "From the early eighteenth century onwards, it had become commonplace to see nervous illnesses of a milder sort as part of the price one paid for civilization, indeed as afflictions to which the most refined and civilized were particularly prone. A century later, these ideas began to be extended to encompass the most severe and frightening forms of Bedlam madness. Insanity, alienists and their allies argued, was a disease of civilization" (225).

Odoevskii)—but both classical and modern discourse on madness pervades the imagery he uses to depict it. Furthermore, its basic structure is in keeping with contemporary thought—in “Nevskii Prospect” and “The Portrait,” madness is linked to the irrational and arises from a powerful passion, which is reflected physiognomically.

In part two of “The Portrait,” the artist-monk’s divine passion is echoed in his appearance: contrary to B.’s expectations (he “imagined beforehand meeting a hermit with a hard appearance ... wasted away, dried up with eternal watching and fasting”), he finds “a beautiful, almost divine elder! No traces of exhaustion were to be seen on his face; it shone with the brightness of heavenly joy” (390 [III:134]). In Radishchev’s *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (*Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, 1790), another father imparting words of wisdom on the role of the passions is described similarly: “His settled features betokened a spiritual calm invulnerable to the passions ... a youthful blush covered his wrinkled cheeks, his eyes shone with hopeful joy, his countenance glowed with supernatural splendor” (108, 123). Although Radishchev’s “spiritual calm” differs from Gogol’s “heavenly joy,” both qualities are implicitly contrasted to the destructive effects of negative passions—an absence which imparts a strikingly youthful appearance to elderly men.<sup>114</sup>

Both descriptions suggest the enduring popular interest in physiognomy—“The study of the features of the face, or of the form of the body generally, as being supposedly indicative of character”—as developed by Johann Kaspar Lavater, which Valeria Sobol considers “another

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<sup>114</sup> Whereas Gogol distinguishes between positive and negative passions, Radishchev opposes passion to reason, which can “bridle” the passions when it has been strengthened by experience (116). Radishchev’s Sentimentalist conception of the passions is more positive than earlier ‘neoclassical’ models, but since he presents them as a unified whole (rather than, like Gogol, differentiating positive from negative passions), they are depicted more ambivalently than in “The Portrait”: although “the horrible tumult of the passions when they [go] beyond their natural bounds” causes “terrible devastation,” “The root of the passions is good and is planted by nature itself in our sensuous organism ... Excess in passion is destructive; absence of passion is moral death” (118).

manifestation of the eighteenth century's concern with the linkage between body and soul. By postulating that one's physical appearance reflects one's inner self, Lavater's teaching suggested that the immaterial soul somehow manifests itself in bodily signs" ("physiognomy, n.;" *Febris Erotica* 212).<sup>115</sup> Physiognomy also played an important role in early psychiatry in France, where it was used to diagnose and classify mental illness. Esquirol "had over 200 drawings made of his patients" and "a large collection of plaster casts of the faces of insane persons," and Théodore Géricault painted ten portraits of monomaniacs for Esquirol's protégé Étienne-Jean Georget, then "the chief physician of the Salpêtrière, the women's asylum in Paris" (Goldstein 154, 380; Pollitt).<sup>116</sup> In his 1820 book *On Madness (De la folie)*, Georget described some of the characteristic permutations of the mad physiognomy:

In general the idiot's face is stupid, without meaning; the face of the manic patient is as agitated as his spirit, often distorted and cramped; the moron's facial characteristics are dejected and without expression; the facial characteristics of the melancholic are pinched, marked by pain or extreme agitation; the monomaniacal king has a proud, inflated expression; the religious fanatic is mild, he exhorts by casting his eyes at the heavens or fixing them on the earth; the anxious patient pleads, glancing sideways, etc. (qtd. in Pollitt)

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<sup>115</sup> The narrator of Karamzin's *Letters* describes a meeting in Zurich with Lavater, with whom Karamzin had corresponded since 1787; see *Letters* 117-121. He also met Immanuel Kant, who described their mutual acquaintance thusly: "Lavater is exceedingly kind out of the goodness of his heart ... but possessing an excessively vivid imagination, he is often blinded by dreams. He believes in magnetism, and so on" (*Letters* 41). Although Lavater was certainly responsible for its resurgent popularity in the late eighteenth century, physiognomy "dates from at least Aristotle, who, in the *Physiognomica* (a book attributed to him), suggested that people have the temperament of animals they may resemble" ("Physiognomy").

<sup>116</sup> Five of Géricault's original ten portraits (produced between 1821 and 1824) survive: *A Woman Addicted to Gambling*, *A Woman Suffering from Obsessive Envy*, *A Child Snatcher*, *A Kleptomaniac*, and *A Man Suffering from Delusions of Military Command* (Pollitt). As it was for writers, madness was a popular subject for European artists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—notable examples include William Hogarth's *The Madhouse* (1773) and Francisco Goya's *The Madhouse* (circa 1812-1819).

This practice continued well into the nineteenth century: “the interest of the early psychiatrists in the physiognomy of insanity ... became under the supervision of Charcot, and with the benefit of the new technology of the camera, a giant and often grotesque archive of the iconography of nervous illness, extending now to bodily postures as well as to facial expressions” (Goldstein 380)

The basic principle of physiognomy—the reflection of inner qualities in facial expressions—is evident throughout “The Portrait.”<sup>117</sup> As the artist-monk’s divine passion is echoed in his appearance, powerful demonic passions are shown in the “convulsively distorted [or ‘corrupted’] face” (*sudorozhno iskazhennoe litso*) of the moneylender (347 [III:87]). According to B., his eyes were marked by an “extraordinary fire” (*neobyknovennogo ognia glaza*), and “His appearance alone held so much of the extraordinary that it would have made anyone ascribe a supernatural existence to him ... all seemed to say that the passions of others all paled before the passion that moved in his body” (378, 382-3 [III:121, 126]). In the correspondence between his demonic passions and the uncanny “diabolical force” (*d’iavol’skaia sila*) of his “extraordinary features,” the evil moneylender is the inversion (or double) of the divine artist-monk (385 [III:128]).<sup>118</sup>

In the end, passion will out—the emotional response evoked by his former comrade’s work renders Chartkov unable to maintain the “significant physiognomy of an expert”

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<sup>117</sup> The word *fiziognomiia*—used three times in “The Portrait”—refers to both “The art of discerning the morals and dispositions of people by facial features” and a given facial expression that expresses such inner qualities (“Fiziognomiia”).

<sup>118</sup> As Alexandra Urakova suggests, the moneylender is probably an “urbanized” transformation of the “Wandering Jew” topos (65). Graffy notes that he has also been identified by commentators as one of the “devil’s disciples,” and that a “common folkloric belief about devils is that they are ‘of another faith’ (inovertsy) or ‘of another land’ (unozemsty)” (252). At least in part, the moneylender’s diabolical passions are connected to his status as a religious and ethnic outsider (he had “a swarthy, lean, burnt face, its color somehow inconceivably terrible”) and/or ‘hot-blooded’ southerner (cf. Othello), suggesting Montesquieu’s environmental determinism (378, 385 [III:121, 129]). From a modern perspective, this depiction is clearly problematic—but this is a topic that deserves a more sustained analysis elsewhere.



(*znachitel'nuiu fizionomiiu znatoka*) which he had “hastened to assume” upon his arrival (369-70 [III:112-13]). After Chartkov succumbs to the demonic passions of envy and rage, they are unmistakably reflected in his physiognomy: his “terrible passion lent him some frightful coloration: his face was eternally bilious. Denial and blasphemy against the world were expressed in his features” (373 [III:115]).<sup>119</sup>

The correspondence (or rather, lack thereof) between outer and inner is the theme of Piskarev’s story in “Nevskii Prospect,” and a major theme of Gogol’s Petersburg tales in general. After Piskarev’s first dream, the physical effects of his ‘unnatural’ existence—the fact that “he slept while waking and watched while asleep”—are plainly visible to any observer: “if anyone had seen him sitting silently or walking down the street, he would certainly have taken him for a [sleepwalker (*lunatika*)] or someone destroyed by hard drinking; his gaze was quite senseless [*bez vsiakogo znacheniiia*], his natural distractedness developed, finally, and imperiously drove all feeling, all movement, from his face” (262 [III:28]). Here, Piskarev’s total disinterest in the external (real) world is reflected in his physiognomy. After his disastrous final visit to the brothel, Piskarev returns to his apartment with “signs of madness [*priznakami bezumiiia*] on his face”—just before this “victim of a mad passion” takes his own life (266 [III:33]).

At first glance, the young prostitute would seem a striking exception to the physiognomic principle: she is both beautiful and “depraved,” and it is the irreconcilability of this disjunction that leads Piskarev to madness and suicide. However, her facial expression reveals the contradiction between her outer beauty and inner nature, which is rendered conspicuous precisely because of this contrast: “[her] smile was filled with some pathetic insolence [*zhalkoi*

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<sup>119</sup> The narrator even describes the physiognomy of a personified present era: “our nineteenth century has long since acquired the dull physiognomy of a banker [*skuchnuiu fizionomiiu bankira*] who delights in millions only as numbers on paper” (374 [III:117]).

*naglosti*]; it was as strange and as suited to her face as an expression of piety is to the mug of a bribe-taker, or an accountant's ledger to a poet" (256 [III:21]). Furthermore, although the girl's beauty is untouched at their first meeting—"She was fresh [*svezha*]; she was just seventeen; one could see that terrible depravity [*uzhasnyi razvrat*] had overtaken her only recently; it had not yet dared to touch her cheeks"—the first physical marks of her depraved lifestyle are visible when Piskarev returns: "pallor [*blednost'*] had already crept over her face, no longer so fresh" (256, 265 [III:21, 31]).

