From the Corners of the Russian Novel:

Minor Characters in Gogol, Goncharov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines a famous formal peculiarity of nineteenth-century Russian novels: the scores upon scores of characters they embrace. Drawing on terminology developed by Alex Woloch—"character space" and "character system"—I ask how Russian writers use their huge, unwieldy systems of characters to create meaning.

In each of the four central chapters I analyze a different "overcrowded" nineteenth-century Russian novel: Gogol's *Dead Souls, Part I* (1842), Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859), Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1875-77), and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80). I address questions such as: what artistic purpose do the many superfluous-seeming minor characters in Gogol's, Goncharov's, Tolstoy's, and Dostoevsky's works serve? What effect does their presence have on the structure of the novels themselves? Why was Dostoevsky so worried by the criticism, which he received throughout the 1870s, that he was "overpopulating" his novels? And how did Dostoevsky's own compositional dilemmas inform both the architectonics and the thematics of *The Brothers Karamazov*?

As I argue, there is an increasingly strong sense in nineteenth-century Russian letters that literary characters not only resemble human beings, but even demand of us the

same sort of moral obligations that people do. The perceived personhood of literary characters gives particular significance to the narrative decisions realist Russian writers make (such as how to characterize the major vs. minor figures in a novel, and how much or what kind of narrative attention to grant to each), and Gogol, Goncharov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky take full artistic advantage of it. They use the enormous number of characters who appear on the pages of their novels in order to pose, through the narrative structure of their works, many of the most important moral, social, and political questions that preoccupy them: What, in essence, is a human being? Are we capable of recognizing (or even simply acknowledging) the psychological complexity of the many, many people who surround us? Can we establish universal brotherhood on earth, a harmonious, unified society that truly includes everyone, even the most disruptive and destructive ones?

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Throughout the dissertation I use the Library of Congress system of transliteration except when listing the last names of well-known Russian writers and literary critics, and common first names that end in "ii." Therefore, I transliterate Smerdiakov, Nozdrev, and Tarant'ev, but write Tolstoy rather than Tolstoi, Dostoevsky rather than Dostoevskii, and Dmitry rather than Dmitrii. When providing bibliographic information, I use the Library of Congress system, except when citing English-language translations. There I cite the author's name as transliterated by the translator (for example, Fyodor Dostoevsky).

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INTRODUCTION

> The plot, in spite of whatever virtues may accrue to it from the acid delineation of the characters and the vivid action pictures, is the weakest part of the work. **It lacks coherence. It lacks stability [...] It is the opinion of the present reviewer that the weakness of plot is due to the great number of characters which clutter up the pages**. **The Russian school is responsible for this.** We see here the logical result of a sedulous aping of those writers such as Tolstoi, Andreief, Turgenief, Dostoiefsky, or even Pushkin, whose metier it was to fill the pages of their books with an inordinate number of characters, many of whom the reader was to encounter but once, let us say, on the Nevsky Prospekt or in the Smolny Institute, but all of whom added their peculiar names (we believe that we will not offend when we refer to Russian names as "peculiar") to **the general confusion of the whole.**
>
> - Robert Benchley's Review of the 1920 New York City Telephone Directory.[1]

Everyone knows that nineteenth-century Russian novels have a lot of characters. In fact, Russian literature is famous for it. The early twentieth-century American humorist Robert Benchley even compared the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to phonebooks—plotless, structureless masses that collapse into piles of names. (It is unfortunate that Benchley does not include Gogol in the number of offending Russian authors, since entire sections of *Dead Souls* consist solely of lists of names and addresses.) Benchley was far from the first, or the last, critic to make this complaint about nineteenth-century Russian novels.

[1] Robert C. Benchley, "The Most Popular Book of the Month," in *Of All Things* (Garden City: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1926), 191-92. My emphasis.

Even Gogol's friend and champion Konstantin Aksakov, in spite his great love of *Dead Souls*, had to admit that readers might be disoriented by the countless human figures that inexplicably appear on and then disappear from its pages.[2] Reviewers of *War and Peace* launched similar complaints against Tolstoy: in 1886 an American critic bemoaned the "plague of small creatures nibbling at the [novel's] plot."[3] Throughout the 1870s Dostoevsky, too, was criticized for "overpopulating" his works. In 1873, for example, D. D. Minaev wrote a piece for the left-wing journal *The Spark* [*Iskra*] that included a mock recipe for constructing a novel like *Demons*: "Strictly speaking neither a plot nor a harmonious plan are necessary […] A million characters and their universal extermination at the end of the novel."[4]

Can the "problem" with Russian novels simply be that they include too many characters? The Russians surely do not have a monopoly on highly populous works of fiction: does *Anna Karenina*, for example, include that many more human figures than a long work by Eliot or Dickens? The formal "confusion" that Benchley and others see in Russian novels is caused, I suggest, not only by the extremely large number of characters who parade along their pages. The inadequate *differentiation* between characters contributes to it as well: the difficulty of telling which characters will play a central role in the storyline and which will not, which are the major ones who deserve our undivided

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[2] "Некоторым может показаться странным, что лица у Гоголя сменяются без особенной причины." K. S. Aksakov, "Neskol'ko slov o poeme Gogolia 'Pohkhozhdeniia Chichikova, ili Mertvye dushi,'" in *Gogol v russkoi kritike: antologiia*, ed. S. G. Bocharov (Moscow: Fortuna EL, 2008), 41.

[3] Anonymous Review in *Critic*, July 31, 1886, in *Tolstoy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. A. V. Knowles (London, 1978), 203.

[4] D. D. Minaev, "Prazdnichnye podarki 'Iskry,'" *Iskra*, April 15, 1873, qtd. in "Primechaniia" to *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, by F. M. Dostoevskii, ed. V. G. Bazanov et al. (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1972-1990), 12:260. From here on I will cite Dostoevsky's *PSS* parenthetically in the body of the dissertation.

attention, and which we can, if not forget, at least push to the back of our minds. The hordes of characters in Russian novels would not cause such a "clutter" if we could neatly categorize them into separate groups, keeping some mentally front and center and relegating others to the back drawers of our memory. One of the earliest reviewers of *War and Peace*, writing after the publication of Books I and II in the journal *The Russian Herald* [*Russkii vestnik*], complained of the difficulty of doing just that: "You do not even know whether these characters figure in the story as heroes or whether, because of their insignificance, they only serve as a separate group to form the main background of the picture."[5]

Russian novelists, Benchley's critique suggests, introduce their reader to hundreds of fictional human figures, but do not arrange them into any obvious hierarchy of importance (instead listing them, one after another, like names in a phonebook). And the reader, confused and overwhelmed, does not know where to direct her already over-strained attention. She meets an elderly gentleman on Nevsky Prospekt and assumes, because the character has been described in meticulous detail, that he will play an important role in the plot. To the reader's great surprise, however, that character turns down a side road and disappears from the novel for good, confounding her expectations and creating a sense of aesthetic imbalance.

Benchley's humorous accusation contains more than a grain of truth. On the first page of Gogol's *Dead Souls* (which the writer and literary critic, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, famously called the first Russian novel), a young man watches as the carriage of the

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[5] Review of *War and Peace, Knizhnyi vestnik,* 1866, in *Russkaia kriticheskaia literatura o proisvedeniiakh L. N. Tolstogo*, ed. V. Zelinskii (Moscow: Tipo-lit. V. Richter, 1897-1904), 3:4, qtd. in Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in* War and Peace (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 58.

protagonist, Chichikov, rolls into town. The young man's clothing is described in such careful detail that the first-time reader feels certain that he is destined to play an important role in the story; he seems to be much more than a background figure, the type of peripheral character David Galef calls "animated scenery."[6] The narrator writes that Chichikov's carriage "was met by a young man in white canvas pants, very narrow and short, in a tailcoat with pretensions to fashion, underneath which one could see his dickey, fastened by a brooch from Tula in the shape of a bronze pistol. The young man turned back, looked at the carriage, held onto his peaked cap, which had nearly been blown off by the wind, and went along his own way."[7] Who is this mysterious young man? What does he have to do with the protagonist and his travels? Why does Gogol's narrator spend five whole lines detailing his clothing and his cap that almost (but not quite) flies away? Gogol never answers these questions. The young man walks "his own way" and off the pages of *Dead Souls*, never to appear again, thereby mystifying generations of readers.

In this dissertation I attempt to demystify seemingly unnecessary minor characters such as the fashionable young man on the first page of *Dead Souls*. I elucidate some (if not all) of the artistic purposes that apparently purposeless characters such as this one serve. Nineteenth-century Russian novels, I argue, are "overpopulated" and "cluttered" for a reason, or rather a host of interrelated reasons. In the chapters that follow I suggest that the famous formal peculiarities of Russian novels (both the "great number of

[6] David Galef, *The Supporting Cast* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 11.

[7] Nikolai Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 14 tomakh*, eds. N. L. Meshcheriakov et al. (Moscow and Leningrad: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1937-1951), 6:7. For the rest of the dissertation I will cite Gogol's *PSS* in the body of the text, using Roman numerals to indicate the volume number and Arabic numerals to indicate the page. All translations from Gogol are my own.

characters" that appear on their pages, and the difficulty of distinguishing the major from the minor) are deeply interrelated with the moral, social, and political questions these novels pose.

What (or Who) is a Minor Character?

In order to help clarify what critics have found so unusual, and even objectionable, about the structure of nineteenth-century Russian novels, I will provide a brief survey of the ways literary theorists have described the typical functions of secondary characters in realist fiction. The term "minor character" can be (and has been) defined in several different ways. For David Galef minor characters are first and foremost functional characters. They can serve as representatives of the social world that the major characters inhabit, narrators and expositors, interrupters, symbols and allegories, enablers or agents of action, foils and contrasts, or doubles of the hero.[8] Mary Doyle Springer, alternatively, suggests that the two most definitive qualities of minor characters are their stasis (they either do not develop over the course of the novel, or develop only minimally) and their role "as complements to the primary characters."[9] For E. M. Forster, the fundamental distinction to be made is not between major and minor characters, but between "round" and "flat" ones. Round characters, as Forster explains, are psychologically nuanced and able to grow and develop: "The test of a round character is whether he is capable of surprising in a convincing way."[10] Flat characters, by contrast, "are constructed around a

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[8] Galef, *The Supporting Cast*, 16-19.

[9] Mary Doyle Springer, *A Rhetoric of Literary Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 14.

[10] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold, ltd., 1961), 75.

single idea or quality"[11] and they "can be summed up in a single sentence."[12] As H. Porter Abbott puts it so well, such characters "seem to exist on the surface of the story, along with objects and machines. There are no mysterious gaps to fill since what you see is what you get."[13]

Other theorists have challenged Forster's division of characters into two groups and two groups only, and proposed their own categories instead. W. J. Harvey, for example, suggests a four-part distinction: protagonists (who "engage our responses more fully and steadily"); background characters; the "ficelle" (a term he borrows from Henry James in order to describe a character who forwards the plot or embodies a particular theme, "ultimately a means to an end rather than an end in himself"); and the "card" (a lively and eccentric character who does not fit easily into any other category).[14] Robert Higbie instead distinguishes between "subject" and "object" characters: characters with whom we are meant to identify and those with whom we are not. Arguing that a narrative in its most fundamental form resembles a sentence, with a subject (an "I") acting on some sort of object (an "it" or a "you"), Higbie concludes that certain characters stand in for

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[11] Ibid., 65.

[12] Ibid.

[13] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 131.

[14] Baruch Hochman challenges Harvey's categories and proposes using an entire spectrum of oppositions in order to group characters, including stylization vs. naturalism, transparency vs. opacity, literalness vs. symbolism, wholeness vs. fragmentariness. Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 89. Susan Lanser, by contrast, argues against trying to categorize characters at all, and instead tries to describe them according to where they fall along a sliding scale of various characteristics: are we given more "subjective" information or more "objective" information about them? Do we see them from the inside out or the outside in (what Lanser calls "internal" and "external vision," respectively)? How "deep" is our vision of each character (do we only learn about their "conscious and verbalized thoughts spoken aloud or enacted" or do we have access to their "dreams and unconscious mental processes")? Susan Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 205-12.

our “I” as we read: we imaginatively inhabit their psyches and act in (and on) the fictional world with and through them. Other characters occupy the “object” position in the figurative sentence that is the narrative. As Higbie explains, “the protagonist seems to belong to a different order of being from object-characters.” We respond to “object-characters in terms of their relation to the subject. We see them as outside the self, to some extent therefore opposed to it, existing to be acted on by it. We see them more as if they are physical objects than in the case of subject-characters…”[15] They resemble things more closely than they resemble people.

I do not think that any one of these definitions, taken individually, fully captures all the possibilities of what a minor character might be. Instead, I would argue that characters can be “minor” or “secondary” in many different ways (much as they can be “major” or “primary” in more than one way). Sometimes we perceive a character as minor because he only appears on the pages of the novel for a short period of time; other times a character may seem secondary even if she makes frequent appearances, because we never gain access to her thoughts (as opposed to the thoughts of the protagonist[s], which we know well). Sometimes a character seems minor because he does nothing to forward the plot (like Maksimov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who is utterly peripheral to

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[15] Robert Higbie, *Character and Structure in the English Novel* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1984), 17, 21. Robert Higbie is not the first critic to draw a parallel between the characters we tend to identify with, and those we tend *not* to identify with, and the subject and object of a sentence. Higbie, for example, cites Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Semantique structurale, recherché de methode* (Paris: Larousse, 1966), 173ff. Mieke Bal also distinguishes the “subject-actant” from the “object-actant” (Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997], 197). Boris Uspensky makes a similar observation: “[I]f some characters in the work serve as the subject of the author’s perceptions, others function solely as the object […] It would seem that the characters whose role the author assumes are usually the main characters, while the less important or incidental characters compose the background (they are ‘extras’ so to speak), and do not justify internal description” (Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973], 91).

all of the central characters and central story lines in the novel); or she might strike us as secondary because her only purpose seems to be to forward the protagonist's plot (like Betsy in *Anna Karenina*, a very "functional" character, who serves as a symbol for Petersburg high society, on the one hand, and a facilitator of Anna's romance, on the other). In my analysis of the marginal characters in nineteenth-century Russian novels, I touch on characters who are minor or secondary in every single one of these different ways (and several that fall into more than one category). Some readers may question whether one or another of the characters I discuss is really "secondary," and that is to be expected. For the nineteenth-century Russian writers I study, the very act of designating certain characters primary and others only secondary was extremely problematic. And, as I will argue, Gogol, Goncharov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky often make a point of blurring this very distinction.

How Do Minor and Secondary Characters Function?

Despite the disparate methodologies and terminology they develop, the critics I have mentioned thus far have at least one thing in common: the conviction that a single nineteenth-century novel can, and perhaps should, include characters who differ not only in quality, but also in kind. On the one hand, there are those characters that, to quote Harvey, are "end-products; they are what the novel exists for."[16] On the other hand, there are functional characters of various types, however one chooses to label them, whether "flat," "background characters," *ficelles*, "object-characters," symbolic, "semiotic" and/or

[16] W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 56. Protagonists, Harvey argues, tend not to bear as much "generalized, representative value" as the ficelle or the various background characters, and for good reason: "what we attend to in his story is the individual, the unique and particular case […] the more he stands for the less he is." Ibid., 67.

fragmentary characters, “partial constructs […] felt to be a function of the action in which they are found and not beings who can be envisioned by themselves in their wholeness.”[17] But it is by virtue of these “partial” characters that novels function: to quote David Galef, “they carry out much of the mechanics of the fiction.”[18]

For E. M. Forster, for example, the exigencies of character development and those of plot and form are always in tension with one another. Literary characters, according to Forster, “try to live their own lives and are consequently often engaged against the main scheme of the book. They ‘run away,’ they ‘get out of hand.’ They are creations inside a creation and often inharmonious towards it; if they are given complete freedom they kick the book to pieces.”[19] If, by contrast, the author tries to corral them into an artificial plot, making them behave in ways that contradict the internal logic of the characters’ personalities, they lose their vitality. A successful novel, Forster argues, has to find a balance between a well-formed plot and multi-dimensional characters. Both “round” *and* “flat” characters serve essential functions in a novel: the “round” characters fulfill the reader’s need to engage with psychologically complex fictional beings that resemble him- or herself. Flat, functional characters help build structure (fulfilling the sorts of functions that Galef lists). Just as one needs rectangular bricks to build a house, one needs flat characters to build a novel: add in too many spheres and they will simply roll off one another—the house will collapse. For Forster, the structures of Russian novels resemble

[17] Hochman, *Character in Literature*, 107-8.

[18] David Galef, *The Supporting Cast*, 1.

[19] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 64.

so many collapsed houses: in them, he quips, flat characters “so seldom occur, they would be a decided help.”[20]

Boris Uspensky, alternatively, sees the essential function of flat minor characters in the way they help guide the reader’s attention. He compares the difference between the central and peripheral characters in a novel to that between the figures in the foreground and the background of a medieval painting. Much as the figures on the edges of a medieval painting are created according to a different artistic system than those in the center (the background figures often being shown from a bird’s eye view, the figures in the foreground straight on), the “extras who appear, so to speak, in the background of the narrative are usually represented through compositional devices which are in opposition to those used to describe the main character.”[21] They are presented through an external point of view, “described not as people but as puppets,”[22] whereas “the central figures, as opposed to the secondary ones, are less semiotic (conventional) and, accordingly, more lifelike.”[23] And these puppet-like minor characters serve much the same purpose as the figures on the periphery of a medieval painting. Just as the “flat” figures in a painting help guide the reader’s gaze to the most important point (the figures in the center of the canvas), authors use flat secondary characters to guide, not the reader’s gaze, but his attention and memory, drawing it away from the flat peripheral characters themselves and towards the central figures in the novel.

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[20] Ibid., 66.

[21] Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition*, 159.

[22] Ibid.,160.

[23] Ibid., 163.

What happens to the structure of a novel, then, if the background figures intrude into the foreground, the flat characters take on dimension, and the secondary characters do not fulfill their typical "mechanical" functions? If, as Higbie suggests, a narrative is like a sentence, what happens to the structure of that narrative if, instead of "subject—verb—object," the author gives us "subject—verb—subject, subject, subject, subject…"? Jonathan Culler has written that "we attempt to decide early in the novel which are the characters to whom we should pay most attention and, having identified a main character, to play others in relation to them."[24] What sort of an interpretive bind do we, as readers, find ourselves in when we cannot identify a main character (or even a set of main characters)? Given the criticism that authors like Gogol, Goncharov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky routinely received for doing precisely this (overloading their novels with characters and subplots, and confusing their readers by failing to adequately differentiate the primary from the secondary figures), why did these writers keep doing it?

Alex Woloch

For the theoretical tools I need to address these questions, I turn to the most important contribution to the study of character in the past twenty-five years, Alex Woloch's, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (2003). In order to understand Woloch's theory, one must first understand what he thinks literary characters to be. For Woloch, literary characters are, on the one hand, "implied people" (fictional human beings) and, on the other, puzzle pieces in the overall structure of the novel they inhabit: "[T]he literary character is itself divided, always emerging at

[24] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 233.

the juncture between structure and reference."[25] The divided nature of the literary character, which is meant both to resemble a human being, and to fulfill an assigned function within the larger artwork, creates what Woloch calls a "tension between the character as implied person and the character as symbolic or textual element."[26]

This tension is most acutely felt in the minor and secondary characters, the ones who carry out the mechanics of the novel, because their "implied humanness" is often eclipsed by their functionality as personified plot pushers, allegories or symbols, or foils for the protagonist. Woloch acknowledges what theorists like Forster, Harvey, and Uspensky have long known: that nineteenth-century novels frequently include flat or functional characters for the sake of plot, theme, and structure. Woloch's innovation is his contention that the exalting of some characters over others, even though they are only "implied," *fictional* people within a text, rankles against the democratic political impulses that were so powerful in the nineteenth century: "[T]he realist novel never ceases to make allegorical (or functional) use of subordinate characters, but it does ferociously problematize such allegory."[27] Realist writers, Woloch argues, play on the tension between the necessarily limited position that their minor characters occupy in the narrative as a whole, and their potential (though never realized) existence as full-fledged personalities in their own right. Austen and Dickens make their flat and functional secondary characters look as if they had been actually flattened; their minor characters

[25] Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 17.

[26] Ibid., 196.

[27] Ibid., 20. As Woloch explains, "The claims of minor characters on the reader's attention—and the resultant tension between characters and their functions—are generated by the democratic impulse that forms a horizon of nineteenth-century politics" (Ibid., 31).

move in ways that are jerky or mechanical, and are often missing limbs, ears and eyes (the literal realization of their status as "partial constructs").

Although Woloch focuses on psychologically complex, individuated protagonists, on the one hand, and the flat, typified secondary characters that surround them, on the other, the theoretical language he develops has much broader applications and implications to the study of the novel (as Woloch himself points out). The terms he uses—"character space" (the amount of narrative attention devoted to any one character)[28] and "character system" (the way in which the "character spaces" of each individual human figure in a novel interact with one another)—can be fruitfully applied to a wide variety of nineteenth-century novels. Woloch's point is not that all novels are constructed along similar lines (with a singular protagonist in the center and minor characters crowded in the periphery), but rather that novelists use the distribution of narrative attention between the many different characters in their stories as a way of creating meaning. As Woloch explains, "The arrangement of protagonist and minor characters, within the story and the discourse, is a problem that almost any novel in this period must work through, becoming an essential field of narrative signification."[29] The

[28] Mikhail Bakhtin, in his essay "Discourse in the Novel," develops a term, "character zone," that closely resembles Woloch's "character space." In keeping with Bakhtin's emphasis on language (his idea that each character in a novel speaks in his own, particular ideological language, which dialogically interacts with the voices of the author, narrator and other characters), a character's "zone" is his sphere of linguistic influence, "the field of action for a character's voice." It includes both that character's direct discourse, and moments when other characters or the narrator adopt his language. "Important characters," as Bakhtin explains, have particularly large and stylistically idiosyncratic "character zones." Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 316, 321.

[29] Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 35. Woloch uses Seymour Chatman's distinction between a film or work of fiction's "story" (what happens in it) and its "discourse" (the order and manner in which the events of the story are related to the reader). In this dissertation I rely on Chatman's terminology as well. See Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

way novels exclude certain characters from the center of the narrative or, by contrast, refuse to exclude any of them—expanding their structures to embrace more and more human figures—is part of the story that they tell.

Woloch's theory may not be applicable to each and every novel. It hinges on the assumption that literary characters are implied people, and some writers (especially in the twentieth century) may abandon that assumption, or at least present such a different picture of what a person is that nineteenth-century writers would have a hard time recognizing it.[30] As Lydia Ginzburg has argued in her 1979 study, *About the Literary Hero* [*O literaturnom geroe*], however, for nineteenth-century realist writers it was essential that their characters at least *seem* to have more in common with people in the world than with the literary types that came before. In general, Ginzburg shows, the nineteenth century saw a "deformalization of literature" [деформализация литературы], a turn from the more stylized forms of the eighteenth century that relied heavily on literary convention, toward an attempt "to establish a sort of unmediated contact with reality, passing over formulae."[31] One of the most important attributes of this striving for "contact with reality" was a "new structure of the literary character."[32] When constructing a character, the realist author consciously strives to avoid well-worn literary

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[30] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan asks whether the twentieth century has seen "the Death of Character," both in criticism and in literature, but ultimately concludes that character is still alive, even if he may have taken on a slightly different form: "But is character as 'dead' as all that? Do the new views dispense with it altogether, or do they only dismantle a certain traditional concept of it? Can the changing notions be seen as nevertheless leaving some constitutive characteristics recognizable? […] And do not even the minimal depersonalized characters of some modern fiction 'deserve' a non-reductive theory which will adequately account for their place and functioning within the narrative network?" Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics,* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1983), 31.

[31] Lydia Ginzburg, *O literaturnom geroe* (Leningrad: Sovietskii pisatel', Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1979), 62.

[32] Ibid.

types (the "Thwackums" and "Squares" that live their half lives in so many eighteenth-century novels), instead depicting contemporary social figures as he sees them in the world. Realism prizes "characters who are not predetermined" [непредустановленные персонажи], whose appearance and behavior does not repeat long-standing literary convention, and who may very well surprise the reader with their unexpected choices and actions.[33]

In nineteenth-century Russian literature the idea that literary characters should (and do) resemble people was especially well developed. In Goncharov's *Oblomov*, as I discuss in chapter two, the titular protagonist not only insists that literary characters should resemble human beings, but also that they demand of us the same sort of moral obligations that living people do. Oblomov tells the writer Penkin, "Depict a thief, a fallen woman, a puffed-up fool, but don't forget that there is a human being there. Where is your humaneness? […] love him, remember yourself in him and treat him as you would yourself—then I will read you and bow my head before you. Give me a human being, a human being!"[34] Dostoevsky, although he deeply admired Gogol, frequently expressed a certain dissatisfaction with Gogolian characters, who do not, in his opinion, resemble real people in all their fullness and complexity. In a draft of his 1880 speech in honor of Pushkin Dostoevsky wrote:

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[33] Because the deformalization of literature is a slow and sinuous process, however, traces of older artistic systems can still be found within realist novels, and for Ginzburg secondary characters are precisely those sorts of "traces": "In general, different methods have long been applied to the characters of the first order and the secondary and episodic characters. In depicting the secondary characters, the author is usually more traditional, he lags behind himself." The secondary characters, so often demonstratively literary "types," symbols and allegories, seem to have walked off the pages of an eighteenth-century novel and into a nineteenth-century one, time-travellers from a different literary era. Ibid., 76.

[34] I. A. Goncharov, *Oblomov: Roman v chetyrekh chastiakh*, ed. L. S. Geiro (Leningrad: "Nauka," Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1987), 25. From here on I will cite this edition of *Oblomov* parenthetically in the body of the dissertation. All translations from Goncharov are my own.

> In literature there are types and real persons—the latter representing sober and complete (as far as possible) truth about man. The type rarely consists in a real person, but a real person can appear thoroughly typical (Hamlet, for example). Gogol's Sobakevich is only Sobakevich, Manilov is only Manilov, we do not see real people in them, but we see only those features of these people which the artist wished to evoke […] The type almost never contains in it full truth because it almost never represents full essence: the truth in it is what the artist wanted to express in this person, and what he wanted to point out. Therefore the type is quite often only half of the truth, and half of the truth quite often is a lie […] There is nobody in the whole world who could be regarded as a scoundrel and nothing else. (26:315-16)[35]

Dostoevsky's criticism of Sobakevich and Manilov's lack of multi-dimensionality notwithstanding, even Gogol's *Dead Souls* derives much of its power from the reader's *expectation* that literary characters resemble human beings. Gogol's characters seem so "dead" to us because we expect to encounter them alive.

Four Nineteenth-Century Russian Novels

In this dissertation I ask how nineteenth-century Russian novels navigate (or fail, or even refuse, to navigate) the "tension between the character as implied person and the character as symbolic or textual element" that Woloch identifies as a dilemma all realist writers of the time period had to face. What story do the huge, unwieldy, improperly hierarchized character systems of nineteenth-century Russian novels tell? How can we account for what so many critics have seen as a national tradition of failing to adequately exclude from the center of the narrative characters who in other novels would occupy the periphery, and letting background figures sneak into the foreground?

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[35] Qtd. in Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of his Philosophy of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 106-7. In another draft of the speech, Dostoevsky unfavorably compares Fonvizin's cariacatures with Pushkin's characters, which he believed to be ideal representations of real persons on the written page (26:294-95).

My analysis focuses on four famously "overcrowded" novels by four different writers, spanning the time period from early Russian realism to its height: Gogol's *Dead Souls, Part I* (1842), Goncharov's *Oblomov* (1859), Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1875-77), and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80). I will ask questions such as: what is the young man with the pistol-shaped brooch (and so many other characters just as seemingly superfluous) doing in *Dead Souls*? What makes it so hard to tell which character (or characters) is the positive hero (or heroes) of *Oblomov*, if any of them? In *Anna Karenina*, which has been called two novels woven into one, do the character systems of Levin's and Anna's halves of the novel function in the same way, and if not, why not? What is the correlation in *The Brothers Karamazov* between the formal question that Dostoevsky struggled with throughout the 1870s (can one compose an artistically coherent novel while still respecting the human complexity of each and every character?) and the moral questions that characters raise in the story itself: can we build a harmonious society on earth that truly includes everyone, even the most disruptive, difficult, and dangerous people? And finally, I will address the question: why *is* a Russian novel like a phonebook?

CHAPTER ONE

Characters without End (or, What's Killing Gogol's Smallest Souls?)

> Selifan, swinging his whip, started up not so much a song as a long sort of something that had no end. Everything went into it: all the encouraging and coercive cries they use to regale horses all through Russia, from one endless end [бесконечного конца] of it to the other […] and he added all sorts of adjectives without much consideration, just whatever happened to come to his lips first.
> —Draft of *Dead Souls*, Part One (VI, 363)

> In Gogol it's simply never clear what's important and what's not, and it's funny because of that, but eerie, too.[1]
> —Olga Meerson

In an unfinished instructional manual, *A Textbook of Literature for Russian Youth* [Учебная книга словесности для русского юношества], which Gogol drafted during the mid-1840s, he insisted that novels should be tightly organized and structured around a dominant central hero. No extraneous details (or characters) should be allowed to distract the reader's attention from the hero's fate, or to unbalance the novel's structure. Gogol explains:

> All the characters that should act, or, better still, between whom the action should be set, ought to be chosen ahead of time by the author; the author should concern himself with the fate of each of them. He cannot move them past quickly or in a multitude, like images flying by. Each appearance of a character that might seem at first to be insignificant heralds his participation [in the storyline] later. Everything that appears,

[1] "[У] Гоголя просто никогда не ясно, что важно, а что нет, и от этого смешно, хотя и жутковато." Olga Meerson, "Chetvertyi brat ili kozel otpushcheniia ex machina?" in *Roman Dostoevskogo "Brat'ia Karamazovy": Sovremennoe sostoianie izucheniia*, ed. T. A. Kasatkina (Moscow: Nauka, 2007), 572.