The prostitute's pallor recalls the physiognomy of the young society girl in "The Portrait" (the subject of Chartkov's first 'fashionable' painting), who is described as pale (*blednyi*) three times (360, 362, 364 [III:100, 103, 105]).<sup>120</sup> After Chartkov fixes his eyes on her pale face (*blednoe lichiko*) and begins to paint, the narrator remarks,

Had he been a connoisseur of human nature, in a single moment he would have read in it [i.e. her face] the beginnings of a childish passion [*rebiacheskoi strasti*] for balls, the beginnings of boredom and complaints about the length of time before dinner and after dinner, the wish to put on a new dress and run to the fete, the heavy traces of an indifferent application to various arts, imposed by her mother for the sake of loftiness of soul and feelings. (360 [III:100-101])

Although the girl's mother claims that balls "are so deadly for the soul, so destructive of what's left of our feelings [*tak ubivaiut dushu, tak umershchvliaiut ostatki chuvstv*]" (possibly articulating the view of the implied/inferred author), her lament is immediately shown to be insincere, a mere platitude—the narrator notes the ironic fact that "Alas! it was written on the

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<sup>120</sup> Although she is introduced as an eighteen-year-old girl (*18-letniaia devochka*), Chartkov later sees "the light features and nearly transparent body of a seventeen-year-old [*semnadsatiletnei*] girl emerge from under his brush"—evidently, this is a mistake on Gogol's part (359, 362 [III:99, 103]).

faces of mother and daughter that they danced themselves away at balls until they nearly turned to wax” (360 [III:101]). As Sobol observes, the “motif of the tiring effect of the ball” recurs in “Diary of a Madman,” wherein the “high society pastime” of attending balls “reveals its unnatural character even more strikingly” via the defamiliarization produced by describing it from the perspective of a lapdog: “My Sophie is always greatly delighted to be going to a ball ... I simply don’t understand, *ma chère*, the pleasure in going to a ball. Sophie comes home from the ball at six o’clock in the morning, and I can almost always tell by her pale [*blednomu*] and skinny look that the poor thing was given nothing to eat there” (“Šumom bala utomlennyj” 302; 289 [III:203]). In both cases, the petty passion for balls leaves its subjects with an unhealthy pallor (*blednost*). Like Sophie in “Diary,” the prostitute in “Nevskii Prospect” stays out all night and comes back pale and drained in the morning, “no longer so fresh”—in their second meeting, she tells Piskarev that she “just woke up” (as we are told in a parenthetical aside, “it was then already two o’clock”) (265). This ‘unnatural’ schedule, inverting day and night, is shared by society girls and prostitutes alike—and, after he chooses dreams over waking life, Piskarev.<sup>121</sup>

Sobol shows that in the 1830s, “Both the Westernizers and the Slavophiles shared a negative view of the ball as a phenomenon originally foreign to Russian culture” (“Šumom bala utomlennyj” 294). Such perceived foreignness touches on another aspect of *poshlost'*: according to Boym, “throughout the nineteenth century *poshlost'* is frequently used in relation to the West and to Russian imitations of it. The fear is that foreign influence can turn native culture into mere

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<sup>121</sup> In the memoirs of one Mikhail Makarov, “the unnaturalness of the lifestyle that Russian high society has borrowed from the West, with its reversed sleep pattern and night-time dinners, has an adverse effect on the health of the entire Russian nation” (qtd. in “Šumom Bala Utomlennyj” 297). The unnatural inversion of day and night was also a source of concern in France: in an 1783 treatise on the “nervous maladies” of women (*De l’Influence des affections de l’âme dans les maladies nerveuses des femmes*), Edme-Pierre Chauvot de Beauchêne contended that “The time when our women get up in Paris bears but a distant relation to what nature intended ... Vapours and harmful exhalations, attracted by the heat of the sun, are already rising up through the air; and this is the time when beauty chooses to rise from her slumbers” (qtd. in Foucault 370).

fashion. In fact, poshlost' is frequently linked to a kind of theatricality in manners, behavior, and self-fashioning" (*Common Places* 47). In Piskarev's first dream after meeting the prostitute—which involves foreign fashions and the mannered theatricality of *comme il faut*—she sends a “lackey in rich livery” to bring him to a magnificent ball (257 [III:23]).<sup>122</sup> Despite his perception of demonic disorder (the sense that “some demon had chopped the whole world up into a multitude of different pieces and mixed those pieces together without rhyme or reason”), the timid artist is entranced by the splendor that surrounds him (“everything was splendid [*blistatel'no*] for him”) and flabbergasted by the markers of wealth and high social status (258 [III:24]). However, the narrator—or, perhaps, inferred author—evinces a subtly ironic attitude toward such ostentatious and affected behavior:

[Piskarev] saw at once so many venerable [*pochtennykh*] old and half-old men with stars on their tailcoats [*s zvezdami na frakakh*] ... he heard so many French and English words, moreover the young men in black tailcoats were filled with such nobility [*blagorodstva*], talked or kept silent with such dignity [*dostoinstvom*], were so incapable of saying anything superfluous [*lishnego*], joked so majestically [*velichago*], smiled so respectfully [*pochtitel'no*], wore such

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<sup>122</sup> Gogol and Pushkin differ in their treatment of *comme il faut*: although Pushkin sometimes mocked fashionable society, he never seems to completely reject its behavioral codes. In chapter eight of *Evgenii Onegin*, Tatiana “seemed the very picture of *comme il faut*” (*vernyi snimok/Du comme il faut*) as the hostess of a high-society soirée—she is “unhurried, not cold, not talkative,” and her *comme il faut* amounts to an apparent lack of effort or affectation (IV:161). As Olga Peters Hasty notes, “There is no mere mimicry, let alone unwitting parody, in Tatiana’s behavior. She has perfectly assimilated the dicta of her new circumstances, and it is precisely this assimilation that wins her freedom of movement” (183). None of Gogol’s Petersburg protagonists are comparable (although admittedly, none of them inhabit the most elite social circles), and all his characters who *are* comfortable in society (e.g. Pirogov, Kovalev, Chartkov) are shown to be ‘respectable’ poshliaki. Boym writes that “‘Not *comme il faut*’ appears to be a predecessor of poshlost’”—I would argue that just the opposite is true for Gogol (*Common Places* 56-7). Throughout the Petersburg tales, *comme il faut* is everywhere revealed to be theatrical and superficial—no more than an empty series of gestures, hairstyles, and articles of clothing—and is often linked to the demonic. Graffy notes that “in the ‘What a Wife Can Be for Her Husband in Her Simple Domestic Life...’ section of the *Selected Passages*, Gogol warns his correspondent not to worry about ‘*comme il faut*,’ because ‘real *comme il faut* is what is demanded from man by Him who created him’; one can only imagine how Pushkin might have reacted to this (265).

superb side-whiskers [*bakenbardy*], knew so well how to display perfect hands as they straightened their ties [*tak iskusno umeli pokazyvat' otlichnye ruki, popravliaia galstukh*], the ladies were so airy, so completely immersed in self-satisfaction and rapture [*pogruzheny v sovershennoe samodovol'stvo i upoenie*] ... (258 [III:24])<sup>123</sup>

Throughout Gogol's Petersburg tales, several such signifiers—including tailcoats, “stars” (i.e. honors), sideburns, and pomaded and curled tufts of hair (Piskarev also sees a “gentleman-in-waiting [*kamerger*]” with “a beautifully curled forelock on his head”)—are metonymic markers of high social status construed as *blagorodstvo*, “nobility” or “dignity,” which is in turn (mis)taken for intelligence and worthiness (260 [III:26]).<sup>124</sup> In “Diary of a Madman,” Poprishchin interprets the director's apparent knowledge of French and German and lack of superfluous speech as signs of lofty personal qualities: “Our director must be a very intelligent man. His whole study is filled with bookcases .... Such learning as our kind can't even come close to: all in French, or in German ... I've never yet heard him utter an extra [*lishnee*] word” (282 [III:196]). For Poprishchin, elegant clothing, sideburns (those of his romantic rival

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<sup>123</sup> This passage almost reads as a parody of *comme il faut*—at the very least, it raises questions that suggest ironic distance. For example, how does one “joke majestically”? What does it mean to “display perfect hands” while straightening one's tie, and how valuable is such a skill? Is rapturous “self-satisfaction” really such a praiseworthy quality? Furthermore, several of these terms—including *pochtennyi*, *blagorodstvo*, and *dostoinstvo*—are treated ironically in the playful introductory description of Nevskii Prospect, which contains an element of social satire (making it tonally distinct from Piskarev's Karamzinian narrative).

<sup>124</sup> Like the English “noble,” *blagorodnyi* denotes both status as a member of the gentry—whether through noble ancestry or military/state service, i.e. the ninth through fourteenth ranks (*ober[-]Ofiterskii chin*) in Peter's “Table of Ranks”—and “spiritual qualities,” including loftiness (*vozvysheynyi*), patient endurance in the face of misfortune, and “sacrificing one's life, time, and possessions for the glory of the fatherland or [one's] fellow man” (*velikodushnyi*) (“Blagorodnyi,” “Velikodushie”). *Blagorodstvo*, “nobility,” indicates elegance or grace (*Iziashestvo*), excellence or preeminence (*prevo[s]khodstvo*), and distinction (*otlichie*) in addition to gentry status (*dvorianstvo*) (“Blagorodstvo”). The poshly Poprishchin conflates the literal and metaphorical meanings of *blagorodstvo*: he presumes that nobility (gentry status) connotes ‘nobility’ (positive “spiritual qualities”). “Nobility” is rendered particularly problematic by its attribution to the young prostitute in “Nevskii Prospect,” whose “features were all so purely [*chisto*] formed, the whole expression of her beautiful face was marked by such nobility [*blagorodstvom*], that it was simply impossible to think that depravity had stretched out its terrible claws over her” (256-7 [III:22]). Like beauty and purity, *blagorodstvo* seems to be a matter of appearance rather than essence.

Teplov), and fashionably curled and pomaded hair are also style markers of status—he complains that his section chief has “a tuft of hair curled into a forelock sticking up, smeared with some pomade, so he thinks he’s the only one allowed anything ... give me a Ruch tailcoat, cut in the latest fashion, and let me have the some kind of necktie as you have—you won’t hold a candle to me” (290-1, 283-4 [III:204, 198]).<sup>125</sup>

#### UNRELIABLE NARRATION AND THE UNCONSCIOUS IN “DIARY OF A MADMAN”

In a comparison of the mad characters examined thus far, clusters of relatively consistent traits emerge: extreme emotional states (the passions) and more stable dispositional characteristics or capacities (e.g. powerful imagination), physiological processes (often relating to humors or passions) and physical capabilities (e.g. supernatural strength, insensibility to pain), behaviors (e.g. aimless wandering, inappropriate laughter), external appearances (e.g. disheveled hair and clothing, burning or ‘wild’ eyes, a fixed gaze), and perceptual dysfunctions (e.g. hallucination, blindness). All of these traits have the potential to contribute to characterization—and many of them are unlikely in texts with character narration.

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<sup>125</sup> In all of Gogol’s Petersburg tales, fashionable clothing is treated ambivalently, ironically, or negatively (cf. Akaky Akakievich’s “Overcoat,” which—like the eponymous “Nevskii Prospect” and “Portrait”—is implicated in the protagonist’s downfall and demise), and the passion for fashion is clearly shown to be a petty one. Chartkov’s descent into poshlost’ (his becoming a “fashionable [*modnyi*] painter”) begins with his discovery of the moneylender’s gold—but his first stop is the tailor’s shop (356 [III:97]). Piskarev also overvalues fashion: in his initial pursuit of the prostitute, he chases after an objectifying metonym, her “bright,” “fluttering” cloak (*plashch*)—the article of clothing which first leads him to mistakenly presume that she “must be a very noble lady”—and in the descriptions of his first and second dreams, an inordinate amount of attention is paid to clothes (251 [III:16]). Poprishchin connects clothing to rank, and rank to identity, which is why he is ashamed to be seen in his “old-fashioned” overcoat, fantasizes about appearing before Sophie “in a general’s uniform” with epaulettes and “a blue ribbon over [his] shoulder,” and fashions himself a royal mantle after ‘discovering’ that he is Ferdinand VIII (280, 292, 296 [III:194, 206, 210]). But this association between clothing and identity is not just Poprishchin’s—it is a feature of his society. Like many other signifiers of high social status in Gogol’s work, the concern with fashion was based on imported, Western European cultural values—and, as Boym points out, the epidemic of poshlost’ has historically been attributed to “western influences” (*Common Places* 60).

First-person narrator-protagonists usually describe their own physiognomies less frequently than third-person narrators describe those of their protagonists—and in “Diary of a Madman,” we have only have recourse to parodies of physiognomy.<sup>126</sup> In place of the external indicators of the passions of Piskarev and Chartkov, “Diary” only gives us one brief description of Poprishchin’s appearance attributed to Medji (the lapdog belonging to the daughter of his departmental director): “Ah, *ma chère*, if you only knew how ugly he is. A perfect turtle in a sack . . . The hair on his head looks very much like hay” (291 [III:204-5]). Furthermore, it seems to me that characterization via the description of the passions as such—rather than their implication (e.g. through behavior)—is particularly privileged in third-person narration, which allows for an external view on the inner life of its characters. Character-narrators tend to lack the necessary perspective (including emotional distance) to see themselves from multiple or outside points of view—Poprishchin’s progeny, Dostoevsky’s hyperconscious Underground Man, is a notable exception—or to authoritatively describe the inner lives of other characters, as in ‘omniscient’ third-person narration. The narrators of “Nevskii Prospect” and “The Portrait” convey the progression of madness, outline the roles of dreams, the imagination, and (in the second case) the demonic, and ‘diagnose’ Piskarev and Chartkov by attributing their madness to passions. We have no such outside perspective on Poprishchin’s inner life—there is no unequivocal transition from sanity to insanity in “Diary” (Poprishchin hallucinates talking dogs in his first entry), and we can only infer the role of the irrational in his madness. It is plausible, even highly probable, that “Diary” is informed by the same understanding of the progression of madness and the etiological primacy of passion that inform “Nevskii Prospect” and “The

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<sup>126</sup> Poprishchin’s attempts to describe the faces and interpret the behaviors of others are humorously nonsensical and inept: he claims, for example, that his section chief’s face “bears a slight resemblance to a druggist’s bottle” (283 [III:198]).

Portrait.”<sup>127</sup> However, Poprishchin does not examine his own feelings or motivations—one of his most characteristic qualities is a lack of self-awareness—and there is no other (more objective) narrator to posit a cause for his madness, whether physiological, emotional, spiritual, or social—whence the diversity of critical commentary on its source.<sup>128</sup>

Because Poprishchin is the ostensible author of his own story, every word in it has the potential to contribute to psychological characterization: his use of language and choice of subject matter reflect his opinions, preoccupations, and worldview. In this sense, our access to Poprishchin’s psyche is more direct than in “Nevskii Prospect” or “The Portrait,” in which the depictions of the protagonist are filtered through the consciousness of third-person narrators. Insofar as it is unmediated, the entire text of “Diary of a Madman”—Gogol’s only published first-person narrative—functions as direct thought or speech. However, the use of thought report in “Nevskii Prospect” and “The Portrait” allows for the representation of

the mental causal network behind behaviour which includes motives, intentions, and reasons for action ... what the character does not know about his or her mental functioning and sometimes does not wish to know ... latent states of mind such as attitudes, judgments evaluations, beliefs, skills, knowledge, character traits, tendencies of

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<sup>127</sup> In such an interpretation, the petty passions would certainly be involved—Poprishchin’s concern with appearances and desire for wealth, rank, and admiration (implying vanity, envy, and ambition) are readily apparent—but the question of a passion powerful enough to drive him to madness is trickier to answer. One could consider his mad passion to be overweening ambition, or the unrequited love for the daughter of his departmental director, or rage at the perceived injustice of his social position. Similarly, a religious conception of the passions suggests multiple sins—pride, vanity, envy, malice—without allowing us to authoritatively privilege any one of them, insofar as they can only be inferred.

<sup>128</sup> According to Xiaolu Ma, Poprishchin’s “dissatisfaction with the contemporary world ... drives him into madness”; Ma later writes that his “gradual mental breakdown” is “owing to common human feelings of inferiority and jealousy” (353, 357). Rosenshield contends that Poprishchin “goes mad ... because he is not taken seriously by his superior’s daughter” (27). Porter argues that “Poprishchin’s ambition is in fact a form of madness” (33). Almost everyone who writes about the story ‘diagnoses’ Poprishchin, but there is no critical consensus on the cause of his madness, because none is authoritatively identified in the text (unlike in “The Portrait” and “Nevskii Prospect”).



thought, intellect, desires, and the Freudian unconscious. (“Thought and Consciousness Representation (Literature)”)

Thought report simply allows for the transmission of more—or at least, different sorts of—information about a character’s psychic life, which suggests some of the inherent difficulties in analyzing a story like “Diary of a Madman.” An even larger problem, however, is presented by Poprishchin’s radical narratorial unreliability.<sup>129</sup>

This unreliability is implied by the title, presumably the only part of the story *not* attributable to its protagonist (who does not consider himself a ‘madman’).<sup>130</sup> Because of our skepticism toward Poprishchin from the outset, we construct our storyworld (i.e. mental model of the fictional universe) tentatively and provisionally.<sup>131</sup> In general, unreliable narration “redirect[s] the reader’s attention from the level of the story to the discourse level occupied by the speaker”; in “Diary,” much of the story (*fabula*: narrative events, what ‘really’ happens) only emerges when the reader *disbelieves* the narrator’s discourse (*siuzhet*) (“Reliability”). Poprishchin’s unreliability forces us to read between the lines: as Andrei Bely put it, the story (in keeping with Poprishchin’s catchphrase) “‘never mind, never mind’—is silent!” (*fabula tozhe – ‘nichego, nichego’: ona – molchit!*) (17).

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<sup>129</sup> As originally formulated by Wayne C. Booth, narratorial unreliability implies distance between the narrator and implied author; distance can occur “along one or more axes of measurement ... The most common [of which] are spatial, temporal, intellectual, emotional, physical, psychological, and ethical” (“Distance”).

<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, the title alone does not prove Poprishchin’s madness: it could be intended ironically, as in Tolstoy’s 1884 story of the same name, or Dostoevsky’s “Dream of a Ridiculous Man” (“Son smeshnovo cheloveka,” 1877).

<sup>131</sup> “Storyworlds are... mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what in fashion in the world to which interpreters relocate (Ryan 1991) as they work to comprehend a narrative” (“Storyworlds”). The term “storyworld” is roughly equivalent to “*fabula* or *story*,” but rather than a quality inherent in the text, it emphasizes the reader’s “attempt to reconstruct not just what happened but also the surrounding context or environment embedding storyworld exists, their attributes, and the actions and events in which they are involved ... the grounding of stories in storyworlds goes a long way toward explaining narratives’ immersiveness, their ability to ‘transport’ interpreters into places and times that they must occupy for the purposes of narrative comprehension” (“Storyworlds”).

In part, Poprishchin's unreliability is a product of his emotional involvement in the narrative—the same factor that renders Piskarev's narrator suspect—which, as Lars Bernaerts notes, is implied by his frequent “exclamations and reiterations” and which “leads to a coloured version of the facts” (199). Although Poprishchin's emotions (or passions) and madness often shade into each other, this kind of unreliability doesn't necessarily make Poprishchin mad—it just makes him human—and, given that the story he tells is his own, is reasonable. Larger interpretive difficulties are created by another type of unreliability: despite the apparently unmediated access the diary format gives us to Poprishchin's psyche, his madness amounts to a form of mediation between himself and reality, making his narratorial perspective (i.e. the entire text) inherently questionable. We intuit this sort of unreliability from several features of the text—including multiple instances of self-contradiction, sometimes even in straightforward facts.

Surprisingly, most previous commentators have failed to note that although Poprishchin originally writes that he followed Fidèle's owner to an apartment on the fifth floor of the Zverkov house (*Damy vzoshli v piatyi etazh*), he later claims to have found the canine correspondence on the *sixth* floor (*ia probralsia v shestoi etazh*) (III:196, 200). While this detail might not stand out to readers today, it would have been more striking to Gogol's fellow Petersburgers in 1835: according to Julian Graffy, this building was “famous in the 1830s as the first five-storey house in St. Petersburg” (242). (Gogol himself lived in a fifth-floor apartment in the Zverkov house from the end of 1829 to May of 1831.) As such, this is not merely an inconsistency—it is also a contradiction between the story and our understanding of reality, which, we are led to presume, the diegetic world reflects. Because Poprishchin is the titular “Madman” and a manifestly unreliable narrator, we have no reason to believe that the world of the story is, at the same time, a supernatural one (e.g. one in which lapdogs write letters to each

other)—instead, we read such ‘unrealistic’ elements as manifestations of Poprishchin’s madness (i.e. as psychological rather than supernatural). Such an interpretation accounts for the unreliability engendered by Poprishchin’s new chronological ‘system’ after he ‘discovers’ that he is the king of Spain (starting with the entry dated “The Year 2000, 43<sup>rd</sup> of April”), as well as the increasingly improbable nature of such discoveries themselves, concerning topics like geography (“China and Spain are absolutely one and the same land”), the provenance of the moon (which is “usually” made—poorly—by “a lame cooper” in Hamburg), and the basis of ambition (which is “caused by a little blister under the tongue with a little worm in it the size of a pinhead” as part of a plot “to spread Mohammedanism throughout the world” masterminded by “some barber who lives in Gorokhovaya Street ... together with some midwife”) (294-8 [III:207-12]).<sup>132</sup>