> appears only because it is all too connected with the fate of the hero himself. (VIII, 481)

Dead Souls does not even come close to fitting this model. Human figures, named and unnamed, described in detail and utterly featureless, waltz on and off the pages of *Dead Souls* seemingly without rhyme or reason. Not only do they peek their heads out of every nook and cranny that Chichikov passes, but also dozens upon dozens "assert their existence" in the narrator's lyric digressions and extended similes (figures that Nabokov calls "comparison-born characters").[2] From a certain Semen Ivanovich, whose only distinguishing characteristic is the signet ring he wears on his finger and shows off to the ladies (VI, 197), to the mysterious Kuku, Perkhunovskii, and Berebendovskii, who prance through the governor's ball and out of *Dead Souls* forever (VI, 164), Gogol's text overflows with countless numbers of the most unexpected human personalities who have only the remotest connection to "the fate of the hero himself."

Gogol's stringent requirements for novelistic form help explain his reluctance to call *Dead Souls* a novel. In a famous 1836 letter to his sometime friend and publisher, Pogodin, Gogol could describe the piece he was working on only apophatically: "The thing that I am sitting and laboring over now and which I've been thinking over for a long time, and will keep thinking over for a long time yet, is not like a novella [*povest'*], not like a novel [*roman*]; it is long, long [*dlinnaia, dlinnaia*], in several volumes" (XI, 77). He finally settled on the label *poema*, a term whose epic associations better matched the grand scope of his literary aspirations. The way Gogol would describe another famous

[2] "The peripheral characters of his novel are engendered by the subordinate clauses of its various metaphors, comparisons and lyrical outbursts. We are faced by the remarkable phenomenon of mere forms of speech directly giving rise to live creatures." Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions Books, 1944), 78.

poema, *The Odyssey*, gives the reader a hint of what Gogol was trying to achieve in his own modern-day epic: "*The Odyssey* captures the entire ancient world, public and private life, all the professions of the people of that time, with their trades, titles, beliefs … in a word, it's difficult even to say what *The Odyssey* doesn't embrace, or what is left out of it" (VIII, 236).[3]

In this chapter I ask what purpose the hordes of characters who appear on the pages of Gogol's non-novel serve. What drove Gogol to add more and more human figures to each subsequent draft of the *poema* (and plan to include still more)? I hope to show that the answers to these questions provide a key to understanding not only *Dead Souls*, but also Gogol's verbal art in general. First I will examine the ways Gogol structures his *poema* to make it maximally inclusive. Then I will look at the author's own writing process (which consisted largely in expanding the *poema* to embrace an ever-increasing number of human figures). Finally, I will explore those moments in the text when Gogol, consciously or subconsciously, draws attention to the narrative chaos his own attempt to encompass all of Russia engenders. Cathy Popkin has argued that Gogol's prose "is somehow about its own discursive dilemmas"; that its content continually refers back to its own unbridled expansiveness.[4] Using her thesis as a starting point, I will suggest that *Dead Souls* tells two stories: the story of Chichikov's travels and the story of the enormous toll Gogol's own literary ambitions take, both on the structure of the *poema* itself and on the characters who exist within it.

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[3] Many critics have pointed to the similarities between *Dead Souls* and both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Some recent studies that analyze the interconnections between *Dead Souls* and Homer's epics include Michael R. Kelly, "Navigating a Landscape of *Dead Souls*: Gogol and the Odyssean Road," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 39 (2005): 37-61; and Frederick T. Griffiths and Stanley J. Rabinowitz, *Epic and the Russian Novel: From Gogol to Pasternak* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011).

[4] Cathy Popkin, *The Pragmatics of Insignificance: Chekhov, Zoshchenko, Gogol* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 161.

"All of Russia"

When he first began working on *Dead Souls* in 1836 Gogol famously called it "a variegated pile! All of Russia will appear in it!" [Какая разнообразная куча! Вся Русь явится в нем!] (XI, 74). Coming from the pen of a writer less obsessed with achieving absolute comprehensiveness this would be a hyperbole, but Gogol meant it very close to literally. Despite having worked on part one (of the projected, but never completed, three-part work) for five years straight, he lamented having published it prematurely. And he spent another half decade hesitating over whether or not to release a second edition without making major revisions first. Finally, in 1847 he agreed to rerelease part one, but only with a preface emphasizing just how incomplete he still considered it to be. In the preface Gogol regrets that he "could not find everything out" [я не мог узнать всего], explaining that "one life is not enough to find out even one hundredth part of all that is happening in our land" (VI, 587). He begs readers from every social class not only to send him notes on part one, but also to describe their own lives with impossible thoroughness. In a manner typical of *Dead Souls* itself (and of Gogol's writing in general) the limits of his request stretch out further and further: after their own lives, he begs them to describe their acquaintances' lives, then the people and things that they have only heard about secondhand: "his whole life, and all the people he has ever met, and all the events he has witnessed, and everything that he has seen himself or heard from

others" (VI, 588). Only once Gogol had collected all of this information did he believe he would be equipped with adequate knowledge to complete his project.[5]

In *Dead Souls* Gogol most of all attempted to capture Russian people, in all their manifold varieties. The *poema*'s ambiguous title is unambiguous in at least one respect: this is a work about souls, which is to say, about human beings, whether living, dead, or dead to the world. In his "Author's Confession," Gogol claimed that Pushkin had suggested the conceit of *Dead Souls* to him precisely because it would allow the young Ukrainian writer "to portray a multitude of the most variegated characters" (VIII, 440). If Pushkin did in fact make this suggestion, then Gogol took it to an incredible extreme. It might be an exaggeration to say that Gogol wanted to include every single Russian person in *Dead Souls*, but not a very big one.

Gogol's impulse to encompass everything in the *poema*, to add more and more people, animals and things until he finally had captured "all of Russia" (a "finally" that he could never actually reach) precludes any sort of stable formal structure. It is no accident that Gogol wrote his two most famous statements about *Dead Souls*, that it is a "variegated pile" and that "all of Russia will appear in it," in neighboring sentences of the very same letter. *Dead Souls* is a "pile" precisely because Gogol is always willing to

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[5] Edyta Bojanowska has shown that Gogol's attempts (from the time he published *Dead Souls* part one until his death) to gather more and more historical, agricultural, social, naturalistic, and every other sort of information about Russia was a direct response to criticism that a) he had painted too negative a portrait of Russia in *Dead Souls* part one, and b) he did not know the country very well. As Bojanowska writes, "While Gogol's unenlightened, impressionistic views of Russia rendered merely a record of its faults, a solid study would provide him, or so he hoped, with positive material." In 1848 Gogol wrote a letter to his confessor, Matvei Konstantinovsky, in which he writes that if he could only gain "a better insight into man's duty on earth and to truth" then he could use his encyclopedic knowledge of Russia to "lead my reader, using my talent for capturing characters, to a better knowledge of a Russian" (XIV, 40). Gogol did not believe that would be able to "lead" his reader appropriately through the material he gathered (i.e. to sort and organize it), however, until he himself had undergone a moral transformation. Edyta Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 317-19.

throw one more thing into it. Like the coachman Selifan's song, a draft of which serves as the epigraph to this chapter, "everything goes into it […] from one endless end [of Russia] to the other." And like the song (which the narrator can only, in good faith, call "not a song" [песню не песню], since it has no melody, verse, logic or structure), the broader the scope of *Dead Souls* becomes, the more quickly it disintegrates into a formless, genre-less "long sort of something" [что-то такое длинное] without end (VI, 363). Gogol's attempt to embrace all of Russia in one *poema* not only destabilizes the structure of the work, but also threatens to drown the plentiful representatives of Russian life themselves (*Dead Souls* very *raison d'etre*) in a "variegated pile" of everything and everyone. In his analysis of Gogol's story "The Tale of the Two Ivans," Donald Fanger claims that "a chaos of things—some 'present,' some invoked by analogy or association—overshadows and threatens to absorb the identifiably human; miscellaneousness swamps significance; sound threatens meaning."[6] With one small adjustment, Fanger's argument applies to *Dead Souls* as well: it is swamped not only by "a chaos of things," but also by a chaos of people. The more characters Gogol adds to it, the less distinct and "significant" each one seems, lost in this pile of everyone and everything.[7]

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[6] Donald Fanger, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 107.

[7] Although my chapter focuses on the many characters Gogol introduces into his *poema*, his desire to bring every*thing* into it is just as significant, and has a strong effect on the way he portrays his characters. As Gogol throws everything and everyone into the *poema*, the constant alternation between descriptions of animals, people, and things in Gogol's narrative threatens to blur the boundaries between all three categories. In one scene, for example, Chichikov looks out the window of his carriage at a village, as "Peasant women with fat faces and wrapped-up chests looked out of the upper windows; out of the lower ones a calf was looking out, or a pig was sticking out its blind snout" (VI, 21-22). The description of the staring women, followed by the description of the farm animals doing much the same thing, suggests an undeniable likeness between the two. For an example of how Gogol uses similar rhetorical techniques to blur the boundaries between men and geese, children and piles of trash, see my article, "Gogol's Language

The Decentering "Center" of *Dead Souls*

How does one compose a prose work that will encompass the entire population of an enormous empire? Gogol does so first and foremost with the help of his mobile, talkative, and undiscriminating protagonist, Chichikov. Many have argued that Chichikov functions as the "glue" that keeps the structure of the *poema* together. Andrei Bely wrote that Chichikov was "the organizing principle" of *Dead Souls*;[8] Yuri Mann has argued that he is the "axis" around which the *Dead Souls* turns, its true central figure.[9] The narrator frequently does follow Chichikov's physical movements (with several spectacular exceptions, which I will discuss below): chapters 1, 3, and 4 both begin and end on Chichikov, and chapters 2, 5, 6, and 11 either begin or end on him. The function of Chichikov's character, however, is not to "anchor" the story by his own person, but rather to pull up the anchor, roll down the sails, and send it flying "who knows where, into the vanishing distance" [нивесть куда в пропадающую даль] (VI, 246). Just as *Dead Souls* is not a novel (at least not in the sense that Gogol understood the term), Chichikov is not Gogol's ideal novelistic hero: the center of a story in which everything that appears "appears only because it is all too connected with the fate of the hero himself." Instead of centering the *poema* on himself, Chichikov radically *de*centers it, dragging the narrative along with him wherever (and to whomever) he may roam.

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of Instability: 'The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich' and the Problem of Identity," *Slavic and East European Journal* 58, no. 1 (Spring, 2014): 19-32.

[8] Andrei Bely, *Masterstvo Gogolia: Issledovaniia* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozhestv. lit-ry, 1934), 398.

[9] Yurii Mann, *Poetika Gogolia: Variatsii k teme* (Moscow: Coda, 1996), 271-86.

Chichikov has roamed quite a lot. He has travelled, and continues to travel, all through the Russian empire. As Igor Zolotusskii puts it, "Chichikov, judging by his traveling papers, has managed to be everywhere: in the north, in the south, on the Volga, and God knows where else. He has served at the border, traveled around Little Russia [Ukraine], and has been in Belarus and Poland."[10] Chichikov will not only go anywhere, he will also talk to anyone he meets along the way, whomever he happens to bump into first. When the narrator finally reveals the details of Chichikov's plot (to buy up deceased serfs and take out a fraudulent mortgage on them), he implies his protagonist chooses his targets with special care: "He did not approach any landlord at random, but chose people who were more to his taste, or those with whom he could conduct such dealings with less difficulty" (VI, 240-1). Yet in part one we never see Chichikov show any such selectiveness or care of judgment. He tries to buy serfs both from Korobochka (a stubborn old landowner he just happens to stumble across) and Nozdrev (a notorious loudmouth, liar, and cheat).

In fact, from the moment he appears in the *poema*, Chichikov demonstrates not selectiveness in the people with whom he speaks and things he collects, but to the contrary, a hoarder's impulse to accumulate more and more information, more and more things, more and more acquaintances. When he happens on a poster for a play, he reads it all the way through, both the front and the back (!):

> A drama by Kotzebue was being staged in which the part of Rolla was played by Mr. Poplevin, Cora by Miss Ziablova. The rest of the characters were even less remarkable, but he read them all, made it even to the price of a seat in the stalls and found out that the poster had been printed in the printing works of the provincial government, and then turned it over to the other side to find out whether or not there was anything there, but,

[10] Igor Zolotusskii, *Smekh Gogolia* (Irkutsk: izd-vo. Sapronov, 2008), 169.

> discovering nothing, rubbed his eyes, rolled it up neatly and placed it in his box, where he was in the habit of putting everything that he came across. (VI, 12)

Unlike the narrator, who dismisses most of the characters as "unremarkable," Chichikov seems to think that every character in this play is worth remarking upon, noting, and storing away in his traveling case. For Chichikov there simply are no minor characters, in the theater or in life: he wants to meet and speak with everyone. When he starts visiting the civil servants in town, for example, he decides to meet everyone*,* irrespective of whether or not they can help him in his schemes:

> Then he headed to the Vice Governor's, then he was at the prosecutor's, at the chairman of the house's, at the police chief's, at the tax collector's, at the head of state factories' […] he appeared even to show his respects to the director of the medical board and the city architect. And still for a long time after he sat in his carriage, thinking whom he might visit next, but there were no more civil servants to be found in the city. (VI, 12)

As the narrator tries to recount every single person Chichikov visits, even he runs out of energy, musing that "it is a little bit difficult to mention all the important people in this world." That is an understatement, however: Chichikov not only visits the powerful officials, but the not-so-powerful ones as well. He only stops visiting (with a certain amount of regret) once he has exhausted every last one.

Chichikov Falls Asleep

Nevertheless, Gogol finds following even this decentralizing central character limiting. The narrator claims to be walking "arm in arm" with his protagonist throughout the *poema*, but in fact the narrator is always ready to break away, to wrench himself out from Chichikov's grasp and to fly out in every direction, to absorb more people and things into the *poema* than even the hoarder of a hero can. When the narrator describes Chichikov's

hotel room, for example, he begins by describing what Chichikov himself can see: the cockroaches in the corners and "the door to the neighboring room, always blocked by a chest of drawers" (VI, 8). But since no door in *Dead Souls* may remain closed, whether it is blocked by a dresser or not, the narrator pushes out past this barrier in order to describe the adjoining room, a place where Chichikov's eyes cannot reach, and "where his neighbor is settling down, a silent and calm person, but extremely curious, and wanting to know all the details about the traveler" (VI, 8). Then the narrator pushes beyond yet another barrier, describing the hotel's facade, only to take yet another step outward. The narrator details the courtyard outside of the hotel, in the foremost corner of which "sat a *sbiten* seller, with a *samovar* made of red copper and a face just as red as the *samovar*" (VI, 8). The *poema* has undergone a steady horizontal expansion, moving beyond the limits of Chichikov's room until it encompasses even the samovar, and the samovar-like merchant, in the furthest stall of the hotel yard.

The narrator often seems only to be waiting for Chichikov to fall asleep so that he can take another one of these horizontal flights. At the end of chapter seven, for example, Chichikov collapses onto his bed, drunk and dead to the world. The narrator, now free to ignore his snoring protagonist, takes this opportunity to step out of Chichikov's room, slide into the corridor, and see what the serfs, Selifan and Petrushka, are doing. Once Selifan and Petrushka themselves collapse in a drunken stupor, the narrator moves out still further, to the other end of the hotel, where "some sort of lieutenant arrived from Riazan', a great lover, it would seem, of boots" (VI, 1153), is parading around now in one, now in another of his five new pairs of shoes. Chichikov may be useful to Gogol when he is awake, but he is perhaps even more useful when he nods off. The narrator, no

longer tied to his hero's arm, can then explore places Chichikov would not; he can peek into every nook and cranny, every lit window, expanding the limits of the already over-populated *poema* to include even more human figures.

The Hero-Who-Wasn't

Sometimes the narrator replaces Chichikov with a different hero entirely, a maneuver that allows him to add yet another set of characters to his *poema* and to expand its scope further still. Whenever Chichikov's response to a beautiful woman or a twilit street seems inadequately poetic to the narrator, the narrator pushes his full-bodied hero out of the way and begins to describe the impressions a romantic, altogether more heroic 20-year-old student or hussar might have had in the pragmatic, middle-aged Chichikov's place. For example, when Chichikov first catches sight of the governor's daughter and assesses her with an all-too-calculating eye, the narrator calls up this hero-who-wasn't: "If there happened at this time to be, instead of Chichikov, some sort of twenty-year-old youth, whether a hussar or a student, or simply [a young man] just having begun his life's work, then, God! What wouldn't have awoken, shaken, begun to speak within him!" (VI, 92). The narrator conjures up the 20-year-old phantom hero yet again when Chichikov, giddy over newly acquired dead souls, fails to notice the sights and sounds of the twilit town around him, which "suddenly will pour over, like pitch, some sort of dreaming twenty-year-old youth, when, returning from the theater, he carries in his head a Spanish street, nighttime, the wondrous image of a woman with a guitar and curls" (VI, 131). The imaginary twenty-year-old hero makes a brief, hypothetical appearance in Chichikov's

carriage in order to express emotions and notice details that the hero never would, and so becoming yet another character in the *poema*, if only a phantom one.

The hero-who-wasn't does not remain a mere phantom, however: this twenty-year-old hero is incarnated, to one degree or another, in several of the *poema*'s most peripheral characters. The first and most spectacular appearance of the hero-who-wasn't comes in the very first scene of the *poema*. Only three people see Chichikov's carriage roll into the town of N—, two *muzhiks* and the mysterious young man I mentioned in the introduction, whose clothing the narrator describes in meticulous detail: "a young man in white canvas pants, very narrow and short, in a tailcoat with pretensions to fashion, underneath which one could see his dickey, fastened by a brooch from Tula in the shape of a bronze pistol" (VI, 7). Although the narrator does not tell us the young man's precise age, his bronze pistol brooch (which associates him with a hussar), make his true identity impossible to mistake: he is the romantic hero that Gogol might have, but did not, place at the center of his tale. The young man walks out of the story just as quickly as he appeared in it, giving way to the *poema's* real protagonist, the pudgy, middle-aged Chichikov. The young man only seems to have left the *poema*, however. In fact, he returns again and again in different incarnations of the hero-who-wasn't. Gogol refuses to leave anyone out of *Dead Souls*, even the potential protagonist he has decided not to follow.

The balalaika player who appears in one of the *poema*'s famous extended similes, for example, is also precisely twenty years old ("a twenty-year-old lad, a flirt and a dandy," [VI, 94]). Note, also, his foppishness, a quality he shares with the young man "with pretensions to fashion" who appears in the opening scene. Yet another young man,

Mokii Kifovich, who appears briefly and, it would seem, inexplicably, in a parable at the end of chapter eleven, is compared to the strongmen, *bogatyri*, of Russian song, and is heroic in a way the cowardly Chichikov could never hope to be: “He was what they call in Russia a *bogatyr*’ […] his twenty-year-old broad-shouldered nature strove to display itself” (VI, 244). Each of these instances of the hero-who-wasn’t expands the scope of the *poema* further still, briefly dragging the reader’s attention away from Chichikov and toward the young hero himself.

“But the monarch, you should know, was not yet back in the capital at that time”: Chichikov Falls Ill

The moments in chapters one through eight when the narrator runs away from Chichikov, embracing more and more characters and making the *poema’*s structure ever more disorderly in the process, only provide a hint of the narrative chaos that is to come in chapters nine and ten. During these scenes Chichikov disappears entirely, and in chapter eleven we learn why: he has come down with a cold and spent several days holed up in his hotel room. Despite the narrator’s many lyric digressions and horizontal flights, the *poema* has rarely wandered away from Chichikov’s person too far or for too long. In chapters nine and ten, however, the narrative loses even the hint of a centralizing structure that the protagonist provides. In these hectic chapters the “orgy of secondary characters”[11] (to quote Nabokov) reaches its height as bizarre figures crawl out of every corner to discuss the scandal of Chichikov’s illegal purchases: “All the lay-abouts and lazybones crawled out of their holes […] There appeared some sort of Sysoi Pafnut’evich and Macdonald Karlovich, whom no one had ever heard of before; in living rooms there

[11] Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, 48.

popped up some sort of tall, tall one with a shot-up arm, of such great height, that the like had never even been seen before” (VI, 190). The streets were crowded with carriages and, the narrator says, “it was a huge mess” [заварилась каша] (VI, 190).

Yet the lazybones and Macdonald Karloviches that crawl out from each and every corner only represent the first wave of new characters that suddenly pop into existence during these two chapters. An unusually large number of “comparison-born characters” burst into the narrative as well. For example, the narrator first compares the “two ladies” who gossip about Chichikov to a Russian baron, and second to an irresponsible scholar. Then he compares the entire town to a schoolboy who wakes up when his comrades play a nasty practical joke on him. As the hypothetical schoolboy opens his eyes, he looks out the window to see little children playing in the stream (yet another set of characters). And as the gathered townsfolk try desperately, but unsuccessfully, to guess who Chichikov might be, they bring still more half-realized human figures into existence (other heroes-that-weren’t). Some suggest that Chichikov is a government inspector come to expose the town’s corruption, others that he is a counterfeiter of currency, “hiding under various names” (VI, 195); still others that he is a bandit escaped from prison. Some even suggest that Chichikov might be Napoleon in disguise, sent by an envious England to destroy Russia. The reader has better sense than to believe any of the townsfolk’s improbable guesses, but he has no choice but to entertain them (or at least be entertained by them): at this point he knows almost as little about Chichikov’s real identity and intentions as any of the townsfolk.

The myriad characters (townsfolk, comparison-born characters and would-be-Chichikovs alike) who unexpectedly appear in Chichikov’s absence drag the *poema*

every which way. What is more, Gogol actually draws the reader's attention to the narrative chaos that they create. A particular feature of the Russian personality, the narrator explains, is responsible for all the hurly burly in the town. Without a leader, Russian society collapses into disorder: "In all our assemblies, starting with the peasant's village meeting, and on up to every possible sort of academic committee and so on, if there isn't one head governing everything, then a proper muddle will preside" (VI, 198). This is social commentary, but it serves as narrative commentary at one and the same time: without its "one head" (its protagonist, Chichikov) the *poema*, like Russian society, collapses into a "proper muddle."

Dead Souls' famous inserted tale, "Captain Kopeikin," represents the height of both the social and the narrative disorder in the *poema*. On the one hand, it contains the most explicit discussion of the social dysfunction caused by the absence of a centralizing authority figure, and, on the other hand, the narrative dysfunction caused by Chichikov's absence reaches its greatest heights in these scenes. In chapter ten any character, no matter how minor, can become a narrator in his own right, grabbing hold of the story and running away with it. The postman only goes further than the rest, interrupting *Dead Souls* with what he calls his very own "*poema*," with its very own protagonist, Captain Kopeikin. Critics have spilled much ink debating what function "Kopeikin" fulfills in the *poema* and why Gogol himself attached such importance to the inserted tale.[12] Gogol, as is well known, considered "Kopeikin" absolutely necessary to *Dead Souls*. When the

[12] To give two examples that I find particularly compelling: Susanne Fusso argues that the fragmented "Kopeikin" (which is cut off before the postmaster finishes) models the fragmented structure of *Dead Souls* itself, which also cuts off before the promised "end" (see Susanne Fusso, *Designing* Dead Souls*: An Anatomy of Disorder* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993], 105). Mann, by contrast, sees in "Kopeikin" (whose name means "kopeck"-man) a development of the theme of lust for acquiring and accruing money that runs throughout the *poema*, and dominates Chichikov's entire life. See Mann, "*Povest' o Kapitane Kopeikine* kak vstavnoe proizvedenie," *Poetika Gogolia*, 422-29.

censors initially refused to publish it for political reasons, Gogol was in despair and ready to go to any lengths to save the inserted story, explaining that it was "for me very necessary, even more than they think" (XII, 53). Cutting out "Kopeikin," Gogol wrote, would leave an irreparable "tear" [прореха] in the structure of his work (XII, 54). What made "Kopeikin" so very necessary to Gogol?

Of all the many hypotheses critics have offered, none has recognized the importance of one detail in the story: the *tsar* is absent. He has yet to return to Russia after defeating Napoleon in Europe, and it is precisely in the absence of a centralizing authority figure that Kopeikin gets into trouble. He cannot receive his pension until the *tsar* returns, and poverty drives him to desperation and finally, banditry. In fact, all of Petersburg seems on the brink of collapse, as if it has lost its appropriate hierarchical structure in the monarch's absence. At the ministry Kopeikin visits, "One doorman already looks like a generalissimo" (VI, 201). What is more, the town has been overrun by foreigners as if, until the tsar returns to quash the invasion for good, French and British agents will still appear where they do not belong: "On the sidewalk, he sees, some sort of slender Englishwoman is walking, like a swan (VI, 202); and "the cook there, you can imagine, is a foreigner, a real Frenchman with an open physiognomy, wearing Dutch linens" (VI, 203). Kopeikin's Petersburg is undergoing what Rene Girard called an "institutional collapse" that "obliterates or telescopes hierarchical and functional differences, so that everything has the same monotonous and monstrous aspect."[13] In "Kopeikin" this obliteration of difference happens on at least two levels: the level of the story and on the level of the discourse. The tale of social disorder caused by the tsar's

[13] Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 13.

absence reenacts the disorder in the structure of the narrative itself caused by the protagonist's absence, and vice versa.

I propose that "Kopeikin" was important to Gogol precisely for the rupture it creates in the flow of the narrative. Gogol himself insisted that "Kopeikin" was necessary, not in order to connect the events of the plot ("необходим, не для связи событий"), but in order "to distract the reader for a moment, in order to replace one impression with another" (XII, 55). The "tear" Gogol worries that cutting "Kopeikin" out of the text would cause is, precisely, the lack of a "tear." Chapter ten, I have argued, is ultimately about social and narrative dysfunction. "Kopeikin," a story about social interruptions caused by war, in the form of an inserted tale that itself interrupts the flow of the narrative, epitomizes that dysfunction on both levels.

This was not the first time that Gogol had explored the theme of the absent monarch in a work that itself lacked a "monarch" metaphorically speaking (lacked a strong central protagonist). In Gogol's comedy, *The Government Inspector*, the titular protagonist, the real representative of the *tsar*, never actually appears on stage. Instead, his position is usurped accidentally by the vacuous and characterless Khlestakov (whom, in a note to the actors, Gogol calls "empty-headed"—literally "without a *tsar* in his head" [без царя в голове, IV, 9]). Khlestakov is no hero, or even a proper anti-hero: V. V. Gippius observes that Khlestakov has no authority except the authority that the secondary characters, taking him for the righteous and wrathful titular hero, give him.[14] He is simply a blank space, "One of those people, whom in offices they call utterly empty" (IV, 9).

[14] V. V. Gippius, "Tvorcheskii put' Gogolia," in *Ot Pushkina do Bloka*, ed. G. M. Fridlender (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), 107.

The Government Inspector, then, could be read as a play without a true protagonist or center, in which secondary, tertiary, and even utterly peripheral characters run riot.

The chaos of characters reaches its height in the scene when Khlestakov starts listening to the peoples' complaints against their mayor. Unlike the genuine government inspector, who would know which complaints to heed and which to ignore, Khlestakov invites anyone and everyone into his room. Scores of new characters, all with their own pretensions, cram onto the stage. Gogol's stage directions bring even more characters onto the set. At the back of a long line of petitioning merchants, widows, and peasants, his stage directions state, there should appear "some sort of figure in a frieze coat, with an unshaved beard, a puffed-up lip, and a bandaged cheek" (IV, 73). Although the unnamed man does not utter a single word, the detailed description of his coat and puffy lip suggest an entire backstory (we can guess what he wants to complain about!). And the line of petitioners still stretches on. Gogol's stage directions continue, "Behind him in perspective appear several others" (IV, 73). When Meyerhold staged the play, he had actors crawl out from behind dressers and under tables until they filled the stage almost to the breaking point. Andrei Sinyavsky would accuse Meyerhold of inappropriately importing the human overflow of *Dead Souls* into *The Government Inspector*, but I cannot second his complaint. Both the *poema* and the play are overrun by characters; the characters stretch on and on, off the stage and into the distance.[15]

[15] Abram Tertz [Siniavskii], *V teni Gogolia: "Revizor" i "Mertvye dushi"* (Moscow: Globulupus, Enas, 2005), 183.

The Chichikov in Gogol: Writing by Expansion

Gogol's own writing method resembles nothing so much as the "soul" collecting of his unscrupulous protagonist.[16] Much as Chichikov travels around Russia collecting list upon list of dead peasants, Gogol would add more and more "souls" (characters) to each subsequent draft of part one, which grew longer and more populous with every passing year. Other critics have noted that Gogol expanded upon the descriptions of several secondary characters in the second extant draft of part one (fleshing out both Manilov's wife and his estate manager, for example). As far as I am aware, however, none has ever commented upon the scores of entirely new human figures that Gogol added to the *poema* each time he rewrote it.[17] Sometimes he added new characters in extended similes. In the second extant draft of part one, for example, the narrator's comparison of Sobakevich's head to a pumpkin ends on that pumpkin (VI, 400). In the final text, however, Gogol has expanded the simile to embrace an entire row of new human figures. The pumpkin is no longer just a pumpkin, but rather the kind of pumpkin used to make balalaikas, "the amusement of a nimble twenty-year-old lad, a flirt and a dandy, winking and whistling at the white-breasted and white-necked girls, who have gathered around to listen to his quiet-stringed strumming" (VI, 94).[18]

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[16] Cathy Popkin also draws a parallel between Gogol's tendency for "verbal hording" and the hording propensities of his hero, Chichikov. See Popkin, *The Pragmatics of Insignificance*, 161.

[17] In all the many drafts of the *poema*, I have found only one place where Gogol actually removed characters from the final text. In the second redaction, he describes three women washing in the pond by Manilov's house, alongside two children wading in the water (VI, 341-42). In the final version the children have disappeared, and the number of women is reduced to two (VI, 23). This is the exception that proves the rule, however: Gogol never removes "extraneous" characters anywhere else in part one; he just keeps adding them.

[18] Carl Proffer has argued that Gogol's extended similes serve primarily as a way of expanding the scope of his *poema* to include all of Russia, and analyzes this simile in particular. I second his interpretation wholeheartedly. See Carl R. Proffer, *The Simile and Gogol's* Dead Souls (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 81.

Other times Gogol introduced new characters "metonymically," by adding a person to fill what had previously been an empty space or by extending his gaze beyond the *poema*'s previous horizons. In the beginning of chapter VI, for example, the narrator remembers a time in his youth when the sight of an estate or a townhouse would inspire in him poetic reveries about the owner's private life. In the first extant draft of this scene the narrator only recalls seeing a few provincial sights and sounds and imagines the life of a single landowner (VI, 303-4). In the final version, by contrast, he sees an infantry officer, a merchant in a Siberian-style coat, and a provincial civil servant (whom he mentally follows back home, where he looks in on the civil servant's mother, wife, wife's sister, and entire family, not to mention the boy in a thick jacket who brings them a candle after supper [VI, 110-11]). Perhaps the most noticeable additions Gogol made to the final draft of part one, however, are the lists of Chichikov's deceased serfs. In the first and second redactions few of these "dead souls" are mentioned by name. In the final version, lists of their names and nicknames (each of which suggests an individual personality, a particular identity) abound. For example, the list of Manilov's dead serfs, which includes "Ivan the Wheel" and "Petr Savel'ev Doesn't Respect the Trough," is missing from both earlier redactions (VI, 208). In the final version of part one Gogol added the names of Pliushkin's dead serfs as well, including a certain "Grigory Drive and Drive, But You'll Never Get There" (VI, 320).

Although I cannot list every single instance when Gogol added new characters to a subsequent draft of *Dead Souls* (suffice it to say there are many), his rewrite of the courthouse scene is so radical that it deserves special attention. In the second redaction, the scene when Chichikov comes to the courthouse to formalize his purchases is clear and

orderly. Chichikov arrives at the courthouse with the landowner Manilov. A civil servant in a tattered jacket (whom the narrator ironically compares to Virgil, Dante's guide through hell) meets them and leads them to the chairman's room. There they find another landowner, Sobakevich, call the archpriest and his son to serve as witnesses, and then "all four" [все четверо] gentlemen (Chichikov, the chairman, Sobakevich, and Manilov) head to the police chief's house to celebrate (VI, 453). Only seven characters appear over the course of the entire scene. When Gogol rewrites the passage, however, that number explodes. In the final version, when Chichikov and Manilov enter the courthouse they happen first upon two curious young civil servants who (after some prodding) send them to an old man, who in turn sends them to a certain Ivan Antonovich (with a snout like a jug) who, after taking a bribe, introduces them to their "Virgil," who finally takes them to the chairman. There they call as witnesses not just the archpriest and his son (though they show up, too, of course), but also the prosecutor, the inspector of hospitals, and Trukhachevsky and Begushkin, who appear in the *poema* here for the first and last time (VI, 146). Gogol has turned a neat seven-character scene into a fifteen-person mess.

What makes the scene in the courthouse so compelling is less the extraordinary number of new characters Gogol added to the final draft, than the way he draws attention to the narrative chaos that he himself, by introducing such a multitude of different personalities into one scene, has created. Each member of this enormous and motley collection of characters writes his name "with all his merits and ranks" on Chichikov's deed of sale, some in cursive, some upside down, whereas others put down "such letters as have never even been seen in the Russian alphabet" [такие буквы, каких даже и не видано было в русском алфавите] (VI, 148), thereby heightening the feeling of

overcrowding and disorder. When they set off for the police chief's house, they do not travel in an organized group of four, but in "a whole crowd" [всей гурьбой] (VI, 149). The noun the narrator uses to describe the gang, "gur'ba," suggests loud chatter, unruliness, and disarray. This is the only time Gogol uses this noun, but it captures the essence of the entire *poema*: a crowd of gibbering people, tugging the narrative this way and that, on their way somewhere, but who knows where?[19]

The Dangers of an Endless Character System

One of the few works of world literature that can challenge *Dead Souls* for its concentration of characters (the number of individual people mentioned, divided by the number of lines in the text) is the *Iliad*. As I mention above, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics have analyzed the similarities between *Dead Souls* and Homer's epics; Konstantin Aksakov went so far as to declare Gogol the Russian Homer, and *Dead Souls* the Russian *Iliad*.[20] Despite the similarly grand expansiveness of both the *Iliad* and *Dead Souls*, however, there is a fundamental disparity between the two narratives that leads them to juggle their myriad characters in very different ways. Homer tells the story of Achilles' wrath in *retrospect*, several hundred years after the event itself, whereas Gogol attempts to describe present-day Russia, a Russia that he himself is still in the process of mentally exploring.[21]

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[19] It is telling that Gogol chooses to stage this most crowded scene at the courthouse. Gogol uses a scene that seems to lack all narrative order and regulation to portray Russian lawlessness (epitomized by the courthouse, which Gogol implicitly compares to Dante's hell by giving Chichikov a "Virgil" to guide him to the innermost room).

[20] Aksakov, "Neskol'ko slov o poeme Gogolia," 41.

[21] Technically, Chichikov's travels take place sometime during the 1820s, but Gogol still aimed to capture the contemporary Russian landscape, how Russia was twenty years before and still continued to be.

According to Bakhtin, one of the fundamental differences between the epic and the novel is the different temporal frames in which they function: the epic depicts events that happened long ago, stories whose endings are long since known, whereas the novel often strives to depict the on-going present.[22] Homer composes the *Iliad* with several hundred years hindsight: he knows who played a major role in the war, who only a minor one, which heroes are worth describing at length, and which he can dismiss in a few short words. By contrast, Gogol is trying to depict a contemporary Russia that he never feels he fully understands or knows; unlike Homer, Gogol still has not decided what (or who) "is important and what's not." According to Bakhtin, *Dead Souls* fails as an epic because Gogol could not maintain the appropriate "epic *distance*" from his subject matter: "[H]aving entered the zone of familiar contact he was unable to leave it," or, to put it bluntly, "he could not find the proper focus on his binoculars."[23]

A comparison of Homer's catalogue of ships with Gogol's parody of that same catalogue (the list of houses in which Chichikov has told successful anecdotes) shows just how greatly the different temporal frames of the epic and the *poema* affect their respective structures. The register of Grecian ships, while famously tedious, is, in fact, extremely well organized. Homer already knows what he will include (and exclude) from the list before he starts reciting it. For example, he does not try to record the common

[22] Bakhtin, "Epic and the Novel," in Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 259-422. Griffiths and Rabinowitz argue, very compellingly, that epics are in general nowhere near as temporally "closed" as Bakhtin suggests. They make an exception, however, for the *Iliad*, which they concede does indeed depict "the absolute past" (Griffiths and Rabinowitz, *Epic and the Russian Novel*, 45).

[23] Bakhtin, "Epic and the Novel," 28. Hugh Mclean suggests that Gogol failed to depict convincing positive characters in *Dead Souls* because he could not maintain an appropriate artistic "distance" from them: "Gogol's lenses were not ground to reveal the world in this way, and the struggle to see brightness through his dark glass is the tragedy of Gogol's last years." Hugh Mclean, "Gogol and the Whirling Telescope," in *Russia: Essays in History and Literature*, ed. Lyman H. Legters (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 98.

soldiers by name. Instead, he prioritizes and recites the names of the captains only, along with the most essential information about them: how many ships each of them leads, how many men are on board, and their land of origin. Compare the neat progression of Homer's catalogue to the disordered jumble of Gogol's. He not only lists the many different provinces over the entire breadth of Russia where Chichikov's jokes have enjoyed success, but also every single person who laughed at them, namely (and he means "namely" [именно] in the most literal sense):

> In Simbirsk province at Sofron Ivanovich Bespechny's house, where his daughter Adelaida Safronovna was also present, along with her three sisters-in-law: Maria Gavrilovna, Aleksandra Gavrilovna, and Adel'geida Gavrilovna; at Fedor Fedorovich Perekroev's house in the province of Riazan'; at Frol Vasilievich's house, where his sister-in-law, Katerina Mikhailovna was present, along with her third-cousins Roza Fedorovna and Emilia Federovna; in the province of Viatka at Petr Varsonof'evich's house, where the sister of his fiancée, Pelegeia Egorovna, her niece Sof'ia Rostislavna, and two stepsisters, Sofiia Aleksandrovna and Maklatura Aleksandrovna, were also present. (VI, 170)

Whereas Homer knows which characters to include and which to exclude from his narrative, which to highlight (with picturesque details about their divine parentage, or spear-throwing skills) and which to downplay, Gogol has not yet acquired the bird's eye view of his material that would allow him to make such judgments. Instead, every third-cousin of Katerina Mikhailovna, every stepsister of Sof'ia Rostislavna, every sister of every fiancée, makes her way into his register. What is more, this catalogue, like the entire *poema*, is only provisional; neither we, nor Gogol, know if it is complete. The enterprising reader of the 1840s, emboldened by Gogol's calls for help in the preface to the second edition, could always write to the author and suggest the addition of a few more names to the list.

The catalogue is humorous but, as always in Gogol's fiction, a serious question lurks behind the comic façade. This is at once the narrator's most spectacular attempt to expand his *poema* to embrace an entire empire (it is no accident that the narrator lists provinces that spread over the lion's share of central Russia!) and it illustrates just how destructive Gogol's all-encompassing narrative urges can be. In her study of Gogol's tendency for verbal "hoarding" Cathy Popkin makes an extremely important point: "The discursive abuse results in the disappearance precisely of the material […] What keeps readers from progressing also keeps them from embracing anything along the way."[24] Her observation applies to this catalogue as well. The broader Gogol makes his list, the more fictional people he adds to it, the harder it becomes for the reader to focus on each one; the more names he records, the more quickly the material itself "disappears." The only one of these many names that the reader will remember is the invented moniker Maklatura, which sounds like "makulatura" (paper that has been spoiled in printing, especially one with a blurred or double impression). The only person who stands out in this long list is a *non*-person, a person-turned-to-paper, a smudged word on a crumpled page.[25]

And yet this *poema* is full of "paper people" who refuse to remain mere letters on a page, who jump from Chichikov's lists of "dead souls" into, if not full fictional life, at least into a kind of half-existence in the story. In one of the most famous and well-loved scenes of the *poema* Chichikov extrapolates, from their names and nicknames alone, the life stories of a good dozen of the deceased serfs he has purchased. Each of the names

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[24] Cathy Popkin, *The Pragmatics of Insignificance*, 206.

[25] See Robert Maguire's note on the significance of the name Maklatura in his translation of *Dead Souls* (Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*, trans. Robert Maguire [London: Penguin, 2004], 446, n. 20).

carries within it the seed of a person, each quite literally has a “character” just waiting to be developed by the attentive reader: “It was as if each one of the notes had some sort of particular character [*kharakter*], and through that the *muzhiks* themselves seemed to receive their own particular character [*kharakter*]” (VI, 135-6). If we apply this logic to our reading of the *poema* itself, then all of the many names we encounter of people who never appear in the story (Korobochka’s neighbors, for example: Bobrov, Svinin’in, Kanapt’ev, Kharpakin, Trepakin, and Pleshakov [VI, 46]) are all potential characters. They, like Chichikov’s dead souls, are only waiting to be fleshed out by the mind of the imaginative reader, or perhaps by Gogol himself in a yet-to-be-written draft.

When Gogol lists many, many names in a row, however, the game of character invention becomes harder and harder to play. Can we, no matter how attentively and imaginatively we read, really imagine human personalities for Feder Federovich Perekroev, Adelaida Safronovna, *and* Adel’geida Gavrilovna? It seems significant that Chichikov can never decide how to think about the dead peasants he has purchased. Sometimes he imagines them as individuals with entertaining stories and exciting lives (and deaths); other times he insists that they have no existence beyond letters on a page: “there remains nothing but an intangible sound” [остался один неосязаемый чувствами звук] (VI, 102). I want to suggest that Roza Fedorovna and Emilia Fedorovna have turned into such “intangible sounds.” As if to emphasize just how easily each individual figure in his *poema* disappears into the hurly burly of everyone that he himself has created, Gogol makes several of the names repeat one another. In this list we find a Fedor and two Fedorovnas (not, however, related to the first Fedor), an Adelaida and, strangely enough, an Adelg*eida*, two Sofias who spell their names differently, and a grinding

repetition of patronymics (Gavrilovna … Gavrilovna … Gavrilovna). I challenge anyone to scan this list through and pay attention to every name while doing so, let alone envision a unique personality for every one of them: it is next to impossible.

Boris Eikhenbaum, in his "How Gogol's Overcoat is Made," argues that Gogol's characters are not meant to resemble human beings at all. Instead, he claims, the "real dynamic […] is in the construction of the *skaz*, the play of language. His characters are petrified poses" [Настоящая динамика […] в построении сказа, в игре языка. Его действующие лица—окаменевшие позы]. It is misleading to talk about a Gogolian character's psychology, Eikhenbaum suggests, because he does not have one: Gogolian names first and foremost provide the author with material for puns, sound games, and linguistic tricks. I believe that Eikhenbaum's argument must be tweaked slightly before it can be applied to *Dead Souls*, because in the *poema* there are many strange and punning names that give rise to vibrant human personalities, and so move beyond the realm of mere sound play. When the narrator lists characters' names in great numbers, however, they never have the opportunity to become anything more than a pile of words; they remain a mere "game of articulation."[26] Gogol's impulse to expand his endless *poema* to include more and more (and more) characters leads directly to this result. Potential fictional people turn into clusters of sound that have as little significance for the reader as the written words the barely-literate Petrushka slowly sounds out: "the devil knows what it means" [чорт знает что и значит] (VI, 20).

This list takes up only a few lines of the *poema* but it epitomizes both Gogol's extraordinary ambitions (his desire to capture all of the vast expanse of Russia with all its

[26] See Boris Eikhenbaum, "Kak sdelana "Shinel'" Gogolia," in his *O proze: sbornik statei*, ed. I. Iampol'skii (Leningrad: Khudozh. lit., Leningr. otd-nie, 1969), 306-26.

many people), and the consequences of these ambitions, both for the innumerable human figures that appear on its pages, and for the structure of the *poema* itself. The passage in the *Dead Souls* that alludes most directly to Homer draws attention to the differences between Gogol and his predecessor just as insistently as it does to their similarities (the enormous breadth and scope of their respective poems). The "epic distance" from which Homer describes the Trojan War allows him to sort and categorize his material, presenting it to his reader in an orderly way. As Alex Woloch points out, the Catalogue of Ships magnifies some of its human figures and minimizes others to the point of reducing them to a collection of numbers.[27] But it is only thanks to these magnifications and reductions that the poet reciting the catalogue (and his audience) can remember any of the names at all. If he tried to list the names of every one of the many thousand men fighting in the war, the poet (and his listeners) would soon get lost. Gogol, who does not have the same distanced vantage point on his material (indeed, he knows he still has much more information to collect), tries to do what Homer knows he cannot, "not if I had ten tongues and ten mouths, not if I had a voice never to be broken and a heart made of bronze within me,"[28] and bring every last Roza Fedorovna into his catalog, not eliding anyone. The

[27] As Woloch argues, "The distinction between counting and naming occurs precisely at the fault line where an individual ceases to command attention as a qualitatively distinct being and begins to be viewed as a quantitative unit, absorbed into a larger number even as the ordinary soldiers are encompassed by the 'lords of the ships' who represent them and do get named." Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 5.

[28] Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 2.489-90. Gogol, like the Homeric poet, lamented the singularity of his own person, and the limits that it necessarily imposed upon his narrative. In one of the letters on *Dead Souls* that Gogol published in *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, he even suggests that his *poema* would have been much more complete if it had been a group project (his version of having ten tongues and ten mouths): "As for *Dead Souls*, an entire crowd of readers could write another book incomparably more interesting than *Dead Souls*, which not only would be instructive for me, but also for the readers themselves, because there's no point in hiding a sin [нечего таить греха]: we all know Russia very poorly" (VIII, 287).

disintegration of this list of people and provinces into a play of sound suggests that Gogol, at least on a subconscious level, understood both the impossibility of his project and the narrative results of trying to achieve it.

Halfway up the Hill

In 1848 Gogol would complain to the poet Zhukovsky precisely of his inability to gain an appropriate distance on his subject matter. He told his friend that he wanted to write a composition that would depict all the good and the bad things about Russian people, but that although he "saw and embraced separately many parts, the plan of the whole simply would not clarify and define itself before me" [Я видел и обнимал порознь много частей, но план целого никак не мог предо мной выясниться и определиться] (XIV, 35). Even when he published part one, he still did not believe he had found "the plan of the whole" he had been searching for. Part one, he lamented, only shows "how far [he] still was from what he had been striving towards" (XIV, 35). Indeed, Gogol never felt that he had acquired enough raw information about Russia in order to understand the empire in all its complexity, or to paint an accurate picture of it. *Dead Souls* part one, which Gogol always hoped to rewrite, is, in a sense, a fact-finding mission in progress, Gogol's unfinished mental exploration of the world he has set out to describe.

In a letter from *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* entitled "One Must Travel Throughout Russia," Gogol advises an acquaintance who wants to understand Russia to do something that sounds a lot like the real-life version of Chichikov's fictional travels. Gogol tells his friend to ride in a carriage all around the Russian empire, stopping at every town and city he passes along the way. In every place

he visits he should find 2 or 3 representatives of every social class, and ask them to describe their lives, and life in the town in general. Only through such a meticulous, piecemeal process of collecting information will he be able to understand Russia, and how he can best serve his homeland (VIII, 301). In *Dead Souls* Gogol "explores" Russia in much the same way (by following his hero as he travels all over the country and interrogates representatives from all walks of Russian life).[29] Gogol's journey is, of course, only a journey of the mind, and the representatives of Russian life he "interrogates" all characters of his own creation, but his ultimate aim is essentially the same.[30]

Gogol regularly compares the course of his work to that of a carriage ride. He describes the *poema*'s "motions and springs" [ходы и пружины] (VI, 19), and explains his choice of hero in those same terms. The "good-doer" hero, he explains, has been worn out like an old nag, so "it's finally time to hitch-up the scoundrel, too. So let's hitch-up the scoundrel!" (VI, 223). In this metaphor, Chichikov is the "horse" that drags the carriage of this *poema* forward. And, in fact, for much of the story we see Russia through

[29] Chichikov's excessive curiosity justifies all sorts of extended interludes with the people he happens to meet, whether the conversation does anything to lay the groundwork for his schemes or not. When he speaks with the woman who runs the inn where he is staying, he "immediately, as was his habit, entered into conversation with her, and asked whether she herself kept the inn or was there a master, and how much income did the inn bring, and did her sons live with them, and was the eldest son a bachelor or married, and what sort of wife did he take, and did she bring a big dowry or not, and was the father-in-law happy, and was he angry that he received too few presents at the wedding; in short, he did not skip anything" (VI, 62-63).

[30] The irony that Gogol, for all his very vocal desire to "know" Russia, spent much of his adult life abroad has not been lost on his critics. S. A. Vengerov sardonically remarks that when Gogol wrote *Dead Souls* he knew (and could have known) almost nothing about the provinces, having traveled through them in a post carriage for not more than a total 50 days *in his entire life* (S. A. Vengerov, "Gogol' sovershenno ne znal russkoi zhizni," in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2 [St. Petersburg, 1913], 119-41). More recently, Anne Lounsbery has written about just how constructed Gogol's conception of the provinces really was (much more a reflection of the way Russian intellectuals saw themselves than a realistic reflection of life in the provinces): "'No, This Is Not the Provinces!' Provincialism, Authenticity and Russianness in Gogol's Day," *Russian Review* 64, no. 2 (April 2005): 259-80. As I have already mentioned (and Edyta Bojanowska has argued) Gogol himself was well aware of his ignorance, and spent years trying to correct it.

the window of a literal carriage (Chichikov's own). Other times we see people and things only "as if" from a carriage. At one point Gogol urges us to drive on (metaphorically speaking) and leave Korobochka and Manilov behind: "Let's move past them!" [Мимо их] (VI, 58). Gogol will never allow the hectic pace of his narrative to slow down for too long: there is always another person to observe, another object to examine, another scene to ponder.

The fictional carriage ride Gogol takes us on in part one is a means to an end; it is a way to get to know Russia "from all angles," to capture every detail of the countryside, so that eventually both Gogol and his reader (who are really on this journey together) can see the big picture in all its complexity. But that big picture kept eluding Gogol's grasp. Although most of part one of *Dead Souls* takes place firmly at ground level, Gogol describes two views from on high that seem to reflect, through the imagery *in* the story, the author's own frustrated desire to grasp "the plan of the whole" both of Russia itself, and of the *poema* that sets out to capture it. In the first of these scenes from on high, Manilov dreams, impossibly, of building a tower on his estate that will allow him to see all the way to Moscow (something that he can only realize in his imagination, of course). In the second, Gogol's fictional persona claims to be looking at an expectant Russia from a "beautiful faraway": "Rus'! Rus'! I see you, from my wonderful, beautiful faraway I see you: it is poor, spread out, and inhospitable in you; one's gaze will not be cheered or frightened by bold wonders of nature, crowned by bold wonders of art […] Everything is open, desert-like, and flat in you; like dots, like points your short cities stick out unnoticeably among the plains. Nothing tempts or charms the gaze. But what incomprehensible, secret power draws one to you?" (VI, 220). As Edyta Bojanowska

argues, this vision of Russia from on high is strangely blank and incomplete: "The author-narrator give luscious concreteness to what Russia is *not*, while he transforms into austere abstractions what Russia *is* (points, marks, lines). Russia offers no enchantment to the eye, and its power eludes the author-narrator."[31] In this view from on high, Gogol pictures himself looking over all of Russia, but not understanding what he sees.

The extant fragments of part two begin with Chichikov looking over the broad landscape from Tentetnikov's elevated estate, an opening that suggests Gogol was planning to incorporate more all-encompassing views of Russia from "on high" in the later sections of his *poema*. But Gogol never felt that he had discovered enough about Russia to present it from above, in all its breadth and complexity: one "angle" always eluded him, one character always escaped his grasp; he was never ready to organize or synthesize his findings, and part two remained incomplete. Indeed, it is hard to imagine Gogol ever reaching this point of synthesis. If the acquaintance Gogol advises in *Selected Passages* had actually traveled around Russia, interviewing a dozen people in every town he passed, he would have died before he finished his journey. Gogol has set out on an imaginative tour of Russia that is just as endless. There will always be another representative of Russian life to observe, describe, and include in this all-inclusive *poema*, and another character to bring into this character system that has (and can have) no end.

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[31] Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol*, 216.

The Non-Sense of No Ending

Many have argued that Gogol never finished *Dead Souls* because he was incapable of depicting the positive characters and positive picture of Russia that he hoped to portray in parts two and three. I want to suggest a somewhat simpler explanation: *Dead Souls* by its very creative design can never end. Gogol set himself the task of embracing all of Russia and the vast variety of Russian people in his *poema*, but as he insists again and again, this enormous nation is unembraceable. Endless expansiveness is its defining characteristic (or rather the characteristic that fails to define it, since in order to define something one must identify its limits).

References to Russia's size and breadth recur with almost obsessive frequency throughout the *poema*. Chichikov, for example, uses Russia's physical enormity as a conversation starter. When he broaches the topic of purchasing dead souls from the landowner Sobakevich, for example, "he started somehow very far from the point [*otdalenno*], touched on the whole Russian state itself, and greatly praised its expanse [*prostranstve*]" (VI, 100). When he tries to strike up a conversation with the governor's daughter, he turns once again to his habitual topic: "how Russia is a very expansive nation [*prostrannoe gosudarstvo*]" (VI, 170). Chichikov is not the only one obsessed by Russia's size, incidentally. The foolish townsfolk seriously believe that the English will sic Napoleon on Russia, because "the Englishman has long been envious that Russia, they say, is so great and wide [*tak velika i obshirna*]" (VI, 205).[32]

[32] Here Gogol adapts a famous quotation from the Primary Chronicle, *Povest' vremennykh let* [*The Tale of Bygone Years*]. This is the part of the story when the Rus'ians beg the Varangians to come rule over them: "Our land is large and bountiful, but there is no order in it. Come be our prince and rule over us" [Земля наша велика и обильна, а порядка в ней нет. Приходите княжить и владеть нами] (V. P. Adrianovoi-Peretts, ed., *Povest' vremennyx let*, 3rd ed., trans. D. S. Likhachev [St. Petersburg: "Nauka," 2007], 149). Gogol replaces the adjective "obil'na" (abundant, bountiful) with "obshirna" (wide, vast, expansive). For him Russia's most distinctive quality is its boundlessness, not its abundance (which actually tends to get

Russia, according to the narrator, is not merely very spacious, but actually *infinitely expanding*, if not literally, than at least spiritually speaking. The narrator calls it a land "without end" [*bez kontsa*], and revels (and trembles) in its "unembraceable expanse" [*neob''iatnyi prostor*] (VI, 221). In the passage from the second extant draft of part one that stands as an epigraph to this chapter, the narrator describes the cries of Russian coachmen that extend from "one endless end of it to the other" [от одного бесконечного конца ее до другого] (VI, 363). In the final draft of Gogol would cut the oxymoronic adjective "endless" before "end," but it nevertheless reveals a fundamental truth about his vision of Russia: even its end is no end; even its boundaries are boundless.

The narrator uses precisely the same adjectives to describe the scope of the *poema* as he does to describe the limitless expanse of Russia itself. On the opening pages the narrator worries his reader will not have the patience to get through "the proposed tale, which is very long, and which will expand wider and more spaciously as it comes closer to the end that crowns the affair" [предлагаемую повесть, очень длинную, имеющую после раздвинуться шире и просторнее по мере приближения к концу, венчающему дело] (VI, 19). Note how he uses words with the roots *shir*- (breadth) and *prostor*- (space), one or both of which always accompany his lyrical portrayals of Russia. (It is curious, too, that the *poema* promises to grow broader and broader *as* it comes closer and closer to the promised "end"; can such a structure ever really reach a conclusion? Or will it grow and grow, eternally postponing the ending that Gogol dangles before our eyes?)

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lost in the vast expanses of endless space). And what for the chronicler was simply a correlation (Russia may be large, *but* there is no law and order) becomes for Gogol causation (there is no order in Russia or in Gogol's Russia-sized *poema because* they are so enormous).

The second and third volumes of *Dead Souls* were meant to expand further still. In chapter eleven the narrator tells us that "how the innermost levers of this broad story will move, how its horizon will expand further, and how it will take on a majestic lyrical course, [the reader] will see later" [как двинутся сокровенные рычаги широкой повести, раздастся далече ее горизонт и вся она примет величавое лирическое течение, то увидит потом] (VI, 241). The *poema*'s horizon, like Russia's, is always receding; it could expand forever.

Robert Maguire refers to "the bounded space that defines the various worlds of this 'poem.'"[33] I want to argue, to the contrary, that the "worlds of this 'poem'" precisely lack "bounded space," and that this is what makes it so chaotic, disorderly, and impossible to define. In *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode argues that narratives with their concrete beginnings and endings help us make sense of the random and accidental world in which we live. They allow us to see structure and significance in what would otherwise seem to be a continual string of unconnected historical events. We need "fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and poems."[34] *Dead Souls*, by contrast, is not merely "open-ended," "unfinished," or even "a fragment" (something Gogol simply never managed to finish); instead it is *endless by design.* And if Frank Kermode is right and it is only by drawing limits and marking ends that we can make meaning, then Gogol's infinitely expanding *poema* must always threaten to collapse into meaninglessness.[35]

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[33] Robert Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 238.

[34] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

[35] Bojanowska sees Chichikov's references to the boundlessness of Russia as Gogol's satirical jabs against the language of empire itself. The passage in which Chichikov references the breadth of the empire as an

Wholeness and Fragmentation: Two Sides of the Same Gogolian Coin

Susanne Fusso has argued that Gogol struggled with two competing creative impulses, an impulse toward “order, system, clarity, and wholeness” and an impulse toward “disorder, disruption, obscurity, and fragmentation.”[36] The urge for “system” and “wholeness,” Fusso contends, primarily influenced Gogol’s approach toward the writing and teaching of history: he believed that a good historian could make his student grasp all of world history in a single glance. Gogol’s urge toward a freeing and invigorating “fragmentation” and “disorder,” by contrast, ruled his fiction, especially *Dead Souls*, his most famously chaotic work. While Fusso’s careful analysis has much to recommend it, I cannot agree with the dichotomy she proposes, at least not as it applies to *Dead Souls*. Far from being motivated by contradictory impulses, Gogol wrote his never-to-be-finished *poema* and his never-to-be-finished histories under the spell of the same demon: the urge for radical wholeness and total all-encompassment.