When Poprishchin first hears Medji and Fidèle speak to each other like humans (*po-chelovecheski*), he quickly overcomes his initial disbelief (“I said to myself, ‘what, am I drunk or something?’ ... But later, when I’d thought it over properly, I at once ceased to be surprised”) by appealing to similar examples—anecdotes from “the papers” (resembling some that actually appeared in *The Northern Bee*) about a talking fish in England and “two cows that came to a grocer’s and asked for a pound of tea”—that strike us as equally implausible, thereby calling his

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<sup>132</sup> Some of these implausible discoveries also function as parodies of philosophical ideas. According to Mikhail Weiskopf, both the “demonic artisans”—the barber and midwife Poprishchin holds responsible for the worm that causes ambition—and the “lame cask maker” who makes an inferior moon out of ‘tarred rope and pieces of sap’ ... represent a typical Gnostic (more precisely, Valentinian) parody of the image of the demiurge, the craftsman of the universe who makes the heavenly bodies in Plato’s *Timaeus* ... The gods, subordinate to the demiurge ... when creating man, used an abundance of all sorts of ropes, bubbles, and so on, and the disorder of these directly explains both spiritual and the resulting social crimes” (132). Poprishchin’s claim that, contrary to popular belief, “the human brain is [not] in the head ... [but] is brought in by a wind from the direction of the Caspian Sea” functions as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Descartes’ assertion that the pineal gland was the point of interaction between the (non-physical) soul and body (294 [III:208]). At the same time, Poprishchin’s attribution of ambition to “a little blister under the tongue with a little worm in it” seems to mock an opposite (materialist) point of view—one contending that the passions and soul are purely physiological (295 [III:210]). Gogol’s parody paradoxically cuts both ways: he suggests that separating the mind from the body and attributing the spiritual to the physical are equally mad. On the ambivalent reception of Cartesian dualism in Russia, see Marquette 14-15.

narratorial reliability into further doubt (281 [III:195]). In other words, the fact that Poprishchin explains the “extraordinary event” that happens to him by recourse to supporting evidence that a reasonable person would perceive as untrue renders his ability to determine relative reliability suspect: the fact that Poprishchin is an unreliable reader (interpreter) also makes him an unreliable writer.

Paradoxically, the closest we get to an objective depiction of reality in “Diary” comes from the letters written by Medji to Fidèle, which Poprishchin ‘discovers’ and ‘transcribes,’ resulting in a mixed generic mode: epistolary fiction embedded within a diary narrative. From the reader’s perspective, the only plausible explanation is that Poprishchin himself is the author of the letters attributed to Medji—we assume that the canine correspondence, like the talking dogs, is a product of hallucination. On the other hand, we believe that Medji’s account is true, both because it conflicts with Poprishchin’s depiction, even stylistically (the dog writes in a pseudo-Sentimental mode)—making it apparently an outside perspective—and because of his reaction to its revelations. Upon learning that he is not respected by the director or Sophie (and of the latter’s engagement), Poprishchin responds with vehement denial (“You’re lying, you cursed dog!”) and projection (“These are the section chief’s tricks”), suggesting the rejection of an inadmissible truth (291 [III:205]). Furthermore, the entry in question engenders the crisis that precipitates Poprishchin’s discovery that he is the king of Spain—Medji’s letter is the catalyst for his megalomaniacal delusion.

Poprishchin’s inability to accept painful realities that, on some level, he is aware of (as the author of the canine correspondence) creates a disjunction that drives the progression of his madness. On the surface, he seems to be totally convinced of his own ‘nobility’ (i.e. worthiness)—but on a deeper level, anxiety and self-doubt manifest themselves. As such, I

would argue that any meaningful interpretation of madness in “Diary of a Madman” must take the unconscious into account. Notably, the unconscious predates Freud—in fact, it was largely “a Romantic-era invention” developed by philosophers like Schelling and Schopenhauer and psychologists like Johann Friedrich Herbart, who, in an 1824 work, “argued that ideas often became inhibited, sinking below the level of consciousness, but nevertheless remaining active in the mind and exerting a pressure on consciousness” (“The Unconscious”). Even earlier, however, interest in the unconscious was stimulated by the figure of the somnambulist (in Russian, *lunatik*) in the context of “Anton Mesmer’s late eighteenth-century experiments in animal magnetism, in which the sleepwalker proved a paradox: an opaque revelation of transparent currents and an unconscious vehicle of sophisticated thought” (Wilson 329).<sup>133</sup>

Ultimately, the interpretation of Poprishchin’s madness depends on that of the title: in the context of this story, what does it mean to be *sumasshedshii*?<sup>134</sup> The *Slovar' Akademii Rossiiskoi* defines it simply as “deprived of reason [*uma*]” (“Sumasshedshii”). There is method in Poprishchin’s madness, however, and Pavel Annenkov’s description of a gathering at Gogol’s apartment points to its origin: “Among [Gogol’s] visitors was a middle-aged man who was talking to him about the habits of madmen and the strict, almost logical consistency which could be observed in the development of their ideas ... The greater part of the material which he gathered from the stories of the middle-aged man he later used in his *Diary of a Madman*” (qtd.

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<sup>133</sup> Connecting Gogol’s story to the work of Odoevskii, Pavel Sakulin notes that “The Nose” was influenced by the enthusiasm for animal magnetism, mentioned in the story as the source of popular interest in “the extraordinary” among Petersburgers: “only recently the public had been taken up with the experiments on the effects of magnetism” (336; 322 [III:71])

<sup>134</sup> Is Poprishchin mad because his reason is disturbed (impaired judgment)? Because his values are flawed (poshlost' as madness)? Because he hallucinates (perceptual dysfunction)? Because he fails to realize that he *is* mad (the blindness of classical furor)? Because he is an unreliable narrator? This is an open question with many possible answers.

in Magarshack 65).<sup>135</sup> A self-consistent system governing the development of ‘mad’ ideas—the logic of madness, traditionally conceived as *the divergence from* the laws of rationality—this seems like an almost Freudian approach.

The anachronistic interpretation of “Diary of a Madman” that follows is rooted in psychoanalysis. This is motivated partly by necessity: Freud’s work provides the most fully developed early psychological model that suits my purposes (although, for reasons too complex to get into here, I think the emphasis on historicism in literary criticism is itself problematic). Mainly, however, my reading was inspired by the striking applicability of psychoanalytic thought to “Diary of a Madman”—Freud’s conceptions of the unconscious, paranoia, and schizophrenia are almost uncannily relevant to the progression of Poprishchin’s madness (cf. Žižek’s proposition that *Richard II* “proves beyond any doubt that Shakespeare had read Lacan”) (qtd. in Menon 2).<sup>136</sup>

#### FREUD ON POPRISHCHIN: SCHIZOPHRENIA, CASTRATION ANXIETY, AND THE OEDIPAL CONFLICT IN “DIARY OF A MADMAN”

A powerful psychological drama unfolds in “Diary of a Madman”: its protagonist, Aksenty Ivanovich Poprishchin, attempts to transcend his symbolic castration, and in doing so,

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<sup>135</sup> This recalls Foucault’s contention that Enlightenment-era madness has two levels; on the deeper level, he argues, “there is ... a rigorous organisation that follows the faultless structure of a discourse ... beneath the obviously disordered delirium reigns the order of a second delirium ... this second delirium ... is in a sense, pure reason ... what is to be found there is both that which makes madness true (faultless logic, well organised discourse, and the flawless flow within the transparency of a virtual language), and that which makes it truly mad (its own nature, the rigorously particular style of all its manifestations and the internal structure of delirium)” (23).

<sup>136</sup> As previously mentioned, passion resembles both *instinkt* and the Freudian *Trieb* (“drive”). “The drive is a stimulus, but it acts chiefly through a phantasmatic resurgence. It is life, activity, desire to be, but also repetition, compulsion, reflex ... [the] manifestations [of the drive] are *pathological*, led on by the *pathos* of the repressed that is returning. The desire that formerly underwent repression, the desire whose realization in an act or a movement has been inhibited, becomes, through this inhibition itself, infinitely powerful, insistent, ‘active’” (“Pathos”). As this suggests, passion is also related to the libido and to desire (*Wunsch*, as in Freud’s conception of wish-fulfillment).

he descends into madness.<sup>137</sup> Although his social status is the basis for his entire concept of self-worth, its true nature is inadmissible to his consciousness. As a result, he moves from denial (neurosis) to rejection (psychosis), from hallucinations and increasingly paranoid delusions to megalomania. Poprishchin craves rank, wealth, and respect, but he refuses to acknowledge his own envy and ambition, instead projecting them onto authority figures. In accordance with Freud's description of the basic characteristics of schizophrenics—"megalomania and diversion of their interest from the external world"—Poprishchin ultimately deviates from reality entirely, escaping into a world of narcissistic fantasy (*SE XIV:74*).<sup>138</sup>

Poprishchin's madness is inextricably linked to his unconscious self-reproach (i.e. repressed feelings of inferiority, or in contemporary psychological terminology, low implicit self-esteem), which is evident in his relationship with the director of his department. To Poprishchin, the director's library is indicative of "such learning as the likes of us [*nashemu bratu*, lit. "our brother"] can't even access: all in French, or in German," suggesting that the director is on a different (higher) plane than his own (III:196). In a further sign of his (un)perceived inferiority, he writes that the only time the director utters a "superfluous [*lishnee*] word" is when he deigns to speak to Poprishchin himself: "I've never yet heard him say a superfluous word. Except maybe, when you hand him papers, [and] he asks, 'How is it outside?'" (III:196). Immediately after this, however, Poprishchin identifies himself with the director by placing them both in the same category—"there's no matching the likes of us!" (*ne nashemu bratu cheta!*)—and enhances his self-worth through his unsubstantiated and

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<sup>137</sup> Of course, "Diary" is not just dramatic—it is also hilarious. The dualism of "Nevskii Prospect" is synthesized in the character of Poprishchin, who is depicted with both pathos and (implied/inferred authorial) irony. In this grotesque Gogolian juxtaposition, Poprishchin is the forebear of Akaky Akakievich.

<sup>138</sup> Eric Altschuler argues that "Gogol's story ... contains one of the oldest and the most extensive description[s] of schizophrenia," inasmuch as Poprishchin exhibits "all the inclusion and exclusion criteria for schizophrenia" as of the third edition of the *DSM* (1476). || Quotations attributed to "SE" refer to *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*.

presumably delusional belief that the director “loves [him] especially” (*on menia osobenno liubit*), aiming the high esteem in which he holds the director back toward himself (III:196). Poprishchin’s feelings of inferiority are clearly unacceptable to his ego, and as such, he systematically represses them.