In 1833 and 1834, soon before conceiving *Dead Souls*, Gogol was working on a history of Ukraine that he was struggling to complete. So he wrote an appeal to the readers of *The Northern Bee* [*Severnaia pchela*] remarkably similar to the preface to the second edition of *Dead Souls* that he would publish over a decade later: “I hesitate to

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opening gambit to buy souls “shows how nationalistic rhetoric can be used for nefarious ends” (Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol*, 224). One could interpret not just this scene, but also the entire discourse of boundlessness as an implicit critique of emperial expansion. Although his narrator explicitly praises Russia for its breadth, Gogol demonstrates the dangers that accompany such breadth on several different levels oof the text. On the level of the story, Gogol shows us an empire that becomes more lawless and chaotic the farther one goes away from the *tsar* (the borders—where Chichikov at one point works as an inspector but runs a smuggling ring—are particularly anarchic). On the level of discourse, Gogol presents us with a *poema* that becomes more and more disorderly the more expansive he tries to make it.

[36] Fusso, *Designing* Dead Souls, 1.

publish the first volumes, since I suspect that many sources may exist, perhaps, unknown to me, which, without a doubt, are being kept somewhere in private hands" (IX, 76). He begged readers to send him all "chronicles, notes, songs, stories of bandura players, official documents…" (IX, 77) of Ukrainian origin they may have in their possession. And he refused to publish his history, refused even to organize or systematize his materials, until he had exhausted every single historical source, until he had included *everything*. Unsurprisingly, Gogol's history of Ukraine remained just as fragmentary and unfinished as the proposed three volumes of *Dead Souls*. The fragmentariness and incompleteness of the Ukrainian history, like the fragmentariness of *Dead Souls*, is the result, not the aim, of Gogol's creative project. As Cathy Popkin puts it, in Gogol's prose "More Is Not More."[37] Excessive presence and fragmentation are two sides of the same Gogolian coin: the more characters he tries to include in his story, the more totalizing and complete he tries to make it, the more disorderly and impossible to complete it becomes.

Gogol draws our attention to this fact again and again over the course of *Dead Souls*. And he does so first and foremost through the hordes of characters that the *poema* expands to include. The plethora of minor characters in *Dead Souls* serves a double purpose: it allows Gogol to increase the scope of his work, on the one hand; and, on the other, it provides him with a uniquely effective way to thematize the destructive chaos, disorder, and lack of meaning that his own desire to embrace the unembraceable creates. The more human figures Gogol includes in his *poema*, the more quickly they disappear into the chaotic non-structure of the *poema* itself. The more names of characters he lists, the more quickly they break down into so many clusters of sound. The potential human

[37] Popkin, *The Pragmatics of Insignificance*, 152.

personalities latent in each of these names die off, leaving behind nothing but an endless expanse of dead souls. For all of *Dead Souls*' fragmentariness and narrative incoherence, however, it is artistically coherent in a way few works of literature can hope to be. *Dead Souls* is a masterpiece in no small part because the chaotic structure of part one (the continually interchanging things, people, animals, sights, noises, smells) mirrors the moral formlessness and spiritual emptiness that Gogol was attempting to depict.

CHAPTER TWO

"A Slumbering Power": *Oblomov*'s Expanding (and Contracting) Secondary Characters

There is only one explicitly metafictional scene in Goncharov's *Oblomov.* With unwonted energy and fervor (he even stands up from his couch!), Oblomov tells the left-wing writer, Penkin, to treat even the lowliest of his characters as human subjects to pity rather than objects to demean: "Depict a thief, a fallen woman, a puffed-up fool, but don't forget that there is a human being there. Where is your humaneness? […] love him, remember yourself in him and treat him as you would yourself—then I will read you and bow my head before you" (25). Writers, Oblomov continues, should depict even the "money-lender, hypocrite, [and] the thieving or dim-witted bureaucrat [*tupoumnogo chinovnika*]" (25) as people, not animals or things. Echoing Poprishchin, the hero of Gogol's "Notes of a Madman," and his wild call for reading material that depicts "real people"— not the canine antics of a fluffy dog—Oblomov cries: "Give me a human being, a human being!" [Человека, человека давайте мне!] (25).[1]

It may strike the reader as odd, then, when only a few dozen pages later the narrator compares Oblomov's servant, Zakhar, to "a dog that upon meeting a beast in the woods throws himself upon him, never considering why he should be the one to throw himself and not his master" (58). At first glance, *Oblomov* seemingly fails to fulfill its eponymous hero's own requirements for "humaneness" in literature. The novel's secondary characters (almost all of whom are women, servants, or members of the lower

[1] Oblomov even echoes Poprishchin's emphatic repetition of the word "human being." Compare his cry to Poprishchin's almost identical, "Give me a human being! I want to see a human being…" [Мне подавайте человека! Я хочу видеть человека] (III, 204).

classes) are repeatedly depicted as existing in the realm of the subhuman; now they are compared to dogs, horses, or inanimate objects; now reduced to synecdoches (a pair of whizzing elbows, a talking nose). Richard Peace contends that most of the novel's secondary characters "are portrayed more as objects than as subjects in their own right."[2] And Milton Ehre has argued that even such an important figure as Agafia Matveevna, Oblomov's landlady-turned-wife, is "reduced to the status of a kitchen utensil, a domestic beast of burden, or a household furnishing."[3] How can we explain the apparent contradiction between what Oblomov (in a moment of great energy and inspiration) says makes for morally and aesthetically valuable literature, and what the novel actually does?

I suggest that Goncharov uses dehumanizing descriptions of secondary characters to tell us something, not about the way those characters objectively *are*, but about the way Oblomov *sees* them. The majority of these descriptions occur in scenes focalized by Oblomov (which is to say, in scenes where the reader sees the world of the novel as if through the protagonist's eyes). Jean Pouillon contends that when we perceive the fictional world alongside the protagonist, then the protagonist himself "is seen in the image he develops of others, and to some extent through that image."[4] Goncharov reveals quite a bit to the reader about Oblomov's personality through the "image he develops of others." On the one hand, Oblomov is kind, tender, and loving: he balks at the thought of people being mistreated (he will even stand up for fictional people in a novel!). On the other hand, he himself, coddled, spoiled, and flattered from his childhood, has become

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[2] Richard Peace, *Oblomov: A Critical Examination* (Birmingham: Department of Russian Language and Literature, University of Birmingham, 1991), 68.

[3] Milton Ehre, *Oblomov and His Creator* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 208.

[4] Jean Poullian, qtd. in Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 193.

accustomed to believing that the people around him exist solely for his own comfort.

In Parts III and IV Goncharov begins to strip away the restrictive frame through which he has portrayed the secondary characters thus far, and we start to see in them what Oblomov cannot. The less frequently Oblomov focalizes the narrative, the more frequently we are allowed to enter the hearts and minds of the people who surround him. As Beth Holmgren has argued, in the later portions of the novel Agafia Matveevna "expands beyond Oblomov's objectifying glimpses of elbows and breast […] from body to vision or, at least, agenda."[5] Many other characters (Anisia, the villainous Ivan Matveevich and Tarant'ev, and even the heroine, Olga Il'inskaia) undergo a similar "expansion," gaining in dimensionality and increasingly commanding the narrator's attention.

The balance of power between the characters shifts once again, however, when, after a long, absence Oblomov's childhood friend, Stoltz, reenters the novel in Part IV. This new male protagonist (dubbed by Setchkarev the "secondary hero"[6]) pushes the female and lower-class characters who have been enjoying more and more prominence, both in Oblomov's life and in the structure of the novel that contains him, back into secondary positions. He becomes the masculine leader Olga always craved in a romantic relationship, and takes Oblomov's son, money, and property away from Agafia Matveevna, who quickly fades into the background of the discourse. And yet Stoltz's success at establishing himself as the novel's new positive hero is uncertain. Will we be convinced that Stoltz and Olga's marriage is fruitful and productive rather than stifling

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[5] Beth Holmgren, "Questions of Heroism in Goncharov's *Oblomov*," in *Goncharov's* Oblomov: *a Critical Companion*, ed. Galya Diment (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 81.

[6] Vsevolod Setchkarev, *Ivan Goncharov: His Life and Works* (Wurzburg: Jal-Verlag, 1974), 136.

and restrictive? Will we believe that Oblomov's son is better off being raised by Olga and Stoltz instead of by his mother (in spite of what Stoltz, Oblomov, who requested his friend take the child, and even Agafia Matveevna herself seem to think)?

In *Oblomov* Goncharov distributes narrative attention between the primary and secondary characters in a fluid, even unpredictable way, at times erasing the boundaries between these two categories entirely: characters expand and contract, becoming now more, now less three-dimensional, and occupying now more, now less space in the narrative. Ultimately Goncharov refuses to place his characters into any sort of stable hierarchy, whether on the level of structure (by clearly differentiating the primary from the secondary characters), or on the level of the story (by distinctly indicating which characters' thoughts and words we can trust, and which we cannot). Goncharov leaves it for us to decide with which character to align ourselves, if any, a decision that will deeply affect the way we read the novel, and how socially radical we understand its message to be.

Variable Focalization in *Oblomov*

Goncharov has long been considered an "objective" writer. In 1847 Belinsky wrote that Goncharov "has neither love nor hatred for the characters he creates. They do not cheer him, do not anger him; he does not give any moral lessons either to them or to his reader."[7] Dobroliubov speculated that Goncharov was entirely indifferent to the way his readers responded to his tales: "[W]hatever conclusions you take from the novel: that's

[7] Vissarion Belinskii, "Vzgliad na russkuiu literaturu v 1847," in *I. A. Goncharov v russkoi kritike: sbornik statei*, ed. M. Poliakov (Moscow: Gos. Izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1958), 30.

your own business."[8] Twentieth-century critics would continue the tradition of Goncharov scholarship that Belinsky and Dobroliubov began. E. M. Taborisskaia sees Goncharov's "objectivity" in the way he depicts even his most unlikeable characters with at least a modicum of sympathy (if not showing their positive attributes, at least explaining what has made them so bad).[9] Dmitry Chizhevsky would even make the bold claim that Goncharov is "the most objective out of all the Russian realists."[10]

Only Yuri Mann has attempted to analyze precisely what lends Goncharov's prose its famous "effect of objectivity," however, and why it thwarts critics who would see Oblomov as a definitively negative or definitively positive character, and his life on his estate, Oblomovka, either as country idyll or as a world of stagnation and death. As Mann writes, "the truth is found not so much in the middle, but in a moving, changing perspective."[11] Although Mann never develops his argument further, his last two words, "changing perspective," perfectly capture Goncharov's narrative technique in *Oblomov* as I understand it. Goncharov illustrates the scenes in his novel from the perspective of now one, now another character, while the narrator, aside from the occasional ironic comment, does not pass explicit judgment on any of the events that take place.

One could call *Oblomov* a novel of "variable focalization." The term "focalization" was developed by Gerard Genette to distinguish between the voice of the narrator and the point of view that he or she inhabits at any given moment (which is to

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[8] Nikolai Dobroliubov, "Chto takoe Oblomovshchina?" in Poliakov, *I. A. Goncharov*, 55.

[9] E. M. Taborisskaia, "Avtor i geroi v romane I. A. Goncharova," in *Problema avtora v khudozhestvennoi literature* (Voronezh: Izvestiia voronezhskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo instituta, 1972), 70-71.

[10] Qtd. in Yurii Mann, "Goncharov kak povestvovatel'," in *Ivan Goncharov, Leben, Werk und Wirkung*, ed. Peter Theirgen (Koln: Bohlau, 1994), 83.

[11] Mann, "Goncharov kak povestvovatel'," 89.

say, between who is speaking and who is seeing—not always the same person).[12] Susan Lanser explains: "One voice is narrating while another consciousness is responsible for the perceptions, thoughts, feelings, or orientation to the scene that the narrator, in turn, relays. The focalizer does not report these perceptions directly in his or her own voice; they are filtered by the narrative consciousness, usually through the technique known as dual perspective."[13] In a novel of variable focalization, as the title suggests, the narrator inhabits the points of view of various different characters, switching back and forth between each one.

In *Oblomov* the game of "changing perspectives" begins on the very first page. The narrator first describes Oblomov as a stranger seeing the protagonist for the first time might perceive him. Not content to explain how one outside observer might perceive Oblomov, Goncharov introduces four distinct personalities, each of whom comes to a different conclusion about the hero and his way of life. First he relates the perspective of a "superficially observant, cold person," who would think, "He must be a good soul, what simplicity!" (7). Then Goncharov gives us the viewpoint of a "deeper" person who, "looking for a long time into [Oblomov's] face, would walk away immersed in pleasant thought, with a smile" (7). Then he slips into the viewpoint of another set of eyes that "at first glance" finds Oblomov's room to be beautifully upholstered, only to counter it with "the experienced eye of a person with pure taste" who "with one sweeping glance […] would have read only the desire to observe, somehow or other, the decorum of unavoidable proprieties" (8). By introducing his reader to Oblomov from not one, but

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[12] See Genette's *Narrative Discourse*.

[13] Lanser, *The Narrative Act*, 142. Seymour Chatman refers to this same narrative technique as "free indirect perception," a clever coinage that, however, did not stick. See Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 204.

four different perspectives, Goncharov builds a multidimensional picture of his protagonist: Oblomov looks simple and kind, but has hidden depths; his apartment looks fashionable, but it is secretly slovenly.

Much of the rest of the novel is focalized by one or another of the characters who exists within it. Sometimes Goncharov clearly marks who is focalizing a scene (through whose eyes the reader gains access to the fictional world at that time). For example, when Oblomov goes to the Vyborg side to see the lodgings that Tarant'ev has procured for him, the narrator describes the house and its inhabitants as they struck Oblomov's eyes for the first time. Oblomov stares at Agafia Matveevna, "looking through her scarf, which had fallen open, at her high, strong, like a couch pillow, never-agitated breast" (234). To whom does the simile that compares Agafia Matveevna's breast to a couch pillow belong? Is Goncahrov trying to tell us that Agafia Matveevna looks, objectively speaking, like a piece of household furnishing, or that Oblomov (lover of couches that he is) merely sees her that way? This image of woman-as-pillow reveals at least as much about Oblomov as it does about Agafia Matveevna herself.

Other times the narrator aligns himself with Oblomov's point of view in much more subtle ways. In Part II, for example, Oblomov ponders what gives Olga her unique moral strength. The narrator begins the passage by relaying Oblomov's thoughts directly, in a short paragraph set off by quotation marks: "'It's all because,' he thought, 'one of her eyebrows never lies straight . . . There, in that fold, is where her stubbornness has taken root'" (209). The quotation marks end here, but the musings on Olga do not. Although the narrator does not explicitly mark the next few paragraphs as a continuation of

Oblomov's thoughts, they not only reflect his way of thinking, but also his exclamatory style:

> No matter what calm, bright expression her face expresses, that crease is never smoothed out, and her eyebrow never lies straight. But she has no external strength, no sharp mannerisms of habits. Her persistence in her intentions and stubbornness never draw her even one step out of a woman's sphere […] She treats everyone with such gentleness, such affectionate attention—in a word, she is a woman! (209)

Here, the reader finds himself in an interpretative bind: is it Oblomov who holds this literally circumscribed view of what a "woman's sphere" should be and who reminds us that Olga, thank goodness, does not step outside of its bounds? Or is it the narrator? Or Oblomov and the narrator? The next sentence of the description, however, which returns to Oblomov's fixation on the line between Olga's brows, can only be read as the protagonist's own thoughts, related through free indirect discourse. Oblomov wonders why other girls do not resemble Olga and concludes, "This must be because their eyebrows lie evenly, in an arch, and are plucked, and they don't have a line on their foreheads" (210). These final Oblomovian words hint that the entire passage should be attributed to him, and that everything that comes after the closing quotation mark is the continuation of Oblomov's own thought process. The narrator's feelings about Olga, and his idea about what the "appropriate" sphere for women might be, remain ambiguous.[14]

[14] Mann analyzes a similar passage in *The Precipice* in which Raisky thinks about Vera. As in the passage about Olga, Goncharov tags only a few short lines with quotation marks as Raisky's thought, but, as Mann writes, "all the rest is connected in some way with the flow of his feelings." Mann argues that Goncharov uses this technique (allowing one protagonist to characterize another) as a way of reducing his authorial presence in the novel to an absolute minimum: "The author effaces himself [стушевывается], goes off to the side, giving over the characterization of one character (Vera) to another (Raisky)" (Mann, "Goncharov kak povestvovatel'," 92).

The Secondary Characters Through Oblomov's Sties

Goncharov keeps us claustrophobically close to the protagonist's thoughts, feelings, and vision of the world for almost all of Part I, and for large portions of Parts II and III as well. Oblomov, the only character with markedly unreliable vision (he has sties in his eyes, his windows are covered with dirt, and the mirror in his room is so clouded with dust that it casts a distorted reflection—a metaphor for lack of self-knowledge if ever there was one) focalizes close to half of the novel.

Oblomov's chief "blindness" is his inability to recognize that the women, servants, and lower-class characters that surround him are seeing subjects just as he is. Innokenty Annensky calls Oblomov an egoist, though not a malicious one: "He's an egoist by the naive conviction that he is a person of a certain breed and that the people he owns are obliged to work for him. People should care for him, respect him, love him, and do everything for him."[15] In nineteenth-century Russia one way to refer to one's servants was as one's "people" [*liudi*]. As the comparison of Zakhar to a hunting dog suggests, however, the relationship between Oblomov and his servant since childhood resembles less that between two people than that between a master and his (sometimes disobedient) dog.

Oblomov has a similarly unequal relationship with Andreev and Tarant'ev, the two "Russian Proletarians" in his life. Although he regularly wines and dines them, he has other motivations beside generosity, as the narrator explains: "There are still sybarites who need such additions in life: they're bored without something superfluous in their world. Who will fetch the snuffbox that has disappeared somewhere or other? Or pick up

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[15] I. F. Annenskii, "Goncharov i ego *Oblomov*," *Roman I. A. Goncharova, "Oblomov" v russkoi kritike,* ed. M. V. Otradin (Leningrad: Izd-vsto Leningradskogo universiteta, 1991), 227.

the handkerchief that has fallen on the floor?" (35). Although neither Andreev nor Tarant'ev rushes to pick up Oblomov's handkerchief, each fulfills a psychological need without challenging Oblomov's primacy of place, and without threatening (in Oblomov's eyes, anyway) to become anything more than a "superfluous" something. Andreev yesses him in everything, and Tarant'ev brings energy into the house, serving as the mobile, but apparently insentient, object to please Oblomov's eye: when Tarant'ev would come over, "Without lifting a finger, Oblomov could listen to, and look at, an energetic something [*chto-to*] moving and speaking in front of him" (35).

Why should Oblomov, who is kindly and generous, repeatedly fail to recognize the human subjectivity of the people around him? Why should he think of Tarant'ev, for example, as some*thing* rather than some*one*? Richard Peace proposes an explanation: "[T]hey are the 'others' against whom the central subject, Oblomov, has to defend the substantiality of his own ego: they cannot be allowed to intrude as real human beings."[16] Indeed, ever since childhood Oblomov has considered himself incomparable, the singular "barin" whose needs and desires those around him exist only to fulfill. Oblomov is not only offended, but also genuinely surprised when Zakhar compares him to "other people," who, unlike Oblomov, are not afraid of moving to a new apartment: "He saw in the way Zakhar lowered him to the level of other people a violation of his rights to Zakhar's exclusive preference for his 'barin' over anyone and everyone" (71). Until now Oblomov has not, apparently, ever even considered what makes him like and unlike others. Zakhar's words prompt him to think about it for the very first time: "He considered the comparison in all its depth and tried to make out what other people were,

[16] Peace, *Oblomov*, 68.

and what he himself was, and to what degree this parallel was possible and fair and how serious the insult Zakhar had given him was" (77).

Much of Oblomov's behavior up until this point in the novel could be read, in fact, as an attempt to avoid having to compare himself to other people. At Oblomovka, where he was the undisputed head of his estate and the villages around him, he was always beyond compare. When he moves to St. Petersburg, however, his belief in his own incomparability becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Instead of occupying the position of the sole heir of the estate, Oblomov finds himself in a small apartment "in one of those large buildings, the population of which was as big as an entire provincial city" (7). In this one building there are more people with whom Oblomov might compare himself (and so potentially come up short) than in the entire city nearest Oblomovka. In a draft of the novel Goncharov places even greater emphasis on Oblomov's difficult adjustment to his new, insignificant social position in the metropolis:

> [C]oddled from his childhood in the country by the indulgence of his father and mother, and the universal spoiling of the entire house, he could not tolerate contradiction from anyone and [this habit of having influence on other people] took root in him. If a stranger or passerby on the street was rude to him, Oblomov would immediately threaten to do something to him that the other man could not even imagine. (435)

Critics often explain Oblomov's refusal to leave his living room as the ultimate sign of his famous slothfulness; those more inclined to view Oblomov in a positive light argue that he is taking a morally (and even spiritually) principled stand, refusing to participate in the empty and vain life of St. Petersburg.[17] But this passage suggests that Goncharov toyed with at least one other psychological motivation for the protagonist's self-imposed

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[17] See, for example, Ksana Blank, "The Endless Passage: The Making of a Plot in the Russian Novel" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1997), 195-236.

isolation: if Oblomov never leaves the house, he never has to acknowledge that he cannot, in reality, punish everyone who speaks rudely to him on the street, and the problem of relative position need not arise.

In his living room, waited on by Zakhar and Anisia, visited on a regular basis only by the sponging "proletarians" Andreev and Tarant'ev (whom he sees more as moving things than as people), Oblomov need not be compared to anyone, and so need not be found lacking. Lying on his couch, having abandoned his position in the civil service where he never succeeded as he expected he would, he can dream about the triumphs he will never achieve in reality:

> Sometimes he loved to imagine himself some sort of undefeatable squadron commander, before whom not only Napoleon, but even Yeruslan Lazarevich wouldn't mean a thing […] or he would choose the career of a thinker or great artist: everyone would bow before him; he would win laurels; the crowd would chase after him, crying, "Look, look, there goes Oblomov, our famous Il'ia Il'ich!" (54)

Becoming a squadron commander who is more talented than Napoleon is extremely difficult; exceeding Yeruslan Lazarevich, a fictional folk hero who defeats dragons in battle, is even more impossible; if Oblomov never sees beyond the walls of his own living room, however, he will always be king of all he surveys.

Yet Zakhar's comparison of Oblomov to "other people" brings on a revelation, "one of the clear, self-aware moments of Oblomov's life" (77). Suddenly he realizes that, compared with the lives of "other people," his has been empty and unsuccessful, and begins to wonder why he has blinded and crippled himself. It is under the influence of this sudden moment of self-awareness that Oblomov eventually allows Stoltz to lead him off his couch and back into "the human crowd." But for Oblomov the return to social life means a frightening loss of control. When he ventures out into the world in Part II, he

finds himself—instead of king of his couch, judging all who walk through his door with one glance—the object of other people's gazes.[18] Most alarming of all are the bright, inquisitive eyes of Olga Il'inskaia, an acquaintance of Stoltz's who quickly becomes Oblomov's love interest. Oblomov had always dreamed of a wife who was essentially static: passive and gentle as "peace itself," she would look at him alone with an unchanging "meek, sympathetic glance" that neither brightens nor dims "to the very grave!" (159) He imagines that his wife will, much like his servants, do the physical work (he dreams that when they go boating, she will row), but still obey him: Oblomov firmly believes that the woman must submit to the man's authority, "that the woman should be subdued/tamed and bow her head" (171).

Olga, however, upends all of these dreams. Rather than bowing her head, Olga looks straight into Oblomov's eyes, and her glance, far from "meek," is questioning and curious. She continually asserts herself, reminding him that she is a seeing subject, too, a fact Goncharov drives home to the reader on the level of the narrative itself by regularly giving us glimpses into her mind. Whereas Part I is dominated by Oblomov's perspective and Oblomov's thoughts (keeping the reader rooted in Oblomov's mind, much as we are rooted in his apartment), in Part II Goncharov frequently alternates Oblomov's point of view with Olga's. Take, for example, the scene when Olga and Oblomov bump into each other in the park after Oblomov's accidental proclamation of love. First Goncharov shows us the park as Olga sees it, walking alone along a path, then as Oblomov sees it (as

[18] Oblomov's fear of other people's glances manifests itself practically from the first time he leaves his living room. When Stoltz takes him to Olga's house, and Olga's aunt seats him at a prime spot at the table, he trembles at the thought of sitting "under the crossfire of the glances of all the interlocutors" [под перекрестный огонь взглядов всех собеседников] (150).

he unwittingly approaches her from the opposite direction): "Suddenly she hears that someone is coming. 'Someone is coming…' thought Oblomov" (161).

Part of the reason that Oblomov ultimately retreats from his relationship with Olga, and his new life outside of his living room, is that he cannot stand being the object of other people's gazes, whether Olga's or anyone else's. He stops visiting Olga as frequently once their relationship becomes the subject of public speculation. A scene at the theater proves just how deeply this gossip injures Oblomov's sense of his self-worth. Between acts Oblomov overhears two young men wondering who he is and why he is loitering around Olga's box at the theater. When one calls him "some sort of Oblomov or other . . . a landowner, a friend of Stoltz's" (249), he shudders. From the "barin" in his living room, Oblomov suddenly finds himself reduced to the level of *a* landowner, one of many, just another of Olga's admirers. And it threatens to derail his sense of identity: Oblomov runs away from the fops thinking, "Yes, I'm 'some sort of'! [Да, я какой-то!] . . . They only know me because I am Stoltz's friend" (249).

Soon after this encounter, Oblomov begins to burrow back into the couch in his new apartment on the Vyborg side. There, protected from the "crossfire of glances" that he was subjected to at Olga's house, and waited on by his social inferiors, he is once again king of his living room. Rather than blanching under the eyes of an unnervingly dominant Olga, Oblomov voyeuristically peeks at Agafia Matveevna, staring at her disembodied arm as it pushes plates full of pie out from the kitchen. Unlike Olga, who always made him move, read, and think, Agafia Matveevna is, in his eyes, a tasty morsel, whom he looks at "with the same pleasure that he looked at a hot cheese tart that

morning" (264). He sees her as a being without agency that exists solely to anticipate and fulfill his desires:

> Oblomov, sitting and not moving from the couch, saw that something [*chto-to*] living and quick was moving for his benefit […] soup and stew will appear on the table, and his undergarments will be clean and fresh, and the spider web will be swept from the wall, and he will never know how it happened, will never give himself the trouble of thinking what it is he wants, and it will already be guessed and brought to him beneath his very nose, not lazily, not with rudeness, not with Zakhar's dirty hands, but with a cheerful and meek glance, with a smile of deep loyalty, with white hands and naked elbows. (299)

He thinks of her, as he does of Tarant'ev, as something [*chto-to*], not someone. Significantly, Goncharov uses not active, but passive, subjectless verbs to describe the many duties Agafia Matveevna fulfills for him. Oblomov does not see human agency in her actions; the good she does happens somehow of its own accord, sped along by a collection of appetizing body parts—white arms, elbows, and a smile. Oblomov's vision of Agafia Matveevna is made especially frightening by the fact that what he loves most about these arms, elbows, and smiles bringing him food almost by magic is that they allow him to cede all agency as well. Thanks to them he does not even have to "give himself the trouble of thinking what it is he wants." [19]

Agafia Matveevna is only one of the many characters on the Vyborg side who, when seen through Oblomov's eyes, look less than human. Of Agafia Matveevna's brother, Ivan Matveevich, Richard Peace argues, "[i]n almost Gogolian fashion Ivan Matveyevich is reduced to a large parcel, flitting past the windows or along the outside

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[19] John Givens sees Oblomov's love for the mothering Agafia Matveevna, and his desire to lie and be passively fed by her until the very day of his death, as an urge to return to the womb. John Givens, "Wombs, Tombs and Mother Love: a Freudian Reading of Goncharov's *Oblomov*," in Diment, *Goncharov's* Oblomov, 90-109.

fence."[20] What Peace does not acknowledge, however, is that Ivan Matveevich only seems to be a flitting "large parcel" in scenes focalized by Oblomov. If anyone is "reducing" Ivan Matveevich in this scene, it is the protagonist himself, who lies on his couch and watches Ivan Matveevich walking by. This is not the first time that Goncharov has performed an almost Gogolian reduction on the people around him. In an earlier scene Zakhar's prominent-nosed and intelligent wife, Anisia, transforms under Oblomov's gaze into nothing but nose. Having accused her of spreading rumors about his relationship with Olga, Oblomov settles his eyes on her nose as he listens to her excuses: "[W]ith horror [he] guided his eyes along the walls, stopping them on Anisia's nose […] She seemed to be saying all of this not with her mouth, but with her nose" (255). By the time she leaves his room, Anisia has undergone a terrible metamorphosis, shrunk from a large-nosed woman to nose alone: "[T]he talking nose disappeared beyond the door, but the murmuring could still be heard for about a minute from behind the door" (255). A detail at the end of the passage drives home the fact that in this scene we are seeing with Oblomov's eyes and hearing with Oblomov's ears, and *Oblomov* is the one who perceives Anisia as a talking body part (not Goncharov): who but Oblomov would hear her mumbling "from behind the door"?