Poprishchin also attempts to avoid his unconscious self-reproach by projecting it onto others, a process characteristic of paranoia—according to Freud, “The determining element of paranoia is the mechanism of projection involving the refusal of belief in the self-reproach” (*SE I:227*).<sup>139</sup> By projecting his self-reproach outward, Poprishchin thereby transforms it primarily into “*distrust*” of other people (*SE I:226*). Most of his paranoia is directed at the section chief (his immediate superior), who he believes is conspiring against him: “The man has sworn implacable hatred—and he injures and injures me, at every step he injures me” (III:205). Poprishchin attributes the section chief’s antipathy to jealousy at seeing the “signs of benevolence” bestowed on himself (*Emu zavidno; on uvidel, mozhet byt', predpochtitel'no mne okazyvaemye znaki blagoraspolzhenosti*), a supposition which, from the reader’s perspective—given that such indications are nowhere in sight, and that Poprishchin’s job seems to mostly consist of the menial task of quill-sharpening (*on, verno, zaviduet, chto ia sizhu v direktorskom kabinete i ochinivaiu per'ia dlia ego prevoskhoditel'stva*)—is patently ludicrous, indicating projection at work (III:198, 193). Tellingly, the section chief is the only person who attempts to force Poprishchin to recognize the reality of his social position: “Well, look at yourself, only think, what are you? You’re a zero, nothing more. You don’t have a half-kopeck [*grosha*] to your name. Just look at your

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<sup>139</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis define projection as an “operation whereby qualities, feelings, wishes, or even ‘objects’, which the subject refuses to recognise or rejects in himself, are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing” (349).



face in the mirror” (III:197-8).<sup>140</sup> Poprishchin is faced with another damning depiction of himself in the letters ostensibly written by two dogs, Medji and Fidèle, of which Poprishchin himself is the unwitting author—accordingly, the canine correspondence is a representation of his own unconscious self-image.<sup>141</sup> In both cases, his repressed (projected) feelings of inferiority ultimately return. Freud also asserts that in cases of paranoia, “[t]he repressed affect seems invariably to return in hallucinations of voices,” an experience which Poprishchin documents from his very first entry, in the conversation he ‘overhears’ between Medji and Fidèle (*SE* I:227). According to Freud, paranoia can conclude—as it does in Poprishchin’s case—in “an *alteration of the ego*, an expression of its having been overwhelmed ... in *protective delusions* (megalomania), till the ego has been completely remodelled” (*SE* I:227). Thus, the progression of Poprishchin’s madness is remarkably consistent with Freud’s early conception of paranoia.<sup>142</sup>

As Irina Reyfman suggests, Poprishchin doth protest too much: his “anxiety about his status as a nobleman is evident in his repeated claims to be a nobleman” (*Rank and Style* 31). Poprishchin’s class anxiety is a response to his unconscious self-reproach, which itself arises from the fact that, in his lack of wealth and social status—and therefore power and respect—he

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. the epigraph to Gogol’s *Government Inspector*: “Don’t blame the mirror if your mug is crooked” (*Na zerkalo necha peniat’, koli rozha kriva*) (IV:5). Poprishchin decidedly blames the mirror.

<sup>141</sup> Most previous readers agree that the canine correspondence is a misattributed ‘autobiography’: Maguire, for example, calls it an “objectification of [Poprishchin’s] own unacknowledged attitude toward himself” (Maguire 54). This interpretation is in keeping with the nature of Poprishchin’s madness as revealed throughout the story, which makes him a doubly unreliable narrator (both to the reader and to himself) and hinges on a bone-deep ambivalence—what A.I. Ivanitsky calls his “deeply divided [lit. “split in two”] self-esteem” (*gluboku razdvoennuiu samootsenku*), i.e. his unconscious self-reproach (176). However, Iurii Mann warns us that the canine correspondence is “more complicated than it appears at first glance” (*slozhnee, chem kazhetsia na pervyi vzgliad*), mostly due to its stylistic deviations from Poprishchin’s writing earlier in the story (92). See Mann 91-3.

<sup>142</sup> The understanding of paranoia I use here is based on that found in Freud’s early correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess (especially “Draft K,” 1896)—for now, I set aside Freud’s infamous later formulation of paranoia as a product of the struggle against a homosexual fantasy. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, “[i]n his correspondence with Fliess ... Freud seems still to accept the pre-Kraepelinian conception of paranoia, looking upon it as a very broad clinical type covering most forms of chronic delusional conditions” (296). Freud later noted that “paranoid and schizophrenic phenomena may be combined in any proportion” (L&P 297).

is symbolically castrated. By preventing him from realizing his ambitions and romantic aspirations, his symbolic castration amounts to emasculating impotence. However, Poprishchin is unwilling or unable to acknowledge this narcissistic wound—instead, he (over)compensates for his castration anxiety by means of his inflated self-image. Nevertheless, his impotence manifests itself physically in his inability to converse with either Sophie (“devil take it, my tongue somehow refused to move”) or the director (“I thought several times to start a conversation with His Excellency, only, devil take it, my tongue doesn’t obey me at all” [*nikak ne slushaetsia iazyk*])—in both cases, his body refuses to cooperate with his desires (III:197).<sup>143</sup>

Freud describes boyhood castration anxiety by analogy with manhood: “In later life grown men may experience a similar panic, perhaps when the cry goes up that throne and altar are in danger, and similar illogical consequences will also follow them” (*SE XXI:153*).<sup>144</sup>

Poprishchin experiences precisely this panic with regard to the succession difficulties in Spain:

They say some sort of doña should ascend the throne. A doña cannot ascend a throne. It cannot be. There should be a king on a throne ... How can it be, that a doña is made a queen? They won’t allow it. And, first of all, England won’t allow it. Moreover, the political affairs of all Europe: the Austrian emperor, our sovereign ... these incidents drove me to such despair and so shook me that I was decidedly unable to busy myself with anything for the whole day. (III:206-7)

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<sup>143</sup> Like his tongue, Poprishchin’s language (also *iazyk*) refuses to submit to his will, appearing in other registers—ironic, and even parodic—throughout the story: following Simon Karlinsky, Lounsbury observes that “Poprishchin’s confessional writing is saturated with (Gogol’s) ‘mini-parodies’ of journalistic and other middlebrow forms” (213-14). Poprishchin’s own language is directed against him in the canine correspondence, which gives rise to his humorously indignant responses: “Hm! This dog seems to me already much too ... she should be whipped! ... You’re lying, damned dog! What a vile tongue! [*Ekoi merzkoi iazyk!*]” (III:203, 205).

<sup>144</sup> Freud’s cryptic allusion to “throne and altar” may be a reference to the close relationship between the Catholic Church and the Habsburg dynasty (in its last incarnation, the Austro-Hungarian Empire), which collapsed at the end of World War I in 1918, nine years before this essay (“Fetishism”) was written. For my purposes, however, the salient point is that traditionally, “throne and altar” are symbolic seats of exalted male authority.

Clearly, Poprishchin associates royalty with masculinity: a throne needs a king, and the alternative has the potential to threaten “the political affairs of all Europe.” In his patriarchal (post-Catherinian) world, authority is assumed exclusively by men. Because Poprishchin correlates personal worth with rank—“essence in his world is class”—and “mistakes social classifications for inherent properties even as he objects to their being treated as such,” high social status is constitutive of meaningful personhood as well as masculine identity (for him, the former may be identical to the latter) (Lounsbury 213; Porter 34).<sup>145</sup> However, his belief in the respectability of his own social position is constantly under attack, partly due to the disrespectful treatment which (he feels) he receives even from members of the “lackey circle,” whom he despises for their impudent behavior, such as the unforgivable failure to stand up when offering him a pinch of snuff: “Don’t you know, stupid bondservant [*kholop*], that I am an official [*chinovnik*], [that] I am of noble birth [*blagorodnogo proiskhozhdeniia*]?” (III:197).

Poprishchin’s embattled sense of masculine identity is also suggested by the representation of bodily fragmentation (i.e. castration symbolism) throughout the story. In “Medusa’s Head” (1922), Freud asserts that the multiplication of male genital symbols signifies castration—phallic imagery is ubiquitous in “Diary of a Madman,” particularly in its persistent nose-motif (*SE XVIII:273*). Poprishchin is preoccupied with potential damage to his nose: he notes that he “almost plastered [his] nose” (*chut'-chut' ne raskleil nosa*) while picking up Sophie’s handkerchief, and that Fidèle “almost grabbed [him] by the nose with [her] teeth” (*chut' ne skhvatila menia zubami za nos*) (III:197, 201). He writes of his romantic rival, the kammerjunker Teplov, “Surely his nose isn’t made of gold, it’s the same as mine, it’s the same

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<sup>145</sup> This is precisely why the section chief’s criticism cuts him to the quick: “When Poprishchin’s superior calls him a ‘zero’ ... the insult embodies Poprishchin’s own repressed knowledge of his utter insignificance in a society that takes both rank and the outward signs of rank just as seriously as he takes them” (Lounsbury 210).

as anyone's; surely he smells and doesn't eat with it, sneezes, and doesn't cough" (206). As Richard F. Gustafson points out, the association of noses with "Popriščin's erotic interests" is established by the context: "His nose is as good as the court chamberlain's [i.e. Teplov's] and yet Sofi wants to marry the court chamberlain, not him" (276). By revealing his unconscious castration anxiety, Popriščin's vehement assertion that there's no difference between their noses undermines itself: "To negate something in a judgement is, at bottom, to say: 'This is something which I should prefer to repress'" (SE XIX:236). In the story's "moon passage," Gustafson writes, "Popriščin's fear that the noses will be crushed [when the earth sits on the moon], the obvious symbolic castration fear, suggests the fear for his own identity. The one thing that makes him a man may be destroyed" (277). Even outside of a psychoanalytic context, the extensive nasal imagery in the story is suggestive—according to Maguire, "Readers even in Gogol's time were well aware that writers often used noses as surrogate phalluses. The practice had been initiated by a celebrated passage in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* ... by the early nineteenth century, any mention of this organ by a writer in more than the most casual terms was invariably taken as a reference to the other, unmentionable one" (60).