It is one of the ironies of Oblomov's life that he becomes more and more dependent on the people that he sees, in his imagination, as less than fully human, and surrenders up his own volition to people he does not think possess volition of their own. Zakhar dresses him, Anisia and Agafia Matveevna feed him, Tarant'ev arranges his housing, and Ivan Matveevich not only manages Oblomov's finances, but also sends out

[20] Peace, *Oblomov*, 67.

an emissary to "manage" Oblomovka and rob its master blind. Alexander Mihailovic describes the contradiction (Oblomov's utter dependence on his own "dependents") as "the paradox of the puerile helplessness of the patriarchal land-owning class, its inability to command any kind of authority."[21] Yet Oblomov has strong psychological motivations for reducing Tarant'ev to a moving "something" and for seeing Ivan Matveevich as nothing more than a flitting package. If he were to acknowledge them as full human beings, he would also have to acknowledge that they are the masters of his fate and not the other way around. It is significant, for example, that Oblomov begins to envision Agafia Matveevna as a talking nose at precisely the moment he fears her insubordination. He is (rightly) convinced that Anisia has been spying on him and Olga, and gossiping about them to friends and relations all over town, and orders her to stop speaking with Olga's servants. His imaginative reduction of Anisia to comic, non-threatening body part could be read as an additional psychic defense mechanism. No longer a woman with eyes that peek or a mouth that can spread rumors, Anisia becomes for Oblomov a walking nose, which even if it can talk, does not seem very likely to go gossiping.

The way Oblomov thinks about his "dependents" creates a sort of formal paradox as well (at least in the sections of the novel that he focalizes). As I mention at the beginning of this chapter, Oblomov has strong beliefs about the ethics of characterization in literature. He insists that writers should portray their characters as "human beings." And yet Oblomov himself does not always recognize the human being in the living and breathing people around him. This leads to a somewhat unexpected result: the scenes that Oblomov focalizes (in which the other characters appear to the reader as the protagonist

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[21] Alexander Mihailovic, "'That Blessed State': Western and Soviet Views of Infantilism in Oblomov," in Diment, *Goncharov's* Oblomov, 53.

sees them) are also the ones that least resemble Oblomov's own novelistic ideal. In these scenes characters look like dogs, pillows, boxes, or talking noses instead of human beings; they are characterized in precisely the way Oblomov believes they should *not* be.

Not Just Noses: The Secondary Characters Expand

From the very beginning of the novel, however, Goncharov gives the reader hints that the secondary characters that surround Oblomov are far more complex and more human than the protagonist realizes. When Goncharov first describes Anisia, for example, he performs one of the perspectival jumps that are typical of his prose style. The narrator details Anisia's appearance in two short paragraphs that display her from radically different points of view:

> She was a lively, quick woman, about forty-seven years old, with a caring smile, eyes that ran keenly in all directions, a strong neck and chest, and red, tenacious, never-tiring hands.
>
> She hardly had a face at all: only her nose was noticeable; although it wasn't big, it somehow stood out from her face, or was placed awkwardly, and what's more the lower part was turned upward, so that you'd long ago have gotten a clear understanding of her nose but still not have noticed her face. (169)

The paragraph break between "never-tiring hands" and "she hardly" is a logical necessity. The two paragraphs describe her from opposing, even irreconcilable, perspectives: in the first, Goncharov shows us Anisia as she might look to someone who knew and liked her (she has "a caring smile," perceptive eyes, and hard-working hands). In the second paragraph, however, we see Anisia from an entirely different point of view, as the grammatical switch from third-person description to second-person address indicates. Now the narrator describes her face not the way a friend, but the way an indifferent observer might see it for the first time. "You," which is to say we, would not

notice her eyes or her smile, but only her prominent nose. In fact, we would entirely fail to notice her face, the very thing that makes her human. Significantly, the Russian word for "face" [*litso*] can also mean "person" or even "literary character."

From the moment Goncharov first introduces Anisia, then, he gives his reader the choice to see her in one of two ways: we can look for what makes her human—her eyes and her caring smile—or we can see her as a casual observer might, as a nose without a face, a non-person and non-character in this novel. Oblomov chooses the second option, but as we learn more about her relationship with Zakhar (who envies her intelligence), and her friendship with Agafia Matveevna (which flowers beyond Oblomov's line of sight), we may become more inclined to choose the first. In fact, the events of the novel prove that ignoring another person's subjectivity can be extremely dangerous. Luckily for Oblomov, Anisia is devoted to him, and her gossiping is mostly harmless; but that is not true of Tarant'ev and Ivan Matveevich. By underestimating them (or, rather, by failing to consider that they are people, too, who may be driven by other motivations besides Oblomov's own best interests), Oblomov makes a fatal mistake.

When Goncharov introduces Tarant'ev he suggests that this Russian "proletarian" is more three-dimensional—and more dangerous—than Oblomov realizes (or wants to realize). Although Goncharov stays extremely close to the mind of his protagonist in Part I (recording almost exclusively Oblomov's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions), the first description of Tarant'ev is one of the exceptions to this rule. Of all the characters who come to see Oblomov in the opening chapters of the novel, only Tarant'ev is given a personal history, a fact that has often puzzled critics. Setchkarev argues that the narrator relates Tarant'ev's past because he will serve as a "connecting character" in the plot. For

Taborisskaia, the narrator's "extensive digression" on Tarant'ev is another indication of Oblomov's "objectivity" as a writer, his impulse to show the positive qualities of even the most unlikeable characters, or at least to explain why they are the way they are.[22] I want to suggest a third interpretation. By giving his reader an alternative perspective on Tarant'ev—a glimpse into this character's thoughts about his own past—Goncharov creates tension between the way Oblomov sees Tarant'ev (a moving and speaking something) and the way Tarant'ev sees himself: "as a strong character persecuted by fate, who unwillingly, without despondency, submits to it" (33).

Tarant'ev's personal history emphasizes nothing so much as unrealized potential: a clever student taken out of school too young, the disciple of a father who died before he could teach his son the tricks of his trade, he "carried, and recognized a slumbering power within himself, locked inside him by hostile circumstances forever, without any hope of manifesting itself" (34).[23] Yet the "slumbering power" that resides within Tarant'ev does, in a sense, "manifest itself" over the course of the novel. It wakes up in the beginning of Part III, when Tarant'ev organizes Oblomov's lodging on the Vyborg side, the first step in the dissolution of Oblomov's relationship with Olga. And it remains in force as Tarant'ev and Ivan Matveevich take greater and greater control of both Oblomov's finances and his personal life. The slumbering power of Tarant'ev's character "manifests itself" on the level of the structure of the novel as well. If in the first half of

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[22] Taborisskaia, "Avtor i geroi," 70-1; and Setchkarev, *Ivan Goncharov*, 136.

[23] Interestingly, the hidden potential that Oblomov has buried within himself through his lethargic habits is described in almost the exact same language as Tarant'ev's "slumbering power": "[I]n him was buried, as in a grave, some sort of good, bright essence" [в нем зарыто, как в могиле, какое-то хорошее, светлое начало] (77). Tarant'ev may belong to a different social class from Oblomov, but these two men from the same province have a lot in common, a fact that suggests, once again, that Oblomov is not as different from, or incomparable to, the people who surround him as he might like to think.

the novel we usually see him in passages focalized by the eponymous protagonist, in the second half Tarant'ev and Ivan Matveevich earn several of their own scenes as they scheme against Oblomov in his absence.

Tarant'ev is only one of many secondary characters who start gaining in dimensionality, increasingly commanding narrative attention, and becoming ever more central figures in Parts III and IV, and the character who "expands" the most is Agafia Matveevna. When we first encounter Agafia Matveevna in Part III, she is almost always depicted "externally,"[24] as Oblomov or some other outside observer might see her (in glimpses of elbows, arms, and bosom). In these scenes the noun most closely associated with her is "mental slowness" [*tupoumie*], which the narrator uses to describe her several times. Soon, however, Goncharov begins to introduce the reader to Agafia Matveevna's rich internal life and the word "mental slowness" disappears from the narrator's descriptions of her. In Part III he has already begun to detail her extraordinary friendship with Anisia (the only friendship between two lower class women that appears in any major nineteenth-century Russian novel that I can think of). And in Part IV Goncharov brings the reader into Agafia Matveevna's heart and mind, detailing the way she falls in love with and devotes herself to Oblomov.

Only gradually does Goncharov shift from describing Agafia Matveevna "externally" (as Oblomov sees her) to representing her interiority, in a series of slow stages. He first gives us a hint of Agafia Matveevna's internal life in the description of her friendship with Anisia: "[T]he mutual attraction between Anisia and the landlady had

[24] The terminology I use here was developed by Uspensky: he discusses the possibility of depicting literary characters either from an "external" or an "internal" point of view (how a third party might see them vs. how they themselves reason and think). See Uspensky, *Poetics of Composition*, especially 140-47.

turned into an unbreakable bond" (294). Soon thereafter, the narrator begins to take on Agafia Matveevna's voice, recording her thoughts and feelings via free indirect discourse for the first time.[25] When he describes her joy at the prospect of keeping house for Oblomov, he allows her words to infiltrate his own: "How her arena had expanded: instead of one, two households, or just one, but what a big one! And to add to that, she had acquired Anisia" (295). A few lines later, the narrator represents her thoughts through free indirect discourse again, this time taking the reader into her anxious mind as she stays up late waiting for Oblomov: "[S]he cannot sleep, she turns from side to side, crosses herself, sighs, closes her eyes—sleep won't come, and that's that!" (296). Only after Goncharov has not only given us access to Agafia Matveevna's anxieties, but actually encouraged us, through free indirect discourse, to think her thoughts and live through her worries, does he launch into a long description of how Agafia Matveevna's life has changed for the better since she fell in love with her tenant.

In fact, in Part IV Agafia Matveevna transitions from occupying a secondary position in the narrative to becoming a protagonist in her own right, a central figure in the novel. One could even argue that she replaces Oblomov as the hero of his own life story. After his final break with Olga, when he settles down on his couch on the Vyborg side, never to get up again, Oblomov loses much of his narrative interest. As I have already mentioned, some critics have seen Oblomov's refusal to leave his apartment in Part I as a justified ethical and even spiritual stance: he refuses to participate in the deadening

[25] Earlier the narrator playfully adopts the term of address, "bratets" ("dear brother"), which Agafia Matveevna always uses when referring to her brother, along with her habit of referring to him in the respectful plural. Thus he creates an ironic disjuncture between Ivan Matveevich as he seems to Oblomov (a sloppy nonentity, a minor bureaucrat) and the undue respect his sister shows him. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say, then, that in Part IV the narrator adopts Agafia Matveevna's language sympathetically for the first time.

hubbub of life in the capital, instead devoting himself to contemplation and internal investigation.[26] Oblomov's return to his couch in Part IV, however, is extremely negatively marked. Instead of daydreaming about reorganizing Oblomovka or even about becoming the next Napoleon as he did in the first chapters of the novel, Oblomov spends most of his day asleep, and the narrator's descriptions of him are imbued with the imagery of death and decline. After Oblomov and Olga part for good, the narrator describes the hero as having utterly lost the spark of life: "He could lie like a rock for whole days at a time, or walk, drive, move like a machine" (291). The man who saw Tarant'ev, Anisia, and Agafia Matveevna as little more than objects or appendages, becomes increasingly object-like himself.

In Part IV Goncharov reveals the titular protagonist's (unchanging and repetitive) thoughts and feelings with less and less frequency, and, in an almost perfect inverse ratio, Agafia Matveevna's more and more. If Oblomov usually focalizes the scenes in which he appears in Parts I, II, and III, Agafia Matveevna often focalizes scenes in which both she and Oblomov appear in Part IV. When Stoltz unexpectedly appears at the house, Oblomov (oblivious to his own financial troubles), orders Agafia Matveevna to buy cheese and meat for dinner, throwing her into a state of near-despair. As she is leaving for the market, Oblomov suddenly remembers that they have no wine, either: "We have to send for lafite—he concluded cold-bloodedly" (335). The adverb the narrator uses, "cold-bloodedly" [*khladnokrovno*], does not reflect Oblomov's tone in any objective sense: Oblomov does not realize how impoverished he is; he is simply asking his landlady to buy wine for his guest. Instead, the adjective reflects Agafia Matveevna's emotional

[26] See Ksana Blank, "An Endless Passage," 195-236.

response to the scene: with no idea where to find the money for all these luxuries, she cannot help but consider Oblomov's demand "cold-blooded." With this one adjective, Goncharov subtly aligns us with Agafia Matveevna's feelings, allowing us to see Oblomov (and Oblomov's financial difficulties) through her eyes.

In chapter IX, the last time Goncharov takes his reader to the Vyborg side before Oblomov's death, he has relegated his erstwhile protagonist to a decidedly secondary position in the structure of the narrative. Long before Goncharov brings us to Oblomov himself (lying, as always, on his couch), he details the bounties of Agafia Matveevna's kitchen, her proud and efficient work alongside Anisia, and the joy she takes in looking after Oblomov's health. In fact, Goncharov reveals Oblomov's own thoughts and feelings only five pages into the chapter, almost as an afterthought, after the phrase: "And Oblomov himself?" [А сам Обломов?] (370). Scholars have long debated why Goncharov portrays Oblomov's deadening life on the Vyborg side in such an incongruously positive light. Milton Ehre suggests that Goncharov does so almost unwillingly: he had intended to criticize Oblomov's choices and praise Stoltz's, but cannot help but pause lovingly over the abundance of his lazy life.[27] It is also possible, however, to read the narrator's enchantment with Agafia Matveevna's kitchen and the domestic harmony of her household as celebrating not Oblomov's life choices, but hers. After all, the couch-bound Oblomov never even enters Agafia Matveevna's wondrous pantry. If we think of chapter IX as more Agafia Matveevna's story than Oblomov's, the

[27] Ehre, *Oblomov*, 218.

seeming incongruity disappears. This is the zenith of her life, which occasions an ode to her powers as a cook and homemaker; she is the hero of this household.[28]

The Exploding Statue: Olga Il'inskaia's Fireworks

Oblomov's character system is destabilized not only by the way characters such as Tarant'ev, Anisia, and especially Agafia Matveevna "expand" over the course of the novel, garnering more and more narrative attention as the eponymous protagonist garners less and less, but also by the conflicting and contradictory characterizations of a figure who is much more central to the novel: Olga Il'inskaia. Agafia Matveevna enters the novel as a decidedly secondary character (often compared to objects and always depicted "externally"), but she focalizes more and more scenes until she becomes the heroine of her own domestic queendom. Olga also flip-flops between occupying two positions of very different narrative significance: is she, first and foremost, a love interest for Oblomov and Stolz, who pushes them and helps them grow (a sort of "complement to the primary characters"[29] and a second-tier, if not precisely *secondary* character)? Or is she a hero in her own right?

Oblomov, as I have already mentioned, believes that for all Olga's vivacity and intellect, she never oversteps the bounds of a "woman's sphere." But Goncharov shows just how difficult it is to circumscribe Olga's character, whether within the bounds of

[28] In her dissertation, Bella Grigoryan shows just how much value Goncharov placed on good housekeeping. She both demonstrates that Goncharov incorporated ideas and images from mid-nineteenth-century "how to" manuals of domestic life into his fiction, and traces pairs of good and bad housekeepers throughout several of his novels. Agafia Matveevna, it goes without saying, falls into the "good" camp. "Noble Farmers: The Provincial Landowner in the Russian Cultural Imagination" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011), 160-87.

[29] Springer, *A Rhetoric of Literary Character*, 14.

"appropriate" feminine behavior, or any other. Soon after meeting Olga, Oblomov lies in his bed and "draws her portrait in his memory" [все рисовал в памяти ее портрет]. The description of Olga that follows, while not tagged with quotation marks, is a continuation of Oblomov's thought process (after all, he is the one mentally "drawing her portrait"). Oblomov muses that "if one were to turn her into a statue, she would be a statue of grace and harmony" [если б ее обратить в статую, она была бы статуя грации и гармонии], and that any man passing her on the street would stop and stare at such an "exactly, thoughtfully, and artistically created being" [перед этим так строго и обдуманно, артистически созданным существом] (151). Olga's very facial features, however, resist Oblomov's attempts to aestheticize her, to turn her from a living and breathing person into an object to behold. Continuing to "draw" Olga in his mind, Oblomov comes upon her uneven eyebrows and the crease on her forehead, which he considers the seat of her intellect, and which destroy the artistic symmetry of her face, ruining the comparison of woman to statue.[30]

Olga, as Goncharov reminds his reader again and again, is no statue. As Richard Peace has argued, the heroine is associated throughout the novel with fireworks and explosives (most explicitly in the narrator's comment that Stoltz, when he introduced her

[30] The first detailed description of Agafia Matveevna's face, like Olga's, is presented to the reader through the filter of Oblomov's mind. As we first see Olga's face when Oblomov "paints her portrait" in his memory, we first see Agafia Matveevna as Oblomov considers her and her house on the Vyborg side: "Suddenly, from behind him the door creaked, and into the room came that same woman, whom he had seen with a bare neck and elbows." To him Agafia Matveevna, with her motionless breast, seems as pale and as perfectly proportioned as a marble sculpture: "She had a very full and white face, so that it seemed that no blush could ever break through […] Even her covered bust […] could have served an artist or a sculptor as the model of a strong, healthy breast [мог бы послужить живописцу или скульптору моделью крепкой, здоровой груди]" (232). But just as Olga's crooked eyebrows resist aestheticization, Agafia Matveevna has a feature that unsettles the comparison of woman to statue: her hands. The only site of color on her body, these hands, "rough, with large knots of blue veins that stood out" (232), represent her skill, energy, and creativity, and turn the work of housekeeping into an art form. As the novel continues, she, like Olga, will become an artist rather than an art object.

to Oblomov, "did not foresee that he was introducing a firework [фейерверк]").[31] She contains within her a hidden power even more potent than Tarant'ev's. It emerges in the "temporary, flying hints and flares of the sleeping powers of life [вспышкам спящих сил жизни]" (158) that burst out when she sings and, most dramatically, in her erotic scene in the garden at nighttime when she leans her fevered cheek onto Oblomov's shoulder (perhaps the only depiction of a female orgasm in the mid-nineteenth-century Russian canon). Olga's liveliness is so powerful that even she cannot seem to contain it. When, aroused by her passionate singing and bold glances, Oblomov spontaneously confesses his love for her, Olga suddenly stills herself. She forces her curious eyes (the cause of all her problems) downward, frightened of what she has done: "She no longer followed him with a curious glance but for a long time, without moving, stood by the piano, like a statue, and stubbornly looked downward" (159). Yet despite her best efforts, her heavy, emotionally-charged breathing destroys her attempt to achieve feminine propriety through stone-like immobility: even though her limbs do not move, still "her breast strenuously rose and fell" (159).

Olga is compared to a statue for a third time, much later in the novel, when she decides to break off her engagement with Oblomov. Once again Olga tries to still and contain herself, and once again she cannot maintain this state for very long. She needs rock-like determination to resist Oblomov's attempts to change her mind, but the narrator emphasizes just how unnatural this state of stillness is for her, and how temporary it must be: "[I]n each one of her features was hidden an internal, tense life, frozen as if in ice, with forced calmness and stillness […] she seemed as peaceful and still as a stone statue

[31] Peace, *Oblomov*.

[…] but only for one moment" (287). After she finally convinces Oblomov that their relationship can go no further, the spell breaks, and she begins to cry. She cannot remain frozen and statue-like for more than a few short moments.

Although Olga does not conform to Oblomov's fantasy of the meek woman who "is subdued" by her husband, she does not wish to upend traditional gender relations, either. Like Oblomov, she deeply believes that man should lead and guide woman, but with her languid fiancé she continually finds herself, against her own desires, taking the dominant role in the relationship. She throws all of her energy and intelligence into raising Oblomov above herself, "higher, higher, to that line, where the power of tenderness and grace lose their rights and the kingdom of manhood begins!" (276), but to no avail. The gender roles in their relationship remain stubbornly reversed, and she plays the romantic initiator and moral guide, shaping Oblomov rather than being shaped by him, the sculptor rather than the sculpture. She soon realizes that her lover is "some sort of Galatea, with whom she herself would have to be Pygmalion" (186).[32] And her prediction is realized to a tee. She, overflowing with life and energy, can only hold herself in a state of statue-like immobility for a few short moments, but the sluggish, slumbering Oblomov refuses to wake up and live. When she and Oblomov finally part, she cries, "A stone would have come to life thanks to what I did" (288).

The Return of the Male Protagonist: The Heroine and Secondary Characters Contract

I have argued that as Oblomov loses his dominant hold over the narrative (serving as the

[32] In one scene that reveals the extent to which their gender roles are reversed, Oblomov tells Olga that he does not fear fate when she is with him. She scoffs in reply that she has read those exact words in a novel by Sue, "only there the woman says it to the man" (204).

focalizer with less and less frequency), the female and lower-class characters in *Oblomov* become more and more narratively central. In the second half of Part IV, however, Goncharov reintroduces Stoltz, Oblomov's childhood friend, who restores the balance of power: he immediately pushes the female and lower-class characters (Tarant'ev and Ivan Matveevich, Agafia Matveevna, and even Olga) back into secondary positions, both in the social world Goncharov depicts, and in the structure of the narrative itself.

When Stoltz runs into Olga in Paris after her break with Oblomov, he immediately takes her under his wing, becoming for her the moral guide that she failed to find in her first fiancé. Extremely independent up until this point in the novel, Olga submits to Stoltz's benign influence: "[H]e became an interpreter of events, her leader. He invisibly became her reason and her conscience" (318). Stoltz retroactively interprets her relationship with Oblomov, replacing her understanding of what happened between them with his own. What is more, he draws on normative feminine behavior to explain why Olga had mistakenly imagined herself to be in love. Stoltz praises portions of a letter Oblomov wrote to her several months before, including one section in which Oblomov explains that her apparent affection for him stems from a natural, feminine need to love, which "sometimes manifests itself in the tenderness women show a child, another woman, and even simply in tears and hysterical fits [в истерических припадках]" (197).[33] According to Stoltz, he and Oblomov understand Olga's emotions better than she

[33] At the time she receives the letter, Olga doubts Oblomov's sincerity, claiming that he never really wanted to part, but only to gain a degree of power over his all-too-powerful lover, to prove to himself that he could make her cry (and indeed, he hides in the bushes to spy out how she will react). Is it simply a coincidence that Zakhar refuses to let his wife, Anisia, deliver this very letter to Olga, insisting on doing it himself with the cry, "Know your woman's place" [Знай свое бабье дело] (199)? Or does Goncharov use Zakhar's words in order to draw our attention to the undertones of self-defensive sexism in Oblomov's letter as well? After all, Zakhar's resentment of his wife's superior intelligence parallels Oblomov's feelings of inadequacy before Olga, a parallel Goncharov made more explicit in earlier drafts of the novel. In one draft, Geiro points out, Oblomov both recognizes and comments upon the similarity between his own

herself does. When Olga remains unconvinced and asks why, if she never loved Oblomov, she wept so bitterly at their parting, Stoltz answers: “What won’t women cry about?” (327).

Once Olga and Stoltz get married, he takes hold of the reins in their relationship even more firmly: they may make both domestic and business decisions together, but Stoltz always shows her the way, and she always follows. Unlike Zakhar, he does not mind having an intelligent wife, and happily teaches her about science and philosophy (albeit leaving out the abstract concepts and figures). And we learn that Olga remembers... most of it. The narrator, expressing an idea that was popular in Russia during the 1850s and ‘60s (that women found it difficult to understand abstract concepts and to remember the details of intellectual arguments), explains: “[A]fterward the details disappeared from her memory, but the picture never eroded away in her receptive mind” (352).[34] Stoltz feels especially validated when she repeats one of his ideas, not with a man’s dry intellect, but “with a brilliancy of feminine grace” [с блеском женской грации] (352). Unexpectedly, the narrator explains that Olga is a Galatea after all: she is, in a sense, Stoltz’s creation, who, we learn, played an instrumental role in forming her personality. Protected from the pernicious feminine influence of “the authority of seven nannies, grandmothers, aunts” (350), the narrator tells us, the orphaned Olga fell under

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dismay at Olga’s intellectual superiority and Zakhar’s anger at Anisia: “Oh my God! Could it be that she… is Anisia, and I am Zakhar?!” L. S. Geiro, “Istoriia sozdaniia i publikatsii romana ‘Oblomova,’” in Goncharov, *Oblomov*, 563.

[34] Take, for example, what Dobroliubov, the political radical and champion of women’s rights, wrote about educating girl children: “It is well known that in children in general and girls in particular, emotion dominates over reason, and imagination constantly interferes with memory. Therefore the teacher must take care above all to ensure the correct development of the imagination of his female pupils and the healthy direction of their emotions: otherwise these faculties will constantly interfere with the correct performance of reason and memory,” qtd. in Arja Rosenholm, “The ‘Woman Question’ of the 1860s and the Ambiguity of the ‘Learned Woman,’” in *Gender and Russian Literature: New Perspectives*, ed. Rosalind Marsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 116.

Stoltz's moral guidance when she was still a very young girl.[35] Without even realizing what he was doing, Stoltz was shaping her developing mind. Now, many years later, her husband, "from time to time, seeing that there flashed within her qualities of mind and a point of view that were not entirely ordinary, that there was no falseness in her, that she did not seek universal adoration […] he wondered where she had gotten these, and didn't recognize his own passing lessons and comments" (350). Olga may be an original thinker, the narrator suggests here, but only thanks to *Stoltz's* influence, only because he helped make her that way.

If Stoltz "defuses" Olga, then he utterly disempowers Tarant'ev and Ivan Matveevich. As soon as he walks into the house on the Vyborg side, the two crooks scatter, fleeing in the face of the "secondary hero's" coming wrath, never to appear again in the novel for any significant length of time. Agafia Matveevna also loses her place as head of Oblomov's household soon after Stoltz arrives. Oblomov has begged Stoltz to raise his and Agafia Matveevna's son (whom he names Andrei, in honor of his friend) after he dies, and the mother agrees. Olga and Stoltz eventually invite Agafia Matveevna to come live with them, but she refuses, just as she refuses any income from the estate, and only after she has utterly negated herself does Stoltz begin to warm up to her. Earlier he had described Agafia Matveevna as "a simple woman; a dirty existence, a suffocating sphere of stupidity" [простая баба; грязный быт, удушливая сфера тупоумия] (345). Note the return of the word "stupidity," *tupoumie*, which was associated with Agafia

[35] In several scenes Stoltz's relationship with Olga is compared to that of a mother and child. This comparison is very significant: it suggests that Stoltz has filled the role that Olga's dead mother can no longer fill, and that Olga has only benefited by the lack of feminine influence in her life.

Matveevna in the scenes when Oblomov first sees her; it only reappears in the novel when Stoltz does.

Is Goncharov in Stoltz's Carriage?

In the novel's final chapter, set several years after Oblomov's death, Stoltz rides through Petersburg with a writer acquaintance (who, with his round face and sleepy eyes, bears a suspicious resemblance to Goncharov himself). In a surprise ending, we learn that Stoltz is the one who related Oblomov's life story to Goncharov's fictional double: "And he [Stoltz] told him [the author], what is written here" [И он (Штольц) рассказал ему (литератору), что здесь написано] (382). If we read the novel's last sentence literally, it means that Stoltz is the one who has been narrating the story from beginning to end. Yuri Mann strongly denies this possibility, calling the novel's ending "formal, demonstratively formal": "The 'author' did not participate in the action and, it goes without saying, related everything that happened in a way that Stoltz could not have possibly told him […] In *Oblomov* the character who is the source of information turns out to be one of the main characters, but this fact absolutely does not impact the manner of narration; it is simply ignored."[36] Even if we cannot read the last line of the novel literally, however, it nevertheless has the power to influence the way we read the entire narrative. It raises Stoltz's voice and Stoltz's point of view above those of the other characters. After all, this turns out to be *Stoltz*'s (not Olga's or Agafia Matveevna's or Tarant'ev's or even Oblomov's!) story.

[36] Mann, "Goncharov kak povestvovatel'," 84.

And yet—any interpretation of *Oblomov* will ultimately boil down to one long series of "and yets"—the principle of perspectival plurality that governs the entire novel ultimately keeps any one voice, any one worldview (even Stoltz's), from dominating all the others. Despite the authority that being identified as the source of the entire narrative would seem to grant him, Stoltz never fully establishes himself as a positive "second hero," in part because he is not always kind to the female and lower class characters with whom the reader has increasingly come to sympathize. As Marijeta Bozovic points out, Stoltz's negative reaction to the news of Oblomov's and Agafia Matveevna's marriage is excessive: "Before him suddenly 'an abyss yawned open,' 'a stone wall' was erected, and it was as if Oblomov suddenly ceased to be, as if he had fallen away from Stoltz's eyes, as if he had sunk through the floor . . . he's perished!" (375).[37] Only ten pages after Goncharov has taken us deep into Agafia Matveevna's thoughts, feelings, and love for Oblomov, he shows Stoltz thinking that Oblomov's marriage to her is a fate worse than death. Sympathetic to Agafia Matveevna as we have become, Stoltz's thoughts may very well strike us as misguided, snobbish, and even cruel.

Just as Stoltz's treatment of Agafia Matveevna may make the reader question his judgment, so his relationship with Olga (another character whose perspective we occupy more and more frequently over the course of the novel) may strike us as manipulative, rather than comradely. Although, as I have argued, the narrator repeatedly reminds the reader that Olga bows to Stoltz's moral influence, that she is *his* Galatea, and not the

[37] Marijeta Bozovic, "Bol'shoe puteshestvie 'Oblomova': roman Goncharova vo svete 'prosvetitel'noi poezdki,'" *Novoe Literaturnoe obozrenie* 106 (2010): 130-45.

other way around, this is only half the story.[38] In the final chapters of the novel Goncharov presents Olga to his readers now through one, now through another lens: the first, closely associated with Stoltz's own view of Olga, shows her as his pupil and creation; through the second and more radical lens Olga looks like Stoltz's superior and the driving force in their relationship. For each of the narrator's or Stoltz's assurances that his wife remains morally and intellectually dependent on him, they both give another, conflicting, suggestion that Stoltz can hardly keep pace with her. When Stoltz first sees Olga in Paris he is shocked by how much she has matured in his absence, and thinks to himself: "This child, Olga! . . . She is outgrowing me!" [Она перерастает меня!] (314). Although the narrator claims that Olga cannot remember the details of the lessons her husband gives her, only a few lines earlier he makes the conflicting statement that Stoltz himself "barely managed to keep up with the exhausting haste of her thoughts and her will" (352).

The text even contains hints that, for all of his supposed encouragement of her intellectual development, Stoltz is struggling to contain her, to curb her liveliness and explosiveness, and make her a little more *statue-like*. Of Stoltz's moral and intellectual training of his wife, the narrator writes that "he had to fight with the liveliness of her nature for a long time [долго приходилось ему бороться с живостью ее натуры], break the fever of youth […] give a smooth flow to her life, and even that he could do only for a short time" (351). Can it be a coincidence that, in the famous scene in which Olga expresses her secret dissatisfaction with married life, she complains not only of

[38] Karl Kramer argues that, according to the logic of the novel, they can only be a "compatible" couple if he is firmly in command. See his "Mistaken Identities and Compatible Couples in *Oblomov,*" in Diment, *Goncharov's* Oblomov, 68-76.

feeling trapped, but also as if she were being petrified? “Suddenly it would be as if she had turned to stone and become silent, then she would bustle about with a false liveliness, in order to hide her strange ailment” (355). It may even strike the reader as sinister when Stoltz suggests that Olga’s problem is that she is too alive [ты слишком жива] (357).

Critics have interpreted Olga’s mysterious depression in countless ways: Dobroliubov argues that Olga is dissatisfied with Stoltz’s lack of revolutionary impulse; Setchkarev insists that Stoltz’s explanation of her sadness (as a malady that afflicts all thinking people) is undoubtedly what Goncharov had in mind.[39] But Olga’s own words suggest still another explanation. She worries that her mysterious dissatisfaction stems from a forbidden desire to exceed “a woman’s sphere” as understood by her husband, herself, and society at large: “[A] desire not made for affection, an unfeminine heart! Oh God!... Could she be a bluestocking?!” (354). Galya Diment lends credence to this feminist interpretation of Olga’s ambiguous unhappiness: she points out that Ekaterina Maikova, one of the real-life inspirations for Olga’s character, “couldn’t fill the void either.” A few years after *Oblomov* was published, she would leave her husband, join a radical commune, and become a fighter for women’s rights.[40]

We may doubt the equity of Stoltz’s relationship with Olga, but something Tarant’ev says just before he is chased out of Oblomov’s house threatens to overturn our entire understanding of Stoltz’s motivations. Throughout the story Tarant’ev has been depicted as a false friend (barely even a human being), who only wants to take advantage of Oblomov; Stoltz, on the other hand, has been depicted as the good friend, who always

[39] Setchkarev, *Ivan Goncharov*, 149.

[40] Diment, “The Precocious Talent of Ivan Goncharov,” in Diment, *Goncharov’s* Oblomov, 34.

has Oblomov's best interests at heart. When Stoltz learns that Tarant'ev has borrowed ten rubles from Oblomov, he asks derisively, "Why do you allow that animal in your house?" [Зачем ты пускаешь к себе это животное?] (133) (although, curiously enough, at this very moment Stoltz himself wants to borrow not 10, but 500 rubles). Before Tarant'ev exits the novel, however, he deeply unsettles both the reader's (and Oblomov's) perception of Stoltz as a "good friend." When Stoltz reappears in Part IV, ruining Tarant'ev's schemes, kicking him out of Oblomov's life and off the pages of the novel itself, Tarant'ev refuses to accept defeat. He marches over to the Vyborg side, shouting that the foreigner Stoltz cannot be trusted: "What a good friend! I heard that he stole your fiancée; a benefactor, there's nothing else to say! Well, brother countryman, you're a fool..." (346).

While Tarant'ev exaggerates (Stoltz did not literally steal Olga away: she and Oblomov parted months before Stoltz began making his advances), he voices an uncomfortable truth. Stoltz not only reacts with condescending derision when he finds out about Olga and Oblomov's former engagement, he actually tries to erase it retroactively. He explains to Olga that she could not have loved Oblomov, because Oblomov is incapable of inspiring love: "[F]or love something is necessary, sometimes only trifles, which are impossible to define or to name, but which my incomparable, but clumsy, Il'ia does not have" (324). (Incidentally, Stoltz's statement is baldly false: Oblomov easily inspires love in the breast of Agafia Matveevna.) Neither he nor she need fear Olga's former relationship with Oblomov, because it was not a relationship at all. When Stoltz learns that Olga's former love was just Oblomov he exclaims, "My God, if I had known that this was all about Oblomov, would I have tortured myself so?!" (326).

The vehemence with which Oblomov responds to Tarant'ev's accusation against Stoltz reveals how deeply it disturbs him. Oblomov believes (or wants to believe) that Stoltz has done him a favor by marrying Olga, and that his friend is in this, as in all things, looking out for Oblomov's best interests. When Stoltz first tells him about the marriage, Oblomov reacts with almost exaggerated gratitude: "I no longer blush at the thought of my role, I no longer regret it; a weight has fallen from my soul; it is clear now, and I am happy. Thank you, God! [Боже! благодарю тебя!]" (337). Tarant'ev's alternate interpretation of what happened between Oblomov, Stoltz, and Olga directly contradicts, indeed threatens to upturn, Oblomov's own, and he cannot allow it to stand uncontested. When Tarant'ev calls Olga Oblomov's lover, it is the last straw, and Oblomov rushes toward him in a fury: he slaps Tarant'ev's face and threatens to kill him "like a dog." Agafia Matveevna reinforces the comparison by shouting at Tarnat'ev, "[Y]ou're still snarling!" ["еще лаетесь," literally, "you're still barking!"]. But even if Oblomov kicks Tarant'ev out the door, humiliates and dehumanizes him, he cannot erase what Tarant'ev has said. His words hang there in the middle of chapter VII, without ever having been explicitly contradicted or disproved, casting their shadow over Oblomov and Stoltz's friendship. This secondary figure, described as a mere "connecting character" by Setchkarev, utters a damning criticism of Stoltz that could, if considered seriously, change the way we read many of the most important events in the novel.

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Susan Lanser argues that it is possible to reconstruct the social or political ideology underlying a novel by organizing all the points of view of all the different narrators and focalizers that appear in it into a hierarchy, thereby "evolv[ing] a portrait of the relative

statuses of narrative voices and their various relationships to the authorial voice."[41] I would argue that for readers of *Oblomov*, establishing such a hierarchy is uniquely difficult to accomplish, in large part because the apparent "statuses" of so many characters fluctuate over the course of the novel as they first gain, and then lose, narrative prominence. Goncharov makes it especially difficult to tell which character's words we can believe, and of whose we should be wary. Tarant'ev, for example, seems to be an untrustworthy character, but is he necessarily less trustworthy than Stoltz?

Even the voice of the (usually reticent) narrator has its inconsistencies, sometimes presenting us with one, and at other times with a very different picture of the novel's characters. These inconsistencies are especially pronounced in the narrator's discourse about Olga: first he seems to be suggesting that Olga is Stoltz's intellectual inferior, then that she has outgrown him and that her husband can barely keep up with the speed and agility of her mind. It is as if Goncharov has picked two possible ways of depicting Olga (one that adheres more closely to traditional gender norms, and one that is more "explosive"), and keeps alternating between the two, in an ever "moving, changing perspective."[42]

Oblomov is a profoundly polyphonic novel in the sense that Boris Uspensky understood the term: a narrative in which "the various viewpoints are not subordinated [to one overarching viewpoint], but are presented as essentially equal ideological voices."[43] The plethora of "equal viewpoints" Goncharov includes in his novel (which

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[41] Lanser, *The Narrative Act*, 173.

[42] Mann, "Goncharov kak povestvovatel'," 89.

[43] Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition*, 10.

touches on some of the most important social questions of the day: the apathy of the landowning classes, serfdom, the so-called "Woman Question") leaves the text open to several, very different ideological interpretations. Does the novel suggest, as Karl Kramer argues, that the only truly compatible couple is one in which the man leads and directs the woman?[44] Or does it show the way men's feelings of inadequacy before their more intelligent partners cripples romantic relationships?[45] Both and neither are true: Goncharov presents us with both of these possibilities, and leaves us to draw our own conclusions.

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[44] See Kramer, "Mistaken Identities and Compatible Couples."

[45] In 1869 Goncharov would express his own moderate position on the "Woman Question" to his female friend, Sofia Nikitenko. In his letter Goncharov states that neither he, nor anyone else, can say for sure who is to blame "for the hideous chaotic state of relations between the sexes" or devise a clear-cut plan of action to fix it. He has no answers about the true natures and talents of each sex, only questions: "But given that nobody has positive answers to these questions, and that some of these answers may forever remain unknown, there is no point in getting angry and climbing up on some superhuman pedestal. What both sexes *should* do is try to improve themselves a little, be a bit more honest and clearheaded…" Goncharov to S. A. Nikitenko, Paris, 24 July 1869, in Diment *Goncharov's* Oblomov, 153.

CHAPTER 3

Two Novels, Two Sets of Minor Characters: Anna Karenina's Cogs vs. Levin, Shcherbatsky, and the Beekeeper

> I want the character to do his job. If someone is raking leaves in the background while the hero and the heroine are having their tragic conversation in the autumn park, I am content that he should be simply someone raking leaves. People do after all rake leaves, and so long as he looks like someone raking leaves, that is enough for me. I positively do not want him "round"; in fact, I do not even want him "flat." More than that: unless his raking those leaves adds something somehow to what is going on, I want him to quit raking them and just disappear. He should never have existed in the first place.
>
> —Elder Olson[1]

The writer and literary critic Elder Olson voices a common idea about literary characters: there should not be any extraneous ones. Unless a character has a role to play in the drama between the hero and the heroine in a particular scene, he "should never have existed in the first place." *Anna Karenina* is full of characters who, if Tolstoy were an adherent of Olson's aesthetic philosophy, would "just disappear," characters who do not contribute to the plots of the heroes and heroines of the novel in any straightforward way. In a scene remarkably similar to the hypothetical one Olson describes, Levin and his pregnant wife Kitty argue in their garden, but not before they "come upon a muzhik who

[1] Elder Olson, *Tragedy and the Theory of Drama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961), 85, qtd. in Springer, *A Rhetoric of Literary Character*, 15.

was weeding the path."[2] Not only does this seemingly superfluous character *exist*, Tolstoy even allows us to occupy his perspective and see this world through his eyes, however briefly. The type of fictional person that Olson thinks ought to be an "object character," or perhaps no character at all, becomes in Tolstoy's novel a seeing subject, who watches "with surprise" as Levin and Kitty return "home past him with calmed, radiant faces" (600; 19:175). And yet the gardener does "add something somehow to what is going on" in the novel, though not necessarily in a way that Olson would recognize. He is essential to the narrative, not in spite of his superfluity to Levin and Kitty's argument and their developing story line, but precisely because of it. As I will argue in this chapter, the inclusion of such "extraneous" characters in *Anna Karenina* is, for Tolstoy, a matter of moral, philosophical, and aesthetic principle.

Long before Tolstoy began writing *Anna Karenina* he was famous for overloading his novels with "superfluous" characters. In 1868 Pavel Annenkov complained that "the innumerable crowd of people who flash by one after the other" in *War and Peace* would "confuse" any critic.[3] As Gary Saul Morson has shown, however, the swarm of peripheral characters who overrun Tolstoy's great work of historical fiction serves an extremely important purpose: these characters reflect Tolstoy's understanding of how history functions, and what we can and cannot know about it. According to the philosophy Tolstoy's narrator expounds in the novel itself, there are and can be no

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[2] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Viking Penguin, 2000), 600. Lev Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh*, Iubileinoe izdanie, ed. V. G. Chertkov (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo "Khudozhestvennaia literatura," 1930-72), 19:175. From here on I will cite Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation parenthetically in the body of the chapter, followed by the volume and page number from Tolstoy's *PSS*.

[3] P. V. Annenkov, "Istoricheskie i esteticheskie voprosy v romane gr. L. N. Tolstogo 'Voina i mir'," originally published in *The Herald of Europe* in 1868, qtd. in Morson, *Hidden in Plain View*, 52.

“extraneous” characters in human history. The historical figures we imagine to be significant (kings, generals, lords) are not. Historical movements, battles, and invasions are brought about not by commanders and heads of state, but by an infinite number of infinitesimal forces, the wills of countless individuals that act according to an unknowable and incalculable divine plan. According to Morson, the proliferation of characters that perturbs so many critics of *War and Peace* in fact serves to recreate, in the structure of his work itself, the incalculable vibrations of the swarm life Tolstoy describes on its pages. Readers of *War and Peace,* like “readers” of history itself, are supposed to get lost in the “innumerable crowd” of characters; they are supposed to be uncertain which will play a more or less significant role in the historical events Tolstoy depicts (which of these characters are major and which minor), because that is something that only a higher power can know for sure.[4]

The seemingly “extraneous” minor characters in *Anna Karenina* serve a somewhat different purpose than they do in Tolstoy’s earlier fiction. A long line of Tolstoy scholars, running from Tolstoy’s contemporary Aleksandr Stankevich to John Bayley, Gary Saul Morson, and most recently, Ilya Kliger, have emphasized the immense structural differences between the two major storylines in *Anna Karenina*, the half of the novel that centers on Anna and the half that centers on Levin, Kitty, their friends, family,

[4] As Viktor Shklovsky has shown through painstaking analysis of the extant drafts of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy actually made a conscious effort to disemplot the novel’s peripheral characters, making them seem more “extraneous” to the lives and loves of more central characters like Pierre and Natasha in subsequent redactions. In the first complete draft of the novel, for example, Pierre was meant to save the life of a young Italian, the freemason Count Poncini, who (after being taken prisoner by Nikolai Rostov) would eventually concoct a successful intrigue to bring Pierre and Natasha together. In later drafts, however, Tolstoy would remove this conventional secondary character (a cog that turns the wheels of Natasha and Pierre’s love story) and replace him with Ramballe, who plays no direct role in uniting the lovers. Tolstoy turns the “story-book hero,” Poncini, into a character with little obvious plot function, just another face in “the innumerable crowd of people who flash by one after the other.” Viktor Shklovsky, *Lev Tolstoi,* trans. Olga Shartse (Moscow: Raduga, 1988), 311.

and neighbors.[5] Tolstoy famously called *Anna Karenina* "a novel"[6] (whereas he refused to apply that label to *War and Peace*), but, as these critics argue, only one of the two central storylines in *Anna Karenina* is meant to be "novel-like"—the romantic, dramatic plot of the novel-reading heroine herself. By contrast, the novel's second plot (or rather non-plot), Levin's loosely-structured story with its long philosophical digressions on death, science, and agriculture, seems to belong to a different literary genre entirely, or perhaps to no literary genre at all.[7] In this chapter I suggest that one of the most important structural dissimilarities between Anna's and Levin's storylines is the very different way that secondary and minor characters function in each. The disparate minor characters in each plot, more functional in Anna's story, more "superfluous" in Levin's, reflect back on the protagonists themselves, and the radically different ways they have learned to perceive the world, and the people, around them.

The type of minor and secondary characters who appear in both parts of the novel changes over time. As Anna's plot takes on momentum and begins to resemble a melodramatic novel of romance, the number of "extraneous" minor characters in her

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[5] John Bayley, *Tolstoy and the Novel* (New York: Viking Press, 1967), 203; Gary Saul Morson, "Anna Karenina's Omens," in *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, ed. Elizabeth Cheresh Allen and Gary Saul Morson [Evanson, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 136. Ilya Kliger has elaborated a version of this argument most recently, and most compellingly. He sees *Anna Karenina* as a unified but "irreconcilably dualistic" work of art, continually pulled in two directions by the "tension between two narratives that function according to different and even mutually exclusive principles." Tolstoy, Kliger argues, contrasts two different types of narrative, constructed according to two different visions of the way the world works, one inspired by Hegelian notions of historical development (progress, perfectibility), the second that rejects all such systematized accounts of reality (Ilya Kliger, *The Narrative Shape of Truth: Veridiction in Modern European Literature* [University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press 2011], 153).

[6] Tolstoy referred to *Anna Karenina* as a "novel" from the moment he conceived it, and throughout all his many notes and drafts on the work. See V. A. Zhdanov, *Tvorcheskaia istoriia "Anny Kareninoi": Materialy i nabliudeniia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1957), 23.

[7] Aleksandr Stankevich hesitated at calling *Anna Karenina* two novels in one because "one of these storylines is not itself a novel" [одно из повествований не составляет собственно романа] (qtd. in Babaev, *L.N. Tolstoi i zhurnalistika ego epokhi* [Moscow: Izd-vo MGU, 1978], 161).

story decreases, and the secondary characters who do appear become flatter and more functional: pushers of her plot, spectators of her drama, or doubles of Anna herself. Levin's half of the novel progresses in precisely the opposite direction: there is a marked increase in the number of "superfluous" minor characters over the course of Levin's story, and they gain in psychological complexity. Drawing on Roman Jakobson, I will refer to these Tolstoyan figures as "metonymic" minor characters, since they are connected to the protagonist by a principle of contiguity: they appear in Levin's story because he just "happens" to run into them and cast his eyes upon them, not because they will play any particular role in his life.[8] In our day-to-day lives we continually bump up against people who have nothing to do with us, our loves, our ambitions, or our preoccupations (or, to put the problem in literary terms, the plots and themes that structure our lives): Tolstoy shows the same thing happening to Levin.

The increasing presence of metonymic minor characters in Levin's plot, and their absence from Anna's, reflects Levin's moral growth, on the one hand, and Anna's moral crisis and decline, on the other. Anna, caught up in her increasingly obsessive and destructive love, loses her ability to see anything outside of it. Through her screwed up eyes (which she begins to narrow after she dances with Vronsky for the first time and breaks Kitty's heart), she sees less and less of the people around her. Trapped in self-perpetuating shame, she can no longer perceive them as individuals with their own loves, lives, and stories; she can only see them for how they might affect her plot. One of the effects of "screwing up one's eyes" is a decreased ability to perceive dimension and

[8] See Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Linguistic Disturbance," in *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 115-33.

depth; how could Anna, through her narrowed eyes, see the people around her as anything but "flat"?

Levin, by contrast, undergoes a slow moral development that allows him to see the people around him in a more complete, multi-dimensional way. As opposed to Anna, who squints more frequently as the novel continues (as Dolly thinks when she visits Vronsky's estate, Anna "narrows her eyes [*shchurit'sia*] at her life in order not to see it all" [на свою жизнь щуриться, чтобы не все видеть] 628; 19:204), Levin *widens* his. By Part VIII Levin has decided to stop squinting to try to look beyond the horizon: "Don't I know that it is infinite space and not a round vault? But no matter how I squint [*shchurilsia*] and strain my sight, I cannot help seeing it as round and limited, and despite my knowledge of infinite space, I am undoubtedly right when I see a firm blue vault, more right than when I strain to see beyond it" (800; 19:381-82). Instead of squinting to see what he cannot, he turns his gaze to the people and things around him, an everyday ethical, rather than lofty philosophical, action. As he does, he learns to see the people around him not as social types or as actors in or observers of his own life, but as individual people, all of whom, as the peasant Fedor says, "are different" [*liudi raznye*] (794; 19:396). Levin learns to recognize that other people do not exist to play a role in his story, that they live lives that run parallel to, and occasionally intersect with, his own, without becoming subordinate to it.

This is not to say that even the most superfluous seeming minor characters in Levin's plot exist somehow outside of the "labyrinth of linkages" that Tolstoy famously claimed runs throughout the entire novel. As I will discuss in the last section of this chapter, many of the minor characters Levin interacts with on his estate or in Moscow

mysteriously echo and reflect other images in the novel. The labyrinth of linkages in which these characters participate, however, and which snakes through both halves of the novel, does not lead back to Levin (although it does include him). The web of situational rhymes and allusions is bigger than any of the novel's characters, even the two protagonists. By integrating his minor characters into a superstructure of which even Levin and Anna are only two parts, Tolstoy gives them an artistic significance that is independent of their relationship to either hero, making them into something much more than "complements to the primary characters."[9]

Learning How to Hear:
Gretchen vs. the Father, the Son, the Uncle, and Vas'ka

In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy shows that, to a great degree, we create the worlds in which we live; the number and type of people we see around us depends on how we see (and, as it turns out, how we hear). The scene when Levin, Oblonsky, and Vasenka Veslovsky stay in a peasant's barn overnight is particularly instructive in this regard, because it shows just how different the same scene can appear when perceived by different characters. As the men lie chatting on the straw, Veslovsky hears a young peasant woman singing and runs off to meet her. He comes back, calling Levin and Oblonsky, now in French, now in Russian: "'*Messieurs, venez vite*! … *Charmante!* I discovered her. *Charmante,* a perfect Gretchen, and we've already become acquainted. The prettiest little thing, really!" (590; 19:164). It is no surprise that Veslovsky, the French-speaking Russian nobleman, should see a peasant woman through the lens of European literature. What is perhaps more surprising is how reductive and dehumanizing this lens turns out to

[9] Springer, *A Rhetoric of Literary Character*, 14.

be. To Veslovsky the girl is a fictional creation, not a human being, one whose story has already been written, and whose ending is already fixed: she will, conveniently enough, fall in love with an older man of higher social status and give herself to him. For Veslovsky, the girl is a *character,* not a person, and one written with him in mind: he gives "an approving look, as if she had been made pretty especially for him and he was pleased with the one who had done it for him" (590; 19:164).

While Oblonsky and Veslovsky run out to flirt with this singing "Gretchen," Levin, who remains stubbornly on his bed of hay, hears something very different:

> He heard his horses munching hay, then the host and his older son getting ready and going out to the night pasture; then he heard the soldier settling down to sleep at the other end of the barn with his nephew, the host's smaller son; he heard the boy telling his uncle in a thin little voice his impression of the dogs, who seemed huge and fearsome to him. (590-91; 19:165)

Levin, in a single moment before drifting off to sleep gains access to a world infinitely richer, more complex, and more varied than the one Veslovsky knows. Unlike Veslovsky, Levin is capable of recognizing the peasants he is staying with as autonomous subjects: a father and son going out to work at night, a soldier who is not only a soldier, but also the member of an extended family, the uncle to a young child, and a child who has his own, independent "impressions" of the animals and people around him. In fact, the scene, as Levin hears it, embraces more people than that same scene heard through Veslovsky's ears does. Levin hears four different people that night. Veslovsky arguably hears none: he only notices the peasant girl's singing, and immediately projects the character of Faust's Gretchen onto her.

The difference between what Levin and Veslovsky hear that night can be profitably compared to the difference between what Anna's son, Serezha, sees when he

looks at the porter, Kapitonych, and what Karenin sees when looking at that same man. Karenin sees just a porter (and in fact Kapitonych is referred to simply as the "porter" in early scenes of the novel focalized by Karenin); Serezha, who can see Kapitonych from a different angle (both literally and metaphorically speaking), thinks of the porter as his friend first and foremost: "Seryozha reflected, peering into the porter's face, which he had studied in the smallest detail, particularly his chin, hanging between grey side whiskers, which no one saw except Seryozha, because he always looked at it from below" (522; 19:93). Kapitonych tells Serezha about his daughter, a ballet dancer (precisely the sort of girl that Oblonsky and Veslovsky "patronize"), thereby allowing the reader to see these girls from a new angle as well. These dancers suddenly blossom from two- to three-dimensional beings, from mistresses and nothing more, to the beloved daughters of kind men. As Tolstoy makes clear through Serezha's thoughts about Kapitonych, and the scene in the barn, the number of people who exist in our lives depends on our capacity to perceive them as autonomous human beings in the first place.

I bring up these two scenes early in the chapter because, as her story progresses, Anna begins to perceive the people around her more and more in the way Veslovsky does. It is no coincidence that Veslovsky, having been ejected by Levin from Pokrovskoe for flirting with Kitty (as Dolly explains it: "he doesn't fit in with us" [*ne k domu*] 602; 19:176), ends up staying at Vronsky's estate, where he quickly feels at home. Veslovsky has wandered, accidentally and temporarily, into the wrong half of the novel: his aestheticized, highly literary view of the world (and the people and things in it) easily finds a place in Anna's plot, but not in the rambling collection of stories that makes up Levin's life.

The "Crystallization" of Society:
The Cogs that Turn the Wheels of Anna's Plot

Although, as I will argue, the differences between the minor characters in Anna's and Levin's plotlines are due in large degree to the disparate ways the two heroes see the world and people around them, they are also a function of the (very different) social worlds in which they move. Tolstoy shows that social life, and particularly that of the high society Anna inhabits, has a way of forcing people into limited and unchanging roles, making them resemble nothing more than the flat, circumscribed literary characters in a second-rate novel. The narrator, for example, describes what happens to Kitty and her mother as soon as they arrive at a German spa:

> As in all places where people gather, so in the small German watering-place to which the Shcherbatskys came there occurred a crystallization, as it were, of society, designating for each of its members a definite and invariable place. As definitely and invariably as a particle in water acquires the specific form of a snowflake in freezing, so each new person arriving at the spa was put at once into the place appropriate for him. (214; 18:225)

Social life freezes people, forces them into "definite" places that they must maintain or risk being ejected from the collective. It is worth noting that the verb "to define" (*opredelit'*) is one of the most negatively marked words in *Anna Karenina*. Built on the root *predel* (limit), it suggests, for Tolstoy, an attempt to confine, contain, render inflexible, and, finally, to deaden. As Kathryn B. Feuer puts it, "It is [a] fatal delusion by which men and women imagine that they can 'define' and 'regularize' and 'settle' and 'decide' the major questions of life."[10] The "definite" social places that members of high

[10] Kathryn B. Feuer, "Stiva," in *Russian Literature and American Critics*, ed. Kenneth N. Brostrom (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 1984), 347-56. When Vronsky enters the novel, he lives his life according to a set of defined and unalterable principles. As the narrator notes, with a heavy dose of irony, "Vronsky's life was especially fortunate in that he had a code of rules

society must occupy have equally "fatal" consequences for them. Social life itself reduces their complexity and dimensionality, making them look and act as stiff and doll-like as Forster's "flat" literary characters.

What is more, the social elite, immersed in opera, music theater, and fashionable novels as it is, models itself after the stereotyped characters it encounters on the page or stage. For Tolstoy, then, members of high society tend actually *are* a little bit flatter and more two-dimensional than the rest of us, because social life restricts, limits, and "defines" them, on the one hand, and because they try to emulate the behavior of clichéd literary characters, on the other. Two of the most conventional and psychologically two-dimensional secondary characters in Anna's plot, Betsy Tverskaia and Lydia Ivanovna, showcase the results of the "crystallization of society" on their own distorted bodies. Through them Tolstoy shows just how grotesque such acts of self-reduction and self-limitation can be.

Betsy Tverskaia has almost all the qualities of a typical, functional secondary character that I list in the introduction: she does not grow or change, she is highly symbolic (a representative of brilliant Petersburg high society), and she is a *ficelle* as Harvey defines the term: a character who pushes forward the heroine's plot, "ultimately a means to an end rather than an end in himself."[11] She is also the character who most carefully controls the way other people, including the reader, perceive her. If Betsy Tverskaia seems to be a two-dimensional "object character," Tolstoy suggests, it is

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which unquestionably defined [*opredeliaiushchikh*] everything that ought and ought not to be done" (304; 18:321). It is a sign of his moral growth that he, having entered into a relationship with Anna that this habitual set of rules does not encompass, leaves them behind. And it is, to the contrary, a sign of Anna's increasing moral exhaustion that she dreams more and more insistently of "defining" her socially and religiously unsanctioned relationship with Vronksy.

[11] See Harvey, *Character and the Novel*, 56-58.

because she has made herself that way. One of the first times the reader meets Betsy, she is preparing for the arrival of guests to her house for post-theater tea. The opera may be over, but the show is just beginning: like an actress preparing for her next scene, Betsy sits down before her mirror to hastily “sprinkle powder on her long, pale face and wipe it off, put her hair to rights” (132; 18:140). The tea that follows is as carefully orchestrated as any ballet: “unobtrusive servants” [*nezametnykh lakeev*] attend to the guests, who sit at two ends of the room in choreographed groups. And Betsy, like everyone else, feels a sense of social and aesthetic dissatisfaction when Anna and Vronsky destroy the symmetry of the party’s “crystallized” structure by refusing to play the roles assigned to them: “to the others in the drawing room it seemed something peculiar and improper” (142; 18:150) when they speak alone in the corner. So Betsy carefully leads Anna back into the general conversation, bringing the social design of the scene to rights.