Unlike the normative behavior of children in the Oedipus complex—who either "[accept] castration as an established fact" or "[fear] the possibility of its occurrence"—Popriščin rejects the knowledge of a castration which is *already in effect* (SE XIX:178). Despite the evidence to the contrary, Popriščin stubbornly insists that he is a nobleman (*Ia dvorianin*), therefore worthy of respect, and that he remains capable of fulfilling his professional ambitions, a dubious claim at best: "I'm still forty-two years old—such a time, at which, truly, service just begins" (198). His behaviour recalls Freud's assertion that penis envy can end in "a process which might be described as a *'denial,'* a process which in the mental life of children seems neither

uncommon nor very dangerous but which *in an adult would mean the beginning of a psychosis*” (SE XIX:252, my emphasis). Poprishchin’s psychical conflict is based on an inadmissible knowledge which, however, cannot be abolished without repudiating reality itself; it can only be repressed—and the repressed has a tendency to return.

When Poprishchin’s thoughts turn to Sophie, he repeats the phrase, “never mind, never mind ... silence” (*nichego, nichego ... molchanie*).<sup>146</sup> Corresponding to the changes in intonation and punctuation noted by Bely (*Eta fraza v ‘ZS’ meniaet pri kazhdom povtore i intonatsiiu, i znaki prepinaniia*), this phrase also varies in emotional valence, an impression which is reinforced by context clues (247). In two (out of six total) instances (III:200, 202), it is preceded by exclamations of excitement (*ai! ai!*)—or, alternatively, distress or pain (“ouch!”)—which are associated with Sophie elsewhere in the story: “Ai, ai, ai! what a voice ... for her, ai! ai! ... for Her Excellency [I sharpened] four quills” (III:196, 199). Arguably, these examples are in keeping with Reyfman’s assertion that the phrase represents Poprishchin “stop[ping] just when his dreams are about to become improper”—but only one instance strongly supports this interpretation (the only one that mentions Sophie’s body): “To look at that footstool, on which she places her little foot [*nozhku*] while getting out of bed, how a snow-white stocking is being put on that little foot ... ai! ai! ai! Never mind, never mind ... silence” (*Rank and Style* 32; III:200).<sup>147</sup> However, the phrase is preceded by the interjection “eh, damn it!” (*ekh kanal'stvo*, lit. “scoundrelry”), connoting frustration or anger—if taken literally, perhaps even directed

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<sup>146</sup> “Nichego” is literally “nothing,” but it can also be translated as “it’s nothing,” “it doesn’t matter,” or “never mind.” In other words, it is a way of dismissing something that might otherwise be perceived as negative.

<sup>147</sup> Although *nozhki* (diminutive of *nogi*) refers to both feet and legs, this passage seems to indicate a foot fetish on Poprishchin’s part, particularly in conjunction with an earlier scene in which he notices one of his fellow clerks chasing a woman and “looking at her little feet” (*gliadish' na ee nozhki*) (III:194). Freud claims that foot fetishism is based on castration anxiety, the fetish-object being a means of restoring the penis to the mother (i.e. denying female castration), and that it represents a “turning away from reality – a procedure which we should prefer to reserve for psychotics. And it is in fact not very different” (SE XI:96, SE XXIII:271-78).

paranoiacally at a third party—in three instances (III:196, 199, 203). Notably, the phrase no longer occurs after Poprishchin overcomes his castration anxiety via megalomaniacal delusion (more on this below). In this context, it seems reasonable to assume that the repetition of this phrase indicates Poprishchin’s compulsive attempts to keep the knowledge of his symbolic castration at bay: “I notice, however, that [the director] loves me especially. If only the daughter also... eh, damn it!... never mind, never mind, silence!” (III:196). Because of Poprishchin’s vague (repressed) intuition that Sophie is unattainable for him on the basis of his social status, lingering on thoughts of her threatens to destroy the complex array of narcissistic delusions he has constructed around himself.<sup>148</sup>

Poprishchin repeatedly conflates Sophie with her father—he refers to her by his title, “Your Excellency” (*vashe prevoskhoditel'stvo*), which has both civil service and military (i.e. masculine) rank connotations (III:196). He describes both of them in terms of their radiant gazes: “And to look at his face: fu, such importance shines in his eyes! ... her glance: the sun, by God, the sun!” (III:196). When Poprishchin thinks of Sophie, it is usually by following a train of thought that begins with the director—apropos of the canine correspondence, Poprishchin writes, “surely everything will be there: the portrait and all the doings of that man. There will [also] be something about her, who ... never mind, silence!” (III:201). In fact, Poprishchin’s relationship with Sophie is contingent on his relationship with the director, reflecting Heidi Hartmann’s assertion that in a patriarchy, “the power relationships between men and women appear to be dependent on the power relationships between men and men” (Sedgwick 25). Arguably, Poprishchin desires Sophie only inasmuch

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<sup>148</sup> Poprishchin’s repetition of this phrase—consisting of dismissals (*nichego*) and calls for silence (*molchanie*)—also suggests that in such cases, he may be *hearing voices*, i.e. attempting to ward off the return of the “repressed affect” as auditory hallucination (*SE* I:227). If so, this is another indication of the extent to which significant events in the story are elided in the text, reflecting Poprishchin’s denial (and ultimately, rejection) of reality.

as she represents a means of forging a relationship with her father: to him, she is a form of “property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” (Sedgwick 26).<sup>149</sup>

In many ways, Poprishchin’s ambivalent attitude toward the director resembles the relation of the son to the father in the Oedipus complex. Initially, Poprishchin venerates the director, ascribing intelligence and importance to him and believing that he is especially fond of Poprishchin.<sup>150</sup> He identifies with the director (“the likes of us”) and seems to see him as a father-figure, at one point referring to him as “papa himself, our director” (*sam papa, direktor nash*) (III:206). By marrying Sophie, Poprishchin would make the director his father-in-law, thereby bringing external reality into alignment with his fantasy—such an outcome would put an end to his symbolic impotence, permanently alleviating his castration anxiety. As the director’s son-in-law, Poprishchin would presumably have a means of increasing his wealth (a dowry) and improving his social standing (nepotism). And, on some level, Poprishchin wants to *be* the director, the man who represents the authority and respect that he so desperately craves.<sup>151</sup> In this sense, the director functions as Poprishchin’s

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<sup>149</sup> Maguire and Gustafson both assert that Poprishchin is afraid of women and threatened by female sexuality. To Ermakov, Poprishchin’s narcissism is such that “he doesn’t need a love-object [i.e. Sophie] ... he loves only himself, seeks satisfaction only from himself” (*Psikhoanaliz* 310). Ivanitsky argues that Sophie represents the Petersburg *haut monde* to Poprishchin, and attracts him only as an “accessory” (*prinadlezhnost'iu*) or a means of climbing his way into high society, i.e. a “social ladder” (*sotsia'noi* [sic] *lesnitse*) (175). In a different context, Lounsbury contends that “[i]n Poprishchin’s world virtually everything is experienced as ‘goods caught up in a circuit of ownership’” (216). In fact, Poprishchin objectifies women from the first entry, in which he describes (a fellow clerk’s proclivity for chasing after) women in curiously depersonalized language: *ty speshish' von za toiu, chto bezhit vperedu ... proidi kakaia-nibud' v shliapke, nepremenno zatsepit* (III:194, my emphasis). On Gogol’s tendency to “destabilize the boundary between the animate and inanimate spheres,” see Firtich, 25-48.

<sup>150</sup> Ivanitsky notes the contradiction between Poprishchin’s disdain for “plebeians” and his own “boundless self-abasement” (*bezmernoe samounichizhenie*) toward the director (176).

<sup>151</sup> Ermakov describes Poprishchin’s relationship to the director in terms of a “father complex” (*ottsovskogo kompleksa*)—the “[t]erm used by Freud to designate one of the chief dimensions of the Oedipus complex: the ambivalent relation to the father”—which he also associates with other male authority figures in the story: “the Spanish king, Polignac, the section chief, the chancellor, [and] the inquisitor” (*Psikhoanaliz* 302; L&P 162).

externalized ego-ideal—the ‘benevolent’ (rather than prohibitive) aspect of his superego—which constitutes “a model to which the subject attempts to conform” (L&P 144).<sup>152</sup>

The turning point in Poprishchin’s mental state occurs when, after reading the canine correspondence, he is forced to confront the fact that his fantasy will never come to fruition: Sophie will never be his wife, and the director will never be his father-in-law. Medji’s letter implies that Poprishchin is an unsuitable match because of his low social status (symbolic castration)—he learns that “there will be a wedding soon; because Papa certainly wants to see Sophie [married to] a general, or a kammerjunker, or an army colonel” (III:205). By preventing Poprishchin from obtaining Sophie (i.e. rank, money, power, and respect), the director reveals himself as the superego in its prohibitive function, becoming—like the primal father in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913)—an enemy whose position must be usurped. Poprishchin realizes that he is an object of ridicule to Sophie, who “can never keep from laughing when she looks at him,” and is not treated with the respect he feels he deserves by the director, who “always dispatches him instead of a servant” (III:205). To add insult to injury, Poprishchin isn’t even rejected by Sophie or the director: he is simply ignored by them.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> The Freudian superego is “the heir of the Oedipus complex in that it is constituted through the internalisation of parental prohibition and demands” (L&P 436). By 1933, Freud considered the ego-ideal to be a sub-structure of the superego, which comprised “the three functions ‘of self-observation, of conscience, and the ideal’” (L&P 145). He also claims that an unfulfilled ego-ideal can lead to paranoia: “paranoia is frequently caused by a wounding of the ego, by a frustration of the gratification desired within the sphere of the ego-ideal” (*SE* XII:255-56).

<sup>153</sup> For Poprishchin, one of the constitutive features of high social status is the ability to ignore people (those deemed beneath oneself), as is evident in his conflict with the section chief: “The section chief exhibited such an appearance as if he didn’t notice my arrival. I also, for my part, [pretended] like there had been nothing between us” (III:199). Cf. Chartkov’s behavior after his supernatural enrichment: “he noticed his former professor and darted nimbly past him as if without noticing him at all” (357 [III:98]). Such affected indifference is also evident in Medji’s treatment of one of her “many admirers” (a double of Poprishchin), a “mongrel [*dvorniaga*], terribly stupid ... very importantly walking along the street and imagining that he’s a wonderful personage, thinking that everyone is looking at him. By no means. I didn’t even pay attention, as if I didn’t see him” (III:203). “Mongrel” or “mutt” (*dvorniaga*) resembles “nobleman” (*dvorianin*), which Poprishchin repeatedly claims to be; given his own



In response to these revelations, Poprishchin lashes out, rejecting the director and the symbolic order that he represents: the system of rank and social hierarchy that has structured Poprishchin's consciousness.<sup>154</sup> In Medji's letter, he 'learns' that the director is ambitious (or perhaps projects his own ambition onto the director), making him an unsuitable model for emulation: as Gustafson observes, "for Popriščin ambition is the greatest sin; this one fault taints the image of his idol, because it makes him resemble the madman" (270). Thus, the director incites Poprishchin's loathing and recrimination, in accordance with Ermakov's contention that "We are most infuriated by what we conceive ourselves to be" ("Nose" 182). In the wake of this traumatic event, Poprishchin obsesses over the succession difficulties in Spain, whence he ultimately derives the material for his schizophrenic fantasy. Indeed, at this point in the story, Poprishchin's state resembles that of Spain: since the director—the symbolic father and ego-ideal—has been deposed, there is no 'king' on his throne, no authority figure for him to aspire to be.