Much as Betsy is both actor in and director of Petersburg high society, she plays a self-conscious role in Anna’s love story (which she sees precisely as a *story*, a piece of literature acted out in life). Betsy tells Anna that her friend, Liza Merkalova, “says you’re a real heroine from a novel and that if she were a man she would have committed a thousand follies for you” (297; 18:314). It is significant, I think, that even though the phrase did not originate with Betsy, she is precisely the one who relates it to Anna. For Betsy, too, has recognized the similarity between the lovely, love-stricken Anna and a novelistic heroine, and has cast herself in the role of Anna’s confidante and supporter, the secondary character that helps set the wheels of Anna’s romance turning and keep them turning when they threaten to stop. From the beginning her interest and involvement in Anna’s love story has literary overtones: she sends carefully worded notes (those staples

of eighteenth-century epistolary novels) now to Anna, now to Vronsky, arranging for them to meet "accidentally" in public places and inexorably drawing them together.

As Betsy plays a more and more instrumental role in Anna's love story, Tolstoy depicts her as looking more and more like an *instrument*, the inhuman pusher of Anna's plot that she has fashioned herself after. While Anna is recovering from her dangerous childbirth, having reunited with Karenin and ended her relationship with Vronsky, Betsy suddenly reappears on the scene. Karenin's forgiveness of Anna and love for another man's child flies in the face of both the social and the literary-aesthetic principles held by Petersburg society in general, and by Betsy, its foremost representative, in particular. Social norms (voiced by several characters, from Vronsky to Anna to the jovial Turovtsyn, a friend of the Oblonskys) dictate that a deceived husband should punish his wife and challenge her lover to a duel, something Karenin fails miserably to do. Aesthetically speaking, Karenin's tears and outpouring of love offend the observers of Anna's and Vronsky's romance as well: a forbidden love story that ends with the wife's forgiveness and return to ordinary married life is no forbidden love story at all. So Betsy (with the help of Oblonsky, who greases the wheels of the plot with his smiles "like almond oil" [как миндальное масло] 427; 18:449), schemes to get Vronsky and Anna back together.

For Karenin Betsy is at this moment not a human being at all, but the physical manifestation of the social currents that mock his reconciliation with his wife, "the embodiment of that crude force which was to guide his life in the eyes of the world and which prevented him from giving himself to his feeling of love and forgiveness" (423; 18:445). While Betsy speaks with Anna, she even begins to look like a thing: "dressed

after the very latest fashion, in a hat that hovered somewhere over her head like a lampshade over a lamp, and in a dove-grey dress with sharp diagonal stripes going one way down the bodice, and the other way on the skirt […] holding her flat [*ploskii*], tall figure erect" (422; 18:444). She has become "flat" in the literal sense of the word. Until this moment Betsy has never been described as having a "flat" figure; nor has the narrator ever compared her to an inanimate object. This suggests that she is not naturally and inherently two-dimensional, limited, and inhuman. Instead Betsy, by partaking in the "crystallization" of Petersburg society (and allowing herself to become crystallized in turn, embodying impersonal social forces instead of making her own choices), has become that way. She has transformed herself from a person into a thing, her head into a lamp, her body into a flat board, a two-dimensional plane defined by so many intersecting lines.

There is at least one moment in the novel, however, when we catch a glimpse of the living, albeit cynical and depraved, woman that exists behind Betsy's carefully constructed two-dimensional image. When Anna asks Betsy about Liza Merkalova's relationship with her lover Prince Kaluzhsky, Betsy's shell begins to crack: "Betsy obviously tried to restrain herself but failed and burst into the infectious laughter of people who laugh rarely. 'You'll have to ask them,' she said through tears of laughter" (297; 18:314). For this one moment, Betsy bursts out of the boundaries of the "definite and invariable" place she occupies, both in Petersburg society and in the novel itself. Anna's naïve question about the social masks that Liza and Kaluzhsky wear causes Betsy to momentarily drop hers. Yet the event is never repeated, and it is not clear that it even

could be. How long can Betsy wear this mask before she can no longer remove it from her face, or, perhaps, no longer find her face at all?

Betsy's counterpart in Karenin's story, the elderly and unattractive Lydia Ivanovna, also starts to look less and less human as the novel progresses. Despite their seeming dissimilarity, Betsy and Lydia Ivanovna are actually closely related characters. Tolstoy introduces the two characters within pages of one another, and they almost always appear in neighboring scenes of the novel. Betsy even seems to recognize the likeness between herself, the head of a circle of young, brilliant Petersburg women, and Lydia Ivanovna, the head of a circle of older pious ladies: "When I'm old and ugly, I'll become like that" (127; 18:135), she declares. Perhaps the most important similarity between the two women, however, is that Lydia Ivanovna's physical appearance, like Betsy's, starts to harden and crystallize until it takes on the very form of the social and literary role that she plays.

When Anna (having succumbed to Betsy's temptation) absconds to Europe with Vronsky, leaving Karenin alone and confused, Lydia Ivanovna barges into his house to give him some direction. And the moment she steps foot in Karenin's office, her face takes on a new, hitherto unseen shape: "Suddenly the inner tips of her eyebrows rose, forming a triangle on her forehead; her unattractive yellow face became still more unattractive" (508; 19:79). Tolstoy uses this description, as he used the comparison of Betsy to a lamp, in order to dramatize the way Lydia Ivanovna's own scheming has destroyed (or at least severely restricted) the human being in her. On another level, the triangle on Lydia Ivanovna's forehead could be read as a metafictional reference to the role she will play in the novel's evolving storyline. Through her machinations, which

begin at this very moment, Lydia Ivanovna turns herself into an influential force in Anna's and Karenin's plot: she will prevent Anna from seeing her son and convince Karenin not to grant her a divorce, two of the circumstances that lead directly to the heroine's suicide. Her appearance in the story, at this moment, is isomorphic to the function she will fulfill in the plot, as she begins to resemble the instrument that she has turned herself into.

What makes the (literally) flat and object-like secondary characters, Betsy and Lydia Ivanovna, so dangerous, is that they not only insistently reduce and limit themselves; they also do their best to reduce, limit, and control the people around them. Structurally speaking they are extremely powerful characters: they may be entirely instrumental, "a means to an end" in the protagonists' plot, but they also partially *control* that plot, helping to "crystallize" it into the form they believe it should take. The more central characters, Anna and Karenin, often find themselves at their mercy. When the stilted Karenin attempts to overflow the bounds of his usual behavior, drawing on his inborn pity, "the one weakness that contradicted the general cast of his character" (278; 18:293) (the one quality that saves him from psychological two-dimensionality), Betsy mocks him, tries to lure his wife away, and succeeds in her purpose. What Lydia Ivanovna does to him is just as bad: under her influence, he converts back into a being as morally and emotionally restricted as she herself is.

Anna suffers an even worse fate at the hands of these two women. The vivacious Anna is continually overflowing the bounds of appropriate social behavior, an overflow that marks every aspect of her physical appearance: her willful ringlets refuse to stay in place; when she tries to restrain her smile, it immediately jumps from her mouth to her

eyes; even the portrait that Mikhailov paints of her seems just barely to agree to stay within its own frame, always looking ready, at any moment, to step down from the wall.[12] Her inability to exist within the stultifying limits of her unhappy family life is what ultimately drives her into Vronsky's arms. What she does not realize, however, is that she has simply exchanged one emotionally deadening social role for another that allows her even less freedom of movement. By the end of the novel Anna is living on Vronsky's estate, Vozdvizhenskoe (which means "upward moving"), but she is resolutely stuck in place—physically, socially, and spiritually.

When Anna decides to commit suicide she imagines that she is asserting herself against Vronsky in the only way she can. In fact, however, when Anna dies she gives herself over, finally and irrevocably, to the social forces she had tried so hard to evade. Much as Anna's suicide exposes her mangled body to the eyes of the gawking crowd, so it gives them total authorial control over her story and her memory; it gives them the ability to put her, once and for all, in a "definite and invariable place." The reader learns of the aftermath of Anna's death not from Anna's friends and family, but from people who are strangers to her: a certain anonymous lady tells Koznyshev and Katavasov (neither of whom was closely acquainted with Anna herself) about Anna's death and Vronsky's suffering and decision to fight in Serbia. She concludes much as one might recount the events in the latest installment of a popular novel: "Whatever you say, that man's fate moves me" (774; 19:356). Vronsky's mother fills in the details of the story for Koznyshev and Katavasov, concluding with words that echo the anonymous princess's:

[12] Amy Mandelker analyzes the many moments in the novel when Anna is "framed," whether by a lace mantilla, a black dress, or, *literally*, in the scenes when various male characters either stare at her portrait, or attempt to paint it themselves. In every instance, Mandelker argues, Anna exceeds her frame: it cannot hold or contain her. Amy Mandelker, *Framing* Anna Karenina (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1993).

“No, whatever you say, she was a bad woman” (778; 19:360). The princess and Vronsky’s mother control Anna’s legacy; they can define, limit, and control her legacy at will, retroactively erasing “whatever you [or anyone else] might say.” The minor characters who represent Anna’s social milieu say the final word about her and not the other way around.

Anna’s Doubles and Spectators

While one set of secondary characters in Anna’s half of the novel controls and manipulates the development of her plot, a second set is controlled and manipulated by Anna’s own psyche: we see them as *she* sees them (though Tolstoy repeatedly hints that she may not see them all that clearly). As she becomes more and more socially isolated, on the one hand, and less and less capable of escaping her love affair, on the other, she also becomes less and less able to see anyone or anything outside of it. After she and Vronsky make love for the first time, she turns to him and says, “I have nothing but you. Remember that” [У меня ничего нет, кроме тебя. Помни это] (150; 18:158). In a sense, she is right. Overwhelmed by the shame that now determines every aspect of her life (from whether she can go to the theater, to whether she can see her son), she becomes increasingly incapable of thinking about anything else. When Vronsky comes upon her in a garden before the races, and asks her what she has been pondering, she answers, honestly, that she always thinks “about the same thing, about her happiness and her unhappiness” [об одном, о своем счастье и о своем несчастье] (187; 18:197).

Eventually she becomes so trapped in the obsessive thoughts her love and shame instill in her that the only thing she can see in the people around her is how they might

affect, or reflect, her love story. Every woman (even little Annie's Italian wet nurse) becomes a potential romantic threat who may take Vronsky's love away from her; every man (even Levin) becomes someone she can entice in order to spur Vronsky's jealousy. She even draws the employees at Vozdvizhenskoe, an architect and a doctor who would seem to have nothing to do with her love, into her plot: she invites them to dinner and speaks to them about their work, all with the secret aim of making sure that Vronsky stays interested in his projects on the estate and stays at home.[13]

Tolstoy makes the increasing distortion of Anna's perception explicit through the habit she develops of squinting. After dancing with Vronsky for the first time she begins to screw up her eyes (*prishchurivshis'*, a verb that suggests slight or partial squinting); by the time Dolly visits her at Vozdvizhenskoe in Part VI, she is "narrowing [*soshchuriv*] her eyes so that only her joined eyelashes could be seen" [сощурив глаза так, что только видны были сошедшиеся ресницы] (618; 19:192). Tolstoy uses the changing minor characters that surround Anna as yet another way of dramatizing the alterations in her perception. As Anna becomes less and less capable of seeing anyone or anything as separate and independent from herself and her love, the number of metonymic characters (characters who do not fit in any obvious way into the symbolic structure or the plot of her story) around her decreases. Her shame and obsession warp the narrative she inhabits,

[13] Much as Anna draws all sorts of people who are superfluous to her love story into it (whether simply in her imagination, or by using them to provoke Vronsky's jealousy, as she does with Levin), she turns two people who should be central in her life into superfluities: her children, Annie and Serezha. Having children does not fit with her plans to stay attractive and keep Vronsky by her side. She simply stops loving Annie, and although it causes her incredible grief to part with Serezha, eventually she does this, too.

endowing the people she encounters simply by chance with personal symbolic significance.[14]

The changes Tolstoy made to the original version of the novel, which appeared serially in *The Russian Herald* [*Russkii vestnik*], when preparing to release *Anna Karenina* as a separate book, suggest that this decrease was at least to some degree intentional. Tolstoy actually subtracted metonymic minor characters from one of the most important scenes in Anna's plot. In the *Russian Herald* version of the opera scene (when Anna, having returned from Europe with Vronsky, makes a scandalous appearance in Petersburg society) Anna is not the singular center of the audience's, the narrator's, and the reader's attention. In the original version the narrator not only details the crowd's reaction to Anna's unexpected appearance, but also describes the wives of bankers and merchants "who had arrived from the country" and are sitting in the audience, oblivious to the commotion Anna makes. Even members of high society do not direct their gazes solely at Anna. Their attention is split between Tolstoy's heroine and the inebriated fiancé of a famous girl, who is making a scene of his own in the boxes.[15] By the time Tolstoy published *Anna Karenina* in book form, however, he had cut all the characters from the scene that might distract attention from Anna: in the final version there are no wives of bankers or merchants, no drunk fiancé or famous girl. Instead, Vronsky can immediately tell where Anna is sitting because "all eyes" are pointed at her (545; 19:118).

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[14] Gary Saul Morson has argued that one of Anna's most distinctive character traits, and, for Tolstoy, one of her greatest faults, is her habit of reading fatal meaning (plot and structure) into events that have none: "Thus does contingency come to suggest mystery. Anna imagines fate and tragedy where Tolstoy gives us causes and conditions largely outside her notice," "Anna Karenina's Omens," 148.

[15] Lev Tolstoi, "Anna Karenina," *Russkii vestnik* 12 (1876): 732-33.

These changes allow Tolstoy to emphasize two related aspects of Anna's personality: her ability to command attention, on the one hand, and, on the other, her increasingly acute feelings of shame, which make her feel herself to be the object of every gaze, even when she is not. Are "all eyes" in the theater really pointed at Anna or do she and Vronsky merely perceive it that way? Tolstoy includes a description of the crowd focalized by Vronsky that suggests he, in any case, does not interpret their reactions in any disinterested way: "As usual, there were the same sort of ladies in the boxes with the same sort of officers behind them; the same multi-coloured women, uniforms, frock coats, God knows who they were; the same dirty crowd in the gallery; and in all this crowd, in the boxes and front rows, there were about forty *real* men and women" (545; 19:118). The bankers and merchants' wives who do not know Anna are for Vronsky nothing but a "dirty crowd." It seems to him that "all eyes" are pointed at Anna because he only sees the people who are looking at her.

The scandal at the opera takes place at the height of Anna's drama; "extraneous" minor characters begin disappearing from her story long before that. One way to track the fluctuating numbers of unemplotted minor characters in Anna's half of the novel is to compare scenes from the beginning, middle and end of her story. I propose to compare and contrast the number and type of minor characters that appear in five major scenes from Anna's plot, all of which take place in train stations or on trains: her arrival in Moscow; her return trip to St. Petersburg (and her arrival there, which I count as the third railway scene); her suicide at the train station; and, finally, the scene when, against the backdrop of departing Russian fighters (Vronsky included) leaving to volunteer in the Serbian war, we learn about the aftermath of Anna's death. The train scenes make for a

good control, because the setting is more or less the same in each. What changes from scene to scene is Anna herself, and the way she perceives the people and things around her.

The first railway scene, when Anna arrives in Moscow, is full of metonymic minor characters who have nothing whatsoever to do with Anna or her (future) plot. Her exit from the train is preceded by that of a host of other characters, fellow travelers on the level of both the story and the discourse, passengers on Anna's train, and episodic characters in the novel that bears her name. As the train pulls into the station a "dashing conductor" blows a whistle, an "officer of the guards, keeping himself straight" jumps off, and is followed by "a fidgety little merchant with a bag, smiling merrily" (60; 18:65). Other passengers seem, at least to those of us rereading the novel, to have more symbolic significance for Anna's story. As the train pulls into the station, the narrator mentions a "muffled-up, frost-grizzled engineer" (whose appearance hints at the cause of the tragedy that is about to take place: a worker, possibly because he was "muffled up" against the cold, will be run over by a shunting train). "[A] *muzhik* with a sack [*s meshkom*] over his shoulder" walks through the station as well. Is this just a *muzhik*, or is it the first incarnation of *the* dirty *muzhik* Anna will see in nightmares, rummaging through a sack [*meshok*] and muttering in French, and whom she believes she sees again on the day of her suicide? Either way, he, like the engineer, will escape most readers' attention, getting lost in the crowd of the other fellow travellers in the station. The careful rereader may feel inclined to interpret these characters as prophetic figures who foreshadow elements of Anna's plot; but in order to do so he would have to notice them in the first place.

In the novel's next train scene, when Anna leaves Moscow to return to St. Petersburg, the minor characters who surround her are much more weighted with symbolic significance for her. This is the first chapter entirely focalized by Anna's character, and it allows the reader to observe the process by which her psyche, already entangled in the beginnings of love for Vronsky, imaginatively transforms the people around her into projections of her own anxieties. When Anna first gets on the train she sees the other passengers as *others*, people with whom she has been thrown together on this trip simply by chance: an ailing lady gets ready for bed, a fat old woman covers her legs, and two ladies try to strike up a conversation with her. As Anna falls into a dream-like state, however, she begins to see in them a series of mysterious images that (as any rereader knows) will haunt her again and again over the course of the novel. Anna looks at the old woman and sees her "stretch her legs out the whole length of the carriage" [протягивать ноги во всю длину вагона] (101; 18:108). During her postpartum illness Anna will revive this image, herself desperately desiring to "stretch [her] legs out" [Только немножко вытянуть ноги] (413; 18:433).[16] Anna's psyche performs a similar act of transformation on the "skinny *muzhik* coming in, wearing a long nankeen coat with a missing button": the stoker who has come to check the thermometer. Under the pressure of her increasingly disrupted and disruptive imagination, however, "The *muzhik* with the long waist began to gnaw at something on the wall" (101; 18:108), metamorphosing from a worker on the train into yet another incarnation of the dirty *muzhik* who will haunt her dreams.

[16] In fact, this is not the only situational rhyme between the scene in the train compartment and Anna's postpartum illness. For example, in the train she wonders whether it is "a fur coat or some animal" that is lying on the armrest (101; 18:108); in her illness she will be convinced that she is lying under a pile of fur coats [Да снимите же с меня эти шубы] (413; 18:433).

In his analysis of the scene when Anna first arrives in Moscow, Robert Louis Jackson has argued that Tolstoy dramatizes the way the pieces of her plot start to fall into place as, "under the impact of character and the changes brought about through encounter, the elements of chance group themselves into coherent design."[17] Something similar, I want to argue, takes place on the train. Anna's thoughts may be disorderly in this scene, but they in fact impose order and design on the people and things around her. No longer independent individuals with their own lives and their own stories, the chance fellow travellers on the train become, through Anna's distorting gaze, subsumed into her plot. Although as the train pulls into the Petersburg station, Anna wakes up in the daylight imagining that her world will go back to normal, there are indications that her dream has permanently altered her vision. She does not so much see Karenin as he meets her at the station as she sees his ears, thinking, "Ah my God! What's happened with his ears?" (104; 18:110). Her gaze has transformed him, too.

In the scenes leading up to Anna's suicide in Part VII Anna, blinded by her own misery, turns everyone she sees into a reflection of her own self-loathing. As she rides in her carriage to the station, she stares out at the "quickly changing impressions" (757; 19:336), but no matter where she looks, she always sees the same thing: animal appetites, self-love, and mutual hatred. Everyone who stands before the "bright light" of her gaze is drawn into her drama: to her eyes they are all fat, red-faced, laughing unnaturally, or staring at her and whispering "something nasty to be sure" (765; 19:345). What she thinks about herself becomes, in her mind, true of everyone; her "I" becomes a "we" as

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[17] Robert Louis Jackson, "Chance and Design in *Anna Karenina*" in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation and History,* ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 316.

the distinction between self and other breaks down: “We all want something sweet, tasty […] We all hate each other” (760-61; 19:340-41).

Only once in the hours before her death can Anna recognize a kindness that contradicts her vision of the irredeemable selfishness of all people (including herself). She sees “obvious compassion” in the “small, kind grey eyes” (756; 19:335) of her maid, Annushka. Soon, however, Anna mentally transforms Annushka into a being better suited to her current view of human nature. When Anna catches sight of Annushka’s husband out of the window of her carriage, she remembers what Vronsky calls the couple: “Our parasites” [Наши паразиты] (757; 19:337). With this one thought, Anna casts doubt, for herself if not for the reader, on the look of kindness she saw in her maid’s eyes: Annushka is financially dependent on her and therefore obligated to show “compassion.”

The label “parasite” that Anna adopts from Vronsky and applies to Annushka and her husband makes explicit the most terrible aspect of the heroine’s vision: to her eyes the people around her are not people at all. As she looks at her servant Petr, who is waving her off at the station, he transforms, in her eyes, into a beast: she cringes at his “dull animal face” [тупым животным лицом] (765; 19:345). If Petr seems, to Anna’s fevered imagination, to be an animal, then the little peasant she sees next, a “dirty, ugly *muzhik* in a peaked cap” [Испачканный уродливый мужик в фуражке] (765; 19:345), exists in a realm even further removed from the human. To Anna the *muzhik* is emphatically not an individual, a person with his own life story, but a grotesque, even demonic sign that is meant for her alone. She transforms him from person to personal symbol. One of the most important moral statements that Tolstoy makes in *Anna Karenina* is that peasants are human beings, not, as Koznyshev perceives them,

"something in contrast to people in general" (238; 18:252), but a group made up of varied individuals like the rest of us. In the moments before her death, as she looks at the *muzhik* and sees an omen rather than a person, Anna is further from this realization than ever. How might this "dirty, ugly *muzhik*" appear to a less squinted pair of eyes? What would Levin, for example, have seen if he had looked at that same man?

Under Anna's gaze chance passersby are transformed into elements in the symbolic structure of her story, but after she dies the "design" she has built around herself begins to disintegrate. In the final railway scene in the novel, we learn about the aftermath of Anna's death: as I have already mentioned, Koznyshev and Katavasov hear the story of Anna's suicide, first from an anonymous Princess and then from Vronsky's mother. As in the scene when Anna first arrived in Moscow, the station is full of metonymic minor characters (volunteers heading for the war in Serbia) who do not seem to have anything to do with the plot or symbolism of Anna's story. They appear in the scene simply by chance, as it were, because Koznyshev and Katavasov happen to pass by them. There is one face in the crowd, however, that stands out from the rest. From the train, between a "tall and very young man with a sunken chest" and two officers, there peeks "an older man with a big beard and a greasy peaked cap" [*v zasalennoi furazhke*] (775; 18:356). This is precisely the type of person Anna might have read as an omen, an incarnation of the *muzhik* who appears in her dreams. The ugly *muzhik* Anna sees before she throws herself under the train is also dirty, and wearing a "peaked cap" [*v furazhke*]; the *muzhik* she sees in her dream, like the man on the train, has a large, distinctive beard. Anna is gone, however, and without the warping power of her consciousness this older man remains unincorporated into her story, just another face in the "innumerable crowd."

"He invited Shcherbatsky and another girl to dinner to make it less conspicuous": **Levin and the Metonymic Minor Character**

In contrast to Anna's half of the novel, Levin's story is continually crisscrossed by the most varied human personalities, who wander into and out of scenes seemingly without rhyme or reason, and play little if any role in the life of the hero himself. Kitty's young cousin Nikolai Shcherbatsky is particularly noteworthy for his utter lack of noteworthiness. He appears in five different scenes (at the ice skating rink, at the train station, when Levin is on his way to Europe, at the dinner party at which Levin and Kitty become engaged, at their wedding, and at the Moscow men's club). We learn little about him except what the narrator tells us in passing: he seems to dress fashionably, "in a short jacket and narrow trousers" (28; 18:32); he tries to lure Levin with him on a pleasure trip to Paris; and he feels anxious twice, once when Dolly forgets to introduce him to Karenin at the dinner party, and again at the wedding, when he has to hold the marriage crown over Kitty's head. At one point this seemingly "extraneous" minor character even annoys Karenin by passing through the drawing room where he and Dolly are discussing his (extremely plot-relevant) plans to divorce Anna (392; 18:413). What artistic purpose does this most "superfluous"-seeming minor character serve?

The primary function of Nikolai Shcherbatsky's character, I argue, is to *have no function*; his "job" is to walk through the drawing rooms of the novel, and so briefly to draw the reader's attention away from central characters like Levin, Kitty, Karenin, and Dolly. When Oblonsky arranges a dinner party with the secret purpose of bringing Kitty and Levin back together, he (the consummate social artist) invites not just Levin and Kitty, but also "to make it less conspicuous, another girl cousin and the young

Shcherbatsky" (373; 18:394). The role Shcherbatsky plays for Oblonsky at the party reflects the role he plays for Tolstoy in the novel as a whole. He exists to make Levin and his story "less conspicuous" and less dominant, to allow Levin to occupy the center of the narrative without monopolizing it.

Levin makes the moral choices that allow a character like Shcherbatsky to exist in his story, to walk through his life without becoming subordinated to its interests. From the first moment that Levin appears in the novel, it is clear that he will be a very different protagonist from Anna. Or rather, the reader may not suspect that Levin will be a protagonist at all. Ilya Kliger points out that, whereas Tolstoy prepares the reader for Anna's appearance in the novel at great length, Levin walks into the novel unexpectedly and unannounced.[18] The door to Oblonsky's office swings open and closed, and the porter tells his boss, "Some sort [*kakoi-to*], your excellency, slipped in the moment I turned my back" (16; 18:19). Recall Oblomov's horror at being called "some sort of [*kakoi-to*] Oblomov" by two young men in the theater. It is hard to imagine that Levin would object to the adjective being applied to him, at least not by the porter at Oblonsky's office: Levin is proud of not being known in his friend's bureaucratic world.

Unlike Oblomov, Levin never tries to make himself the center around which his entire world turns. He makes a conscious effort to remember that there are other stories, other independent lives taking place alongside his own (although he sometimes fails, especially in the early sections of the novel). Even when he is planning to propose to Kitty (and so in love that he sees her as "a rose among nettles" [28; 18:31]), he still remembers to visit his sick brother Nikolai, angrily chastising himself for even

[18] Kliger, *The Narrative Shape of Truth*, 154.

momentary forgetfulness toward his brother. As an alteration Tolstoy made to the oyster scene shows, it was extremely important to him that Levin's love for Kitty should never eclipse Levin's care for, and interest in, other people. In the version of the scene published in *The Russian Herald*, Levin is thinking about his brother's illness when Oblonsky distracts his attention by mentioning Kitty: "Oblonsky turned straightaway to the main topic" [Облонский прямо приступил к главному предмету].[19] In the final version of this scene, however, Tolstoy has deleted the adjective "main" [*glavnyi*], removing even the implicit suggestion that Kitty is the "major" focus of Levin's life, and Nikolai simply a "minor" one. The final version of the sentence reads: "but Oblonsky began talking about a subject that distracted him at once" (36; 18:40). Tolstoy's rewrite puts Kitty and Nikolai on even footing: it does not permit either of them to become the exclusive center of Levin's life. Levin may be imperfect: he, like Anna has a tendency to forget about everyone and everything else when he ponders his beloved. The difference between the two heroes is that Levin knows this about himself, and fights against it, forcibly reminding himself of his brother's suffering and never allowing it to become eclipsed by his own love story.

Another change Tolstoy made to the final version of the oyster scene emphasizes how consciously and intentionally Levin attempts to keep his brother's suffering in mind. In the *Russian Herald* version, when Oblonsky mentions that Levin has a rival for Kitty's affections, Levin simply feels annoyed: "His *particular* feeling had been defiled by this conversation about some sort of Petersburg officer and Stepan Arkadievich's advice and

[19] Lev Tolstoi, "Anna Karenina," *Russkii vestnik* 1 (1875): 284.

suggestions."[20] In the final version, however, Tolstoy describes Levin's first response to the news of a rival in an entirely different way: "At once he remembered his brother Nikolai and how mean he was to have forgotten him" (40; 18:44). Instead of having Levin reacting first and foremost egoistically, becoming offended by Vronsky's intrusion on his "particular" love, Tolstoy has Levin react by worrying about the wellbeing of someone else.

During the oyster scene Levin is still in the first stages of his moral development, however. He may be able to look beyond his own love story to see his brother's suffering, but he cannot perform this same ethical feat with everyone. His passion for the innocent Kitty clouds his vision of "fallen women," all of whom he sees as absolutely opposed to her, and all of whom, he explains to Oblonsky, "are vermin for me, and all the fallen ones are the same" (41; 18:45). In order to grow, Levin must realize that even prostitutes are neither "vermin" nor all "the same": when he meets his brother's girlfriend, the ex-prostitute Masha, he immediately recognizes her kindness. He still balks at the thought of Kitty's meeting her (of the mixing of the two categories into which he has divided all women, the "vermin" and the virtuous), but Kitty insists on the acquaintance and he quickly comes to terms with it. It is Levin's meeting with Anna, however, that ultimately changes the way he thinks about "immoral" women. Not only does she little resemble "vermin," he admires her mind and heart, and finds himself "entering more and more into her situation and pitying her" (702; 19:279).