Freud describes schizophrenia in terms of libidinal economy: object-libido is withdrawn from the external world, and libidinal energy is redirected toward the ego (i.e. narcissism, megalomania) (*SE XIV:74-5*). In keeping with this conception, Poprishchin's object-libido (invested in the director and his daughter) is transformed into ego-libido (invested in himself) after he discovers that Sophie is engaged to Teplov. This is necessitated by the fact that Poprishchin finds himself in a potential psychic crisis: his ego is already weakened by his unrequited adoration ("Loving in itself, in so far as it involves longing and

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resemblance to this deluded and self-important canine suitor, the former term suggests Poprishchin's manifest concerns about his own lineage.

<sup>154</sup> According to Julia Kristeva, "As correlative to the notion of *repression*, Freud put forward that of *denial* as a means of figuring out neurosis, that of *rejection (repudiation)* as a means of situating psychosis. The asymmetry of the two repressions becomes more marked owing to denial's bearing on the object whereas repudiation affects desire itself" (7). For an analysis of Gogol's destabilization (even reinvention) of the hierarchy of ranks, see Reyfman (2016), 86-116.

deprivation, lowers self-regard; whereas being loved ... raises it once more”), and the impending return of his repressed feelings of inferiority (i.e. knowledge of his symbolic castration) threatens to damage it even further: “The realization of impotence, of one’s own inability to love ... has an exceedingly lowering effect upon self-regard” (*SE XIV:99, 98*). Therefore, Poprishchin’s megalomaniacal delusion that he is the king of Spain represents the only means of restoring—and, in fact, elevating—his sense of self-esteem.<sup>155</sup>

After he assumes the role of “King Ferdinand,” the power dynamic between Poprishchin and his (former) superiors is radically altered.<sup>156</sup> In his narcissistic fantasy, the director now seems insignificant, no longer worthy of his respect (let alone veneration and identification). When Poprishchin returns to work “as a joke” (*dlia shutki*) after a three-week absence, he treats the section chief “indifferently” (*ravnodushno*), indicating his newly acquired social status (*III:208*). He then symbolically replaces his former father-figure, assuming his rightful position as king of the office: “I was most amused when they pushed me a paper to be signed ... In the uppermost place, where the director of the department signs, I scribbled: ‘Ferdinand VIII’” (*III:209*). Thus, Poprishchin’s delusional belief that he is the king of Spain allows him to overcome his castration anxiety—his imagined royal status becomes the symbolic phallus that he lacks in reality.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> The increasing scope of Poprishchin’s persecutory delusions—the conspiracy against him, originally imputed to his section chief, is eventually ascribed to France, England, and the Inquisition—serves the same purpose: it coincides with his need to bolster his self-esteem (in light of the increasingly evident insurmountability of his symbolic castration), and contributes to his increasing sense of self-importance. Incidentally, this is consistent with the findings of recent studies on the role of paranoia in schizophrenia: see Moritz, Werner, and von Collani.

<sup>156</sup> The fact that P. elevates himself to the status of a monarch bears comparison to the motif of the pretender (*samo-zvanstvo*) in Russian literature and history, which was often interpreted in terms of the demonic, insofar as “in the last analysis, God provided the foundation for the authority of the tsar” (Riasanovsky 137).

<sup>157</sup> The failure of Poprishchin’s prosaic, bourgeois fantasy of fulfilled ambition leads him to the hallucinatory fantasy that he is the king of Spain—these fantasies are contiguous, and ultimately, equally delusional (insofar as they are both predicated on self-deception). The difference is that Poprishchin’s earlier fantasy is bracketed, however tenuously, by the reality of the present, while his later fantasy *remakes* reality and *rejects* the present, as

Poprishchin's triumph is short-lived: he is taken to an asylum, which he interprets as "Spain," according to the schizophrenic delusion which protects his ego. By the time of his last entry, however, Poprishchin's narcissistic fantasies have eroded—in a moment of lucidity, he writes, "I no longer have the strength to endure ... They pour cold water on my head! They do not pay heed, do not see, do not listen to me ... What can I give them? I have nothing" (III:214).<sup>158</sup> After being submitted to various treatments (or tortures), including being beaten with a stick, Poprishchin is forced to face the reality of his total powerlessness—his symbolic impotence—in a way that he can no longer deny.<sup>159</sup> In response, he retreats into an infantile vision: "Mother, save your poor son! shed a teardrop on his sick little head! see how they torture him! press the poor little orphan to your breast! for him there's no place in the world! they're

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indicated by the increasingly bizarre dates (or lack thereof) assigned to diary entries after this point in the story: "April 43, 2000" (*God 2000 apreliia 43 chisla*), "Martober 86. Between day and night" (*Martobria 86 chisla. Mezhdum dnem i noch'iu*), "No date. The day was without a date" (*Nikotorogo chisla. Den' byl bez chisla*), etc. (III:207-10).

<sup>158</sup> The fact that the "inquisitors" ignore Poprishchin (*Oni ne vnemliut, ne vidiat, ne slushaiut menia*), as the section chief had done to him and as he (as Ferdinand VIII) had done to the section chief, emphasizes their superior social status in relation to his own (III:214).

<sup>159</sup> As Greenfeld notes, "the treatment administered to [Poprishchin] ... is precisely of the sort used in England and France in the early pre-psychiatry days and in Germany well into the nineteenth century" (494-5). In fact, it closely resembles regimens outlined by Thomas Willis in "one of [his] most influential works," an expansion on *Cerebri Anatome* entitled *De Anima Brutorum Quae Homini Vitalis ac Sensitiva Est* (1672), published in English as *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes, Which is that of the Vital and Sensitive of Man* (1683) (Molnár 332). In addition to the pouring of cold water on and shaving of Poprishchin's head—the latter recommended by Willis as part of the treatment regimen for everything from "*Phrensie*" and "*Madness*" to "*Stupidity*" and "*Headach*," followed by the application of poultices, "Plasters," or "the warm Entrails of some animal new killed"—the intimidation and physical violence done to him are in keeping with the first stage of Willis's treatment for "continual *Madness*," which "endeavours to correct or allay the furies and exorbitances of the Animal Spirits" and which "requires threatnings, bonds, or strokes, as well as *Physick* [i.e. medicine] ... for the curing of Mad people, there is nothing more effectual or necessary than their reverence or standing in awe of such as they think their Tormentors" (132, 205-6). Such treatment was not as cruel as it might seem, however: "*Mad-men*, what ever they bear or suffer are not hurt ... they bear cold, heat, watching, fasting, strokes, and wounds, without any sensible hurt" (205). When dealing with madness proper, Willis writes, "there is no need of keeping up the flesh ... the spirits ought not to be refreshed with Cordials, nor strength to be restored with Medicines; but on the contrary, both being too raging of themselves, things are to be administer'd as it were for the suppression or extinction of a flame raging above measure" (208). A century later, a similar philosophy was the basis for the treatment of King George III by Francis Willis (no relation); Gogol may have known some of the details of the 1788-1789 'cure,' given that Willis became a celebrity after the king's apparent recovery. According to Willis, "The emotion of fear is the first and often the only one by which [madmen] can be governed. By working on it one removes their thoughts from the phantasms occupying them and brings them back to reality, even if this entails pain and suffering" (qtd. in Scull 155).

chasing him! dear mother! take pity on your sick child!” (III:214).<sup>160</sup> Since Poprishchin’s secondary narcissism (i.e. schizophrenic megalomania) has failed, he escapes into a regressive fantasy of a return to the primary narcissism of childhood: one in which “he shall once more really be the centre and core of creation—‘His Majesty the Baby’, as we once fancied ourselves” (SE XIV:91).

## CONCLUSION

In some respects, “Nevskii Prospect,” “The Portrait,” and “Diary of a Madman” are typically Romantic narratives. In keeping with the aesthetics of Romanticism, they emphasize extreme states and are highly dualistic: binary oppositions include rapture and despair, the divine and the demonic, night and day, reality and dreams, and appearance and essence. Furthermore, in place of the pre-Romantic opposition between the rational and irrational (characteristic of both Enlightenment-era and Sentimentalist literature), Gogol focuses almost exclusively on the latter (cf. the positive and negative passions in “The Portrait”). In “Nevskii Prospect,” Piskarev’s emotions predominate—they are frequently attributed to his heart (*serdtse*), which is mentioned nine times, whereas his reason or mind (*um*) only appears once: “His reason was clouded [*Um ego pomutilsia*]” after the prostitute’s rejection of his proposal (266 [III:33]). Likewise, Chartkov’s reason (*rassudkom*) only merits a single mention: it tells him to use the gold to “shut [him]self in and work” uninterruptedly for three years, but is immediately overwhelmed by the

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<sup>160</sup> *Matushka, spasi tvoego bednogo syna! uroni slezinku na ego bol'nuiu golovushku! posmotri, kak muchat oni ego! prizhmi ko grudi svoei bednogo sirotku! emu net mesta na svete! ego goniat! Matushka! pozhalei o svoem bol'nom ditiatke!* Poprishchin’s extensive use of diminutives (“Matushka,” “golovushku,” “sirotku”) contributes to the infantile impression of his outburst. L.M. El'nitskaia attributes “archaic thinking” (*arkhaicheskoe myshlenie*) to the protagonists of Gogol’s Petersburg tales, the typological “little man” who is “unable to separate himself from the environment and analyze his own existence” (El'nitskaia 170, 171). Similarly, Ermakov ascribes a “primitive” or “pregenital character” to Gogol’s protagonists in general, and a regressive, infantile character to Poprishchin in particular (*Psikhoanaliz* 318).

voice of his youthful passions (356 [III:97]). As a rule, emotions are contrasted with each other rather than opposed to reason.