The lesson Levin has slowly been learning is voiced most clearly in Part VIII by the peasant Fedor: "Well, that's how it is—people are different [*liudi raznye*]. One man

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[20] Ibid., 288.

just lives for his own needs, take Mitiukha even, just stuffs his belly, but Fokanych—he's an upright old man. He lives for the soul. He remembers God" (794; 19:396). Levin repeats with awe the second half of Fedor's statement, that one ought to "live for the soul" and "remember God." But, I want to argue, the first half of Fedor's comment is just as important for Levin's moral growth. Over the course of the novel Levin has learned to see that "people are different," and even fallen women are not "all the same": some are good, others bad, some full of life and others unaccountably timid, and we must respect each person's particularity when we interact with him or her.[21]

Although Levin's new appreciation for human difference begins with fallen women, he learns to extend it to everyone else he meets. If, near the beginning of the novel, Koznyshev accuses Levin of always trying to "be original" [*original'nichat'*], then by the end of the novel Levin has realized that his "originality" and particularity are not unique to him. When, several hundred pages earlier, Vronsky locks himself in his room to "clarify" his accounts (by rounding down to the 1000, and disregarding all those inconvenient details such as tailors' bills), the narrator explains:

> Every man, knowing to the smallest detail all the complexity of the conditions surrounding him, involuntarily assumes that the complexity of these conditions and the difficulty of comprehending them are only his personal, accidental peculiarity, and never thinks that others are surrounded by the same complexity as he is. (302; 18:319)

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[21] Perhaps just as important as his realization that Anna is no "vermin," but a human being who deserves his pity, is his realization that although he may empathize with her, he must not spend time with her. He starts to understand that his care for her is mingled with physical attraction, and that "there was something *not right* in the tender pity he felt for Anna" (702; 19:280). When Kitty becomes upset, he promises not to see Anna again. Levin's decision not to return to Anna may seem cruel, but I believe that, for Tolstoy, it is not only morally justified, but actually reveals how subtle Levin's moral intuition has become. Whereas Levin must help Dolly (his sister by marriage, to whom he experiences no sexual attraction) through hard financial times, Anna is different: his physical attraction for her means that he cannot help her in the same disinterested way he does his sister-in-law. Kitty comes to a similar realization: she may nurse Levin's brother Nikolai, but must not take care of other women's husbands (like the painter Petrov, who immediately falls in love with her).

That which “every man” “never thinks” is precisely what Levin has begun to learn: the universal quality that unites all human beings is their particularity, the impossibility of summing them up in a single word or phrase.

Levin not only realizes that people are different from each other, but also that they are different from him: they do not necessarily care about the things he cares about, and will not necessarily behave the way he prefers that they should. Even the peasants on his estate (whom he has hoped, in vain, to involve in his new farming schemes) are individuals with their own interests, lives, and stories that may have little or nothing to do with his own. Tolstoy uses metonymic minor characters to draw attention to Levin’s realization. Soon after his conversation with Fedor, Levin walks to the apiary and sees the old man who works there, who “was shaving a hoop and did not see Levin” (803; 19:385), but decides not to interrupt him. It is highly significant that the beekeeper, occupied with his own work, fails to notice Levin. On the one hand, it shows the way that Levin has learned to run his estate: instead of trying to micromanage every aspect of the harvest, interrupting and correcting his workers wherever he goes, making himself the center of attention, he now allows the peasants on his farm to do their own work without excessive interference. On the other hand, it emphasizes how Levin has learned to see other people, as genuine others, who neither reflect his own ideas back to him nor even necessarily see him. At the picnic table, when Levin, Koznyshev, Katavasov, and the Old Prince Shcherbatsky are arguing about the volunteers who are going to Serbia to fight the Turks, the handsome, silver-haired beekeeper appears again. As he listens to the conversation, Levin glances at the beekeeper and realizes that he is simply looking over

their heads, "neither understanding nor wishing to understand anything" (806; 19:389). He is not, and does not want to be, part of their plot, and Levin does not try to make him.

Levin's realization about the particularity of the human personality extends to his wife as well. In the final scene of the novel, Levin ponders the stars from a balcony, Kitty follows him out, and he decides, after a moment's hesitation, not to tell her what he was thinking. He realizes that even his wife is different from him, that there will always be a "divide" between them, and that he cannot (as he imagined, mistakenly, at their wedding) read her thoughts, just as she cannot read his. In short, Levin comes to precisely the opposite realization that Anna does before she dies: if Anna sees everyone around her as so many incarnations of her own humiliations and anxieties, then Levin learns to recognize difference, what separates other people from each other, and him from everyone else.[22]

"Kitty wanted to go into the next room, but the governess was giving Tanya a lesson there": The Levins' Creative Marriage

Much as the type of secondary and minor characters that surround Anna reflects, on the one hand, the way she sees the people around her and, on the other, the social world in which she moves, the atmosphere of Levin's estate helps determine the sort of stories and

[22] Levin's newfound ability to recognize difference must be contrasted with Oblonsky's claim that he can do the same. Oblonsky presents himself as a connoisseur of the nuances of life, of moral complexity and ambiguity (as he says to Levin, "All the variety, all the charm, all the beauty of life are made up of light and shade" 42; 18:46). And yet, despite his self-proclaimed appreciation for difference, Oblonsky frequently fails to recognize the important differences between various ideas, things, and, most reprehensibly, people. As the narrator explains, Oblonsky uses the familiar form of address, "ty," with everyone: his equals, his inferiors, and his superiors. He inspires equal joy in every acquaintance he sees (whether or not the meeting actually ends up bringing them pleasure); he encourages Levin in his pursuit of Kitty, but then encourages Vronsky, too (not realizing that he misquotes the same poem by Pushkin to them both). Oblonsky, who treats new ideas like new hats and gets the same pleasure from reading the newspaper as he does from smoking a cigar, "respects" difference by ignoring it, by treating everyone and everything with the same jovial *in*difference.

the sorts of people that can appear on it. By removing themselves from the city and settling permanently on Levin's estate, he and Kitty protect themselves from the deadening social forces (like Countess Nordstrom, Kitty's version of Betsy, who tries her best to make Kitty marry a fashionable young man) that victimize both Karenin and Anna. Instead he and Kitty create at Pokrovskoe a different sort of social "gathering place," entirely unlike those of Petersburg or the German spa. The "creative, constructive force"[23] of the Levins' marriage, to quote Stenbock-Fermor, draws an enormous number of people to their home, without forcing them "at once into the place appropriate for" them. It brings people together without attempting to fit them into an overarching social structure centered around Kitty and Levin themselves.

When Dolly visits Vozdvizhenskoe she feels like an actor in a play who, through her poor performance, is ruining the entire production; her role in the house, she feels, is to play the loyal friend and validate Anna's life choices, and she does not feel able to fulfill it. Levin's guests, by contrast, not only have no subsidiary roles that they are expected to play in Levin's life, they actually disrupt it, constantly getting in their host's way. Levin bumps into visitors wherever he turns: the entire Shcherbatsky clan, Dolly and her children, Oblonsky, Varenka, Koznyshev, Katavasov. In the scene I discuss at the very beginning of this chapter Kitty and Levin (arguing over another unexpected guest in their home, Veslovsky), simply cannot find a place to speak to each other in private. The Shcherbatskys are sitting in the living room; Tanya is having her lessons in a parlor; and an "extraneous character," the *muzhik*, is weeding in the garden. In the end the couple has to make do with a partially concealed park bench. Levin feels annoyed now and then by

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[23] Elisabeth Stenbock-Fermor, *The Architecture of* Anna Karenina (Lisse: Peter de Ridder Press, 1975), 84.

what he calls the influx of the “Shcherbatsky element” (551; 19:123) because the Shcherbatskys disrupt his work; but it is precisely this influx of “superfluous” characters into Levin’s narrative and into his life that marks the fecundity of his marriage. The Levins’ inability to find solitude is a sign of what socially integrated, and creative lives they live.

As if to emphasize precisely the fecundity and productivity of life at Pokrovskoe (which infects even visitors to the estate), storylines based on secondary characters flower with particular abundance there in the second half of the novel. They cannot be called “subplots,” because they are not mere facets of Levin’s larger storyline; instead they are related but independent tales that run parallel to Levin’s own. Take, for example, the character Katavasov, Levin’s friend from university, who has become an important professor of Natural Science and visits the estate. At first he may seem to serve the same purpose as a conventional secondary character: a foil for the hero and a representative of the exclusively secular and scientific worldview Levin left behind when he ended his schooling. Levin finds the “clarity and simplicity” (678; 19:254) of Katavasov's mind appealing, but also a sign of the “poverty of his nature,” whereas Katavasov thinks Levin’s intellectual “inconsistency” derives from a lack of mental discipline.

The argument that Katavasov’s function is to serve as the spiritually impoverished backdrop against which Levin’s own nature seems all the more complex breaks down, however, just as soon as one considers a single salient fact: Koznyshev, Levin’s half-brother, serves this exact same purpose. In fact, he and Levin have almost an exactly identical intellectual relationship to the one he has with Katavasov, as the narrator explains earlier in the novel: Koznyshev is annoyed by Levin’s mental inconsistency

(thinking that his mind "was subject to momentary impressions and therefore filled with contradictions") while Levin thinks his brother's *con*sistency is a sign of his lack of "heart" (239; 18:253).

In short, as a foil for the hero and his way of thinking and being in the world, Katavasov is, if not an entirely superfluous character (his scientific worldview does differ from Koznyshev's, though his inflexible way of thinking does not), then at least not a particularly useful one. It seems significant that the first time he appears in the novel it is because Levin has run into him on the street by "chance," and "dragged" this old friend to his bachelor party (442; 19:9). At the time Katavasov laughs at Levin's decision to marry, warning that Levin will lose his male independence; and yet even this critic of marriage finds himself drawn to the Levins' happy home. Integrated into the Levins' life, but never made subordinate to it, he does much more than just serve as a foil for the hero: he plays with Dolly's children and teaches everyone about the sexual habits of fruit flies. Tolstoy even makes Katavasov the focalizer of an entire chapter in Part VIII (chapter 3), giving the reader insight into his confused feelings about the men who have volunteered to fight against the Turks in Serbia. Katavasov may serve as a foil for Levin, but he becomes much more than that; he becomes a three-dimensional character in his own right.

Even Koznyshev, whose most obvious function as a character is to provide an intellectual contrast to his brother, quickly exceeds the limits of that role. Tolstoy eventually describes Koznyshev's disappointment with the reception of his latest book, the death of a girl he loved many years ago, and even, over the course of a long chapter,

his romance with, and near engagement to, Varenka.[24] Matthew Arnold used this chapter to provide an example of what makes *Anna Karenina* unlike an ordinary novel, because the scene sheds no particular light on the major characters or their story: "What, for instance, does the episode of Kitty's friend Varenka and Levin's brother Serge Ivanovitch, their inclination for one another and its failure to come to anything, contribute to the development of either the character or the fortunes of Kitty and Levin?"[25] Arnold concludes that Tolstoy is not interested in such questions of narrative economy, because he does not want *Anna Karenina* to be a novel, but rather a representation of life itself. I would add that another part of making Levin's story non-novelistic was, for Tolstoy, making the secondary characters seem like more than just background. If we think of Koznyshev as simply a foil for Levin and Varenka, as Dostoevsky complained, merely a "pedestal" for Kitty,[26] it seems odd that Tolstoy would devote so much narrative attention to them. One of the essential purposes of this scene, however, is to make their characters into more than just the foils against which the light of the protagonists will shine all the brighter. It allows Tolstoy to show dimensions of these two characters that the reader would not otherwise see (Varenka's love for children, for example, or Koznyshev's past).

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[24] Robin Feuer Miller, in an excellent presentation at ASEEES in 2011, proposed reading this chapter as its own story, independent from the rest of the novel, and comparable in tone and scope to a short story by Chekhov.

[25] Matthew Arnold, "Anna Karenin," in Leo Tolsoy, *Anna Karenin,* trans. Constance Garnett, ed. William Allan Neilson (New York: P F Collier & Son, 1917), 12.

[26] Dostoevsky, qtd. in Svetlana Grenier, *Representing the Marginal Woman in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature: Personalism, Feminism and Polyphony* (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 2001), 130, n.17. Tolstoy's narrator summarizes the differences between Varneka and Kitty as such: "She lacked what Kitty had in over-abundance—the restrained fire of life and an awareness of her attractiveness" (215; 18:227).

Minor Characters and the "Labyrinth of Linkages"

For Tolstoy it is essential that "metonymic" or "chance" characters who walk through Levin's life or flock to his estate remain unemplotted in the hero's story; their very existence in his half of the novel demonstrates Levin's ability to notice people and things outside of himself and his own interests (a capacity that Anna loses bit by bit). As I have already mentioned, however, this does not mean that the metonymic minor characters in Levin's story do not sometimes fulfill a symbolic function as well, or that they remain outside the "labyrinth of linkages" that Tolstoy claimed runs through both halves of the novel. Vladimir Alexandrov, for example, has analyzed the many appearances of Mlle Roule (Kitty's French governess and a seemingly "unnecessary" minor character), and shown that Mlle Roule is closely, but mysteriously, associated with the Kitty and Levin marriage plot. She appears at key moments in their relationship: when they meet at the ice skating rink, and again in the minutes before the young couple embraces, having received her parents' consent to marry.[27] Shcherbatsky also has a way of showing up at significant moments in Kitty and Levin's lives. He is holding Kitty's arm at the ice skating rink when Levin first comes up to her, a gesture that foreshadows the future development of their courtship: Levin will again see Shcherbatsky standing by Kitty in the doorway at Oblonsky's dinner party just before he proposes for the second time; and it is Shcherbatsky who will hold the crown over Kitty's head at their wedding, accompanying them as they walk around the church.

[27] Alexandrov also notes the symbolic significance of Mlle Roule's memory that Levin used to call Kitty "little bear," which is connected with an entire network of bear imagery in the novel, often associated with love, marriage, and hunting, and in which even Betsy Tverskaia plays a part (Vladimir Alexandrov, *Limits to Interpretation: the Meanings of* Anna Karenina [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004], 284-89).

The important difference between minor characters such as Shcherbatsky and Mlle Roule, who appear in Levin's half of the novel, and many of those who appear in Anna's half, such as the reappearing dirty *muzhik* (multiple people, in fact, whom Anna transforms in her mind into a single character), is that the former never become subsumed by the symbolic roles they play. They remain fictional people first and foremost, with lives and interests separate from Levin's (such as the rollicking young man's life we know that Shcherbatsky leads in Paris). In fact, it is not even clear what Shcherbatsky symbolizes: should we read his repeated appearances, arm in arm with Kitty, as evidence that Dolly is right and Levin and Kitty's marriage is preordained? Or does he represent the close, interconnected relations of the Shcherbatsky family (which, after Levin marries into them, will characterize his family, too)? Or something else? Unlike the little *muzhik*, who becomes for Anna a bad omen, a clear symbol of the tragedy she witnessed at the train station and the harbinger of her own death, the significance of Shcherbatsky's appearances always remains mysterious, both for Levin and for the reader. His character cannot be summed up by his (difficult to define) symbolic function alone. He remains, to a certain degree, narratively superfluous to the stories of the main characters: the young man interrupting Dolly's and Karenin's conversation by walking in at an inopportune time; a fellow traveler on Levin's train to Europe. He is a link in the novel's vast and enigmatic symbolic structure, which does not center on Levin or Anna, and of which even the protagonists make up only two parts. Shcherbatsky is simply another face in the sea of human life, which Levin is learning to see ever more clearly.

CHAPTER FOUR

From the Corners of *The Brothers Karamazov*

> I may have taken secondary things for the most important, and even overlooked the most prominent and necessary features…
>
> —The chronicler, *The Brothers Karamazov*[1]

How much narrative attention to grant primary versus secondary characters, primary versus secondary plot lines, was a problem Dostoevsky struggled with throughout his career. By the 1870s it had become almost commonplace for Russian reviewers to criticize Dostoevsky for squeezing too many characters, too many scenes, too much of everything into his fiction. One critic of *The Idiot* called it "a belletristic compilation, consisting of a multitude of absurd characters and events, without even the slightest concern for any artistic aim."[2] Another remarked that the events of the novel were so mixed up [*pereputany*] that "sensing some sort of, perhaps, terrible drama, at the same time you don't know what the drama consists of."[3] Even some of Dostoevsky's greatest friends and admirers spoke with hesitation about the oversaturation of his novels. In an

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[1] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Quartet Books, 1990), 656. Dostoevskii, *PSS*, 15:89. Throughout the chapter I quote Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation (occasionally modifying it to bring it closer to the original Russian), providing page numbers from their translation, followed by those from Dostoevsky's *PSS*.

[2] Viktor Burenin, review of *The Idiot*, *S-peterburgskie vedomosti,* September 13, 1868, qtd. in "Primechaniia" to *PSS*, ed. T. P. Golovanova and G. M. Fridlender, vol. 9 (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," leningradskoe otd-nie, 1974), 415.

[3] V. V. Chuikov, *Novosti*, May 18, 1879. Qtd. in "Primechania" to *PSS*, 9:417.

1871 letter to Dostoevsky, Nikolai Strakhov bemoaned the excessive number of scenes and characters in part two of *Demons*: "The impression [left] on the public has been up to this point very vague; the public does not see the point of the story, and is getting lost in the multiplicity of characters and episodes, whose connection isn't clear."[4] *Demons* and *The Idiot*, Strakhov warned, were too structurally complex, and readers could not follow along.

Dostoevsky, who always wrote with his reader in mind, took Strakhov's criticism to heart. In his reply he immediately conceded: "You have pointed to the main failing terribly accurately. Yes, I suffered from this and still suffer […] Many separate novels and stories cram their way into one, so that there's neither measure nor harmony."[5] Dostoevsky went so far as to promise himself he would not make the same "mistake" again. In his notebooks for *The Adolescent*, amidst calls for "Form, form!" and "Be aware of the main point in each chapter and stick to it,"[6] Dostoevsky set himself the following principle:

> *1st rule.* Avoid the mistake, made in *The Idiot* and in *Demons*, of describing secondary events (many of them) in a fragmentary, insinuated, romance-like manner, and dragging them out over a lengthy extension […] Being mere secondary episodes, they weren't worth such capital attention on the part of the reader; on the contrary, they actually tended to obscure, rather than to clarify, the principle objective, precisely because the reader, diverted to a side road, could very well lose the main road and get confused in his attention.

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[4] Nikolai Strakhov, letter to Fedor Dostoevsky, 21 Apr. 1871, *Russkii sovremennik*, ed. M. Gorky, vol. 1 (Moscow and Leningrad, 1924): 199-200.

[5] Dostoevsky, letter to Nikolai Strakhov, 23 Apr. (5 May) 1871 (29:208).

[6] Dostoevsky, *Notebooks for* A Raw Youth, ed. Edward Wasiolek and trans. Victor Terras (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 187, 139.

> Try to avoid secondary details and seek to assign an insignificant place to those [that you introduce]; present them much more briefly, concentrating the action exclusively around the hero.[7]

Although Dostoevsky promises only to devote less attention to "secondary episodes," without mentioning minor characters explicitly, his final words reveal what this would mean: it would mean bringing secondary characters into the novel's action *only* when they interact with the hero (and avoiding narrative digressions on their movements and thoughts in the hero's absence). This "rule" helps explain why Dostoevsky decided to make his hero a first-person narrator for the first time since the early drafts of *Crime and Punishment*: when the hero tells his own story, he necessarily centers the action around himself. Dostoevsky says as much himself in a later note: "If I write the novel in the *first person*, this will undoubtedly give it more unity, and less of *that* which Strakhov has been criticizing me for, i.e., too large a number of characters and subjects."[8]

Most readers would agree, however, that *The Adolescent* has an enormous number of characters and subjects. This means that Dostoevsky either failed in his initial plan to write a more structurally "unified" novel or intentionally abandoned it. *The Brothers Karamazov* is even more unwieldy: Dostoevsky could not "center the action around the hero" of *The Brothers Karamazov* even if he wanted to, since, as the title suggests, it has multiple protagonists. Two questions arise at this juncture. First, why did Dostoevsky take Strakhov's criticism so seriously that he was prepared to change the entire way he structured his novels? And second, why did Dostoevsky ultimately reject Strakhov's

[7] Ibid., 236-7.

[8] Ibid., 128-29.

advice? The key to answering the first question lies, I argue, in two important words that Dostoevsky uses in his response to Strakhov: harmony and measure. In *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, Robert Louis Jackson demonstrates that these precise words, "harmony" and "measure," are essential to Dostoevsky's understanding of what makes art beautiful, and therefore morally uplifting. Yet, as Jackson argues so compellingly, Dostoevsky's admiration for the artistic "measure" of Pushkin and Raphael directly conflicts with his own impulses as a novelist, "which sought out the inner form and rhythms of a 'reality which strives toward fragmentation.'"[9] It is the pull of this "classical higher aesthetic" that drives Dostoevsky's attempt to simplify and unify the structure of *The Adolescent* by devoting less narrative attention to secondary events and secondary characters.

Yet this solution to the formal problem of novelistic "overpopulation" only creates new problems for Dostoevsky. A novel that centers its action on the hero and keeps secondary things and people secondary may be structurally "harmonious," but at what cost? Is not the very act of designating some people "primary" and others merely "secondary" (even fictional people in a novel) antithetical to the ideals of universal brotherhood that so many of Dostoevsky's most positive characters call for? Even more importantly, how can we, with our limited human knowledge, tell for certain who is more or less important in our stories and our lives? What happens if we make a mistake, if we push to the side as "secondary" the very person we should be paying the most attention to? The narrator of *The Brothers Karamazov* calls himself a "chronicler," a title that suggests he sees himself as an impartial recorder of facts. Yet even he must admit that he prioritizes some facts over others, and that his judgment is fallible: "I may have taken

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[9] Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, 118.

secondary things for the most important [*vtorostepennoe za glavneishee*], and even overlooked the most prominent and necessary features" (656; 15:89). Although he only writes this warning in book 12, directly before he describes the trial, we understand that it applies to his entire narrative.

Whereas in the notebooks for *The Adolescent* Dostoevsky worried that "secondary things" in *Demons* and *The Idiot* had diverted the reader "to a side road," and "confused" his attention, in *The Brothers Karamazov* it is precisely a character that stands on the "side roads" of the novel who in fact requires both the other characters'—and the reader's—"capital attention." Smerdiakov, Fedor Pavlovich's probable illegitimate son and admitted murderer, stands on the side roads of the novel both literally (he was conceived in a ditch by a back alley and lurks in corners) and figuratively (in the sense that the chronicler treats him as character of decidedly the second plan).[10] Olga Meerson has argued that Dostoevsky places the characters in and the readers of *The Brothers Karamazov* in the same moral conundrum with respect to Smerdiakov: will we recognize him as the "fourth" brother Karamazov (which, biologically, he probably is) and the spiritual equal of the other three, or will we dismiss him as his adoptive father Grigory does, as something subhuman?[11] I would only add that this is a narrative conundrum as well: will we recognize Smerdiakov as one of the brothers, and thus one of the titular protagonists of the novel? Or will we dismiss him as nothing more than the villain, a second-tier character? As the tragic events of the novel demonstrate, to underestimate

[10] Rakitin, another villainous secondary character whom I will discuss at length later in the chapter, is also associated with "side roads." When Rakitin angrily walks away from Alesha at a crossroads, Alesha thinks: "As long as Rakitin thinks about his grudges, he will always walk off into some alley" [он будет всегда уходить в переулок] (360; 14:326).

[11] Olga Meerson, "Chetvertyi brat ili kozel otpushcheniia ex machina?" in *Roman Dostoevskogo* "Brat'ia Karamazovy": *Sovremennoe sostoianie izucheniia*, ed. T. A. Kasatkina (Moscow: Nauka, 2007).

Smerdiakov and consider him a secondary player is a terrible mistake. He becomes angry and envious because Fedor Pavlovich, Grigory, and his probable brothers consider him marginal and inessential. And he gets away with murder for the exact same reason: no one notices him; they all consider him unworthy of their "capital attention."

In this chapter I argue that Dostoevsky inscribes into the very structure of *The Brothers Karamazov* the formal questions that he himself grappled with throughout the 1870s: would he continue to "overload" his novels with characters, and risk losing his reader, or make them more "harmonious" by marginalizing certain characters, even excluding them entirely? Could he write a novel with a structure that was at once inclusive *and* "harmonious"? Dostoevsky uses the narrative decisions made by his chronicler and secondary narrators like Alesha to reenact, in the novel's discourse, the social questions that characters repeatedly raise in the story: can we truly establish universal brotherhood on earth, a "harmonious," unified society that includes everyone, even the most disruptive, destructive people? And what are the consequences if we cannot? In his famous speech at the unveiling of the monument to Pushkin in June 1880, Dostoevsky prophesies that future Russians will "utter the final word of great, general harmony, final brotherly unity of all peoples according to Christ's evangelical law!" (26:148). In *The Brothers Karamazov*, however, which he finished in November of that same year, he shows just how difficult "general harmony" and universal "brotherly accord" are to achieve, in literature as in life.

Taking the Primary for the Secondary

The structure of *The Brothers Karamazov* is extremely capacious. It encompasses several inserted narratives (most notably "The Grand Inquisitor" and Alesha's rendering of Zosima's biography), not to mention recreations of the speeches of the defense and prosecution at Dmitry's trial (although the chronicler does admit that his rendering of the speeches is only partial, and that certain details may have escaped his memory). Sometimes the chronicler even seems to have lost control of his own narrative, as in chapter one of Part Four, when he gets so carried away describing Kolia Krasotkin that he "forgets" to mention what Kolia has to do with the rest of the plot until the last paragraph: "Incidentally, I have forgotten even to mention that Kolya Krasotkin was the same one whom the boy Ilyusha, already known to the reader, son of the retired captain Snegiryov, stabbed in the thigh with a penknife" (519; 14:466). Kolia Krasotkin, it would seem, dominates not only his mother, his friends and his dog, but also the chronicler himself, who forgets that he has other things to discuss, too, for a full five pages.

Yet the chronicler's snobbism makes him favor certain characters over others, and keeps him from realizing the (unrealizable) ideal of objectivity to which he aspires. When recounting the trial, for example, he cavalierly dismisses the non-noble members of the jury as not worth the effort it would take to describe them: "There is nothing to say about the tradesmen and peasants. Our Skotoprigonyevsk tradesmen are almost peasants themselves, they even handle the plow […] So that indeed the thought might well enter one's head, as it entered mine, for example, as soon as I took a look at them: 'What can such people possibly grasp of such a case?'" (660; 15:93). But it soon becomes clear how seriously the chronicler has underestimated them. A townsman voices a different opinion

about one of the merchants on the jury: “A palatial mind […] Never says a word, but so much the better. Your man from Petersburg has nothing to teach him; he could teach the whole of Petersburg himself. Twelve children, just think of it!” (751; 15:176). Ultimately these jurors, about whom the narrator thinks “there is nothing to say,” have a deciding impact on the fate of the novel’s protagonists: they ignore the high-flown speeches of the prosecution and the defense, and convict Dmitry according to their own understanding of the facts of the case.

In fact, the chronicler deems an entire class of people (“lackeys”) not worth his or the reader’s time.[12] After describing Grigory and Marfa, the chronicler begins to discuss Smerdiakov, but quickly interrupts himself: “I ought to say a little more about him in particular, but I am ashamed to distract my reader’s attention for such a long time to such ordinary lackeys, and therefore I shall go back to my narrative” (100; 14:93). He not only suggests that servants do not merit attention as a general principle, but also that these particular lackeys will play only a tangential role in his story. They merely “distract” the reader’s attention from “his narrative,” which only begins again when he stops talking about *them*. Although the chronicler does not explicitly label Grigory, Marfa, and Smerdiakov secondary characters, the allusion to *Dead Souls* in this passage makes it clear that this is precisely what he has turned them into. He echoes almost verbatim the

[12] While the chronicler tends to devote little attention to peasants and servants, he is sometimes ready to deviate from his protagonists’ stories when describing upper class or otherwise socially significant characters. For example, in the chapter “The Start of the Official Perkhotin’s Career,” he describes with particular care the meeting of two secondary characters, Madame Khokhlakova and the ambitious Perkhotin. He quickly apologizes to the reader for expanding about “such petty and incidental details” but then justifies the digression by explaining that thanks to this meeting Perkhotin would soon become a very important person. The encounter “served as the foundation for the whole life’s career of that precise and accurate young man, which is still recalled with astonishment in our town, and of which we, too, shall perhaps have a special word to say, once we have conclude our long story of the Karamazov brothers” (450-51; 14:406).

narrator of *Dead Souls* who apologizes for going on too long about Chichikov's serfs, Petrushka and Selifan: "But the author has serious scruples about taking up so much of the reader's time with people of the lower classes, knowing from experience how reluctantly they meet, in life, with the lower estates." Gogol's narrator also emphasizes the marginal role Petrushka and Selifan will play in his *poema*: "they are not such noticeable figures, what they call secondary or even tertiary characters" (6:20). The reader of *The Brothers Karamazov* who recalls this (memorable) passage from *Dead Souls* will immediately understand that Dostoevsky's chronicler considers Marfa, Grigory, and Smerdiakov "secondary or even tertiary" characters as well.

The chronicler's dismissal of Smerdiakov as an "ordinary lackey" may strike the reader