Gogol's combination of the madness motif with artist-protagonists indicates the influence of Hoffmann and Odoevskii, but his devalorization of madness suggests a polemical response. Both Odoevskii and Gogol oppose the commonplace to the supernatural—heightened perception, transcendental wisdom and creative genius (“Beethoven’s Last Quartet,” “The Sylph,” “Who are the Madmen?”), or a divine artistic ideal that brings peace to the world (“The Portrait”).<sup>161</sup> While the essential opposition between high and low remains, the difference is one of focus: whereas Odoevskii emphasizes the connection between perceived madness and creative imagination and insight, Gogol highlights the dangers of passion and the imagination, and his treatment of madness in “The Portrait” includes another level of negativity (the demonic as well as the earthly and divine). With the possible exception of Pushkin’s lyric persona in “God Grant,” none of the mad characters heretofore analyzed can be considered geniuses, which is particularly striking in the case of Gogol’s artist-protagonists, the literary type most susceptible to notions of Romantic genius.<sup>162</sup> Unlike Hoffmann’s Kreisler and Odoevskii’s Beethoven, Piskarev is not a tortured genius at odds with society or uncomprehending philistines; rather, he takes his society’s values for granted, is deceived by false beauty, and comes up against reality. Chartkov’s story is somewhat more typical of Romantic artist narratives—at least passion and imagination are

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<sup>161</sup> In Odoevskii’s “Who are the Madmen?,” an article originally intended as the introduction to *The Madhouse* and later revised for inclusion in *Russian Nights*, he argues that revolutionary scientific breakthroughs (like Franklin’s “taking control of thunder and lightning” and Robert Fulton’s steamship) seem like madness at first: “Doesn’t the condition of the madman bear a resemblance to the condition of the poet, the great genius-inventor?” (Cornwell 81; Odoevskii 264).

<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, neither of the brilliant artists in “The Portrait” who *could* be described as geniuses (Chartkov’s former comrade and the artist-monk) are depicted in terms of a positive madness; the notion of artistic ‘genius’ espoused here—in which years of dedicated labor and self-abnegation are central—is closer to Salieri than Mozart.

associated with creative potential in “The Portrait”—but he is a negative example of the type: he loses his passion, imagination, talent, and taste (i.e. is transformed into a poshliak).<sup>163</sup>

Several commentators (e.g. Magarshack, Lotman, Pavlo Shopin) see social criticism in Poprishchin’s protest—such interpretations resemble Belinskii’s understanding of Gogol’s work, as well as a positive model of madness that provides access to higher truth.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, Poprishchin’s insights into the social hierarchy (e.g. that rank is not correlated with worthiness) sometimes approach the criticism implicit in the ironic treatment of ‘nobility’ in Gogol’s other Petersburg tales.<sup>165</sup> However, Poprishchin’s ‘revolution’ is hardly a radical one: he rejects the social order only to reconfirm it after giving himself a prominent position within it. He is decidedly not a Romantic genius—rather, he is a pretentious poshliak, devoid of self-awareness, talents, or positive traits, too unexceptional to be a Byronic hero or ‘superfluous man.’ His numerous grammatical and logical mistakes (i.e. incompetence as a writer and reader), bad taste, and flawed values render him ridiculous. In this sense, he is an embryonic version (and probably the original) of Nabokov’s unreliable narrators, who are often undermined by their own discourse.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Chartkov is not unprecedented in this regard: the protagonist of “The Sylph” also descends into the moral mediocrity of poshlost’ (which is treated ironically by Odoevskii’s narrator)—but this is preceded by a supernatural journey into an otherworldly realm, where he experiences rapturous bliss and receives transcendental truths.

<sup>164</sup> For example, Magarshack suggests that Poprishchin’s madness functions as a device that masks Gogol’s social criticism, akin to Aesopian language: he argues that the “fantastic element” introduced by the madness motif is a pretext for “slip[ping] in a number of unpalatable truths which might otherwise have been blue-pencilled by the censor” (119).

<sup>165</sup> After Poprishchin discovers that his marriage fantasy will never be realized, he associates markers of social status with the demonic: “Woman is in love with the devil ... You think she’s looking at that fat one with the star? Not at all, she’s looking at the devil standing behind his back. There he is hiding in his tailcoat” (III:295). In a certain light, some of Poprishchin’s ideas—that power is arbitrary (anyone could be a sovereign) and those at the top hoard everything for themselves, making the possibility of real social advancement illusory—threaten to undermine the foundations of the sociopolitical order. Nevertheless, Poprishchin continues to crave rank even after realizing that men of high status are ambitious and self-serving, making his anagnorisis incomplete at best: characteristically, he fails to apply this discovery to himself.

<sup>166</sup> Particularly notable in this regard is the protagonist of Nabokov’s *Despair* (*Otchaianie*, 1934, English version 1937), Hermann (an homage to “Queen of Spades”). Hermann cites Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, failing to

Furthermore, in several of Poprishchin's 'rationalizations,' Gogol parodies Romantic discourse on the limits of scientific knowledge, a recurring theme in Odoevskii's works (e.g. "How many such phenomena are there, which now appear incredible to us, but which perhaps really happened, but are repudiated by our proud ignorance alone! ... many such phenomena, which we now ascribe to superstition and prejudice, will some day enter the ranks of the perfectly common") (qtd. in Cornwell 61). Poprishchin's justifications for the existence of talking dogs and his claim that "they [i.e. dogs] know all the political relations" also resemble Hoffmann's *Tomcat Murr*: "'Looking at this clever tomcat,' said Kreisler, 'I sadly recognize once more the narrow confines of our knowledge. Who can tell ... how far the intellectual capabilities of animals may extend? ... we've dismissed the entire intellectual capacity of the animal kingdom ... can the idea of instinct as a blind, involuntary urge be reconciled with the ability to dream?'" (286 [III:201]; Hoffmann 26).<sup>167</sup> Poprishchin's Romantic insistence that the improbable is still *possible* is precisely what allows for the extent of his self-delusion: "Maybe I myself don't know who I am. There are so many examples in history: some simple fellow ... some tradesman or even peasant—it's suddenly revealed that he's some sort of dignitary, or sometimes even an emperor. If even a muzhik sometimes turns out like that, what, then, may become of a nobleman?" (292 [III:206]).

Ultimately, Piskarev, Chartkov, and Poprishchin cannot access higher truths through dreams or the imagination. Instead, they are all essentially misled: Piskarev by his

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realize that the quotation in question—"Mist, vapor ... in the mist a chord that quivers"—is itself "an intentional paraphrase of Gogol's 'Memoirs of a Madman'" (Dolinin). Alexander Dolinin argues that, like Poprishchin, Hermann's status as a 'bad reader' works to "[undermine] his inflated self-image and [reveal] who he really is: a pathetic madman on a par with Gogol's hero" (Dolinin).

<sup>167</sup> Apropos of Medji's comment that "sharing thoughts, feelings, and impressions with others is one of the foremost blessings in the world," Poprishchin responds, "Hm! the thought is drawn from some work translated from the German. Can't recall the title" (287 [III:202]). If it is indeed a reference to German literature, it could be to one of Murr's narratorial asides, which, like Medji's letters, are full of Sentimentalist clichés (e.g. "How rare is true sympathy of souls in these sorry, obdurate, loveless times!") (Hoffmann 10). Presumably, the memoirs of a cat would make interesting reading for a literate lapdog.

“simpleheartedness,” obsessive passion, and unmoored imagination, Chartkov by the corrupting influence of gold and the petty passions it enables him to gratify, Poprishchin by his conflation of social status with personal worth—and all three are deceived by the false gleam and false values of high society. Moreover, in all three stories, it is precisely the revelation of truth that drives the protagonist mad: anagnorisis is not the result of madness, but its cause (cf. Mariia in *Poltava*). In this respect, Gogol’s treatment of madness is the antithesis of the positive Romantic model.<sup>168</sup>

If, as commentators since Pushkin have argued, *poshlost'* is the distinctive feature of Gogol’s art, then Gogolian *poshlost'* is broader than the concept as it has usually been understood (*Common Places* 48).<sup>169</sup> In the Petersburg tales, it involves the privileging of external signs over internal qualities (i.e. the truly valuable): in fact, Gogol’s madmen *presume a correspondence between the two*. The basic feature of *poshlost'* in this broader sense is false worthiness (in keeping with Nabokov’s definition), which, on the level of the individual, implies a warped value system—deception, if not corruption (hence the connection between *poshlost'* and the Devil identified by Merezhkovskii). The *poshlaia prostitutka* in “Nevskii Prospect” is literally

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<sup>168</sup> Madness in Gogol presupposes deception—it is only when horrible reality becomes visible through the fog of delusion that Piskarev, Chartkov, and Poprishchin are driven mad (or rather, even deeper into a preexisting madness). Notably, Gogol’s more irredeemably *poshlye* characters, who never have such moments of self-awareness, are rewarded with happier endings: Pirogov brushes off his beating at the hands of German artisans, and Kovalev’s nose returns to its proper place between his cheeks. Perhaps the difference is that Gogol’s madmen are given a ‘peek behind the curtain,’ as it were. Generally, Gogolian madness is more the result of a perceptual shift (anagnorisis) than a reversal of fortune (peripeteia)—but the latter is characteristic of madness in Pushkin, which arises in response to catastrophic events (Kochubey’s execution, the Petersburg flood, the loss of Germann’s patrimony).

<sup>169</sup> Traditionally, critics have considered Gogolian *poshlost'* in terms of characterization—for example, Sergei Bocharov writes that “Such diverse readers as Vissarion Belinsky, Apollon Grigoryev and Fyodor Dostoevsky were all equally delighted with Gogol’s Pirogov, the immortal embodiment of vulgarity” (158). This approach is reasonable, insofar as (at least post-*Mirogod*) the *poshliak* is Gogol’s most frequent character type. But Gogol’s personifications of *poshlost'* reflect Nabokov’s definition of a philistine as a “full-grown person whose interests are of a material and commonplace nature, and whose mentality is formed of *the stock ideas and conventional ideals of his or her group and time*” (309, my emphasis). This suggests that Gogolian *poshlost'* goes beyond individual characters—the fact of its ironic treatment also implicates the values of the world in which they live. As Deidre Wilson and Dan Sperber have argued, this is a general feature of verbal irony: “an ironic utterance is perceived as if set between quotation marks, as the echo of an invalid or inappropriate utterance, targeting both the originator of that utterance (i.e. the victim) and the belief system that gave rise to it” (“Irony”).



the embodiment of poshlost'—beautiful on the outside, but rotten on the inside—and all of Gogol's madmen chase after her. Both worldly and demonic, individual and social, Gogolian poshlost' is a sort of omnipresent mass delusion—Gogol's Petersburg is a poshlyi world—and the essence of madness.

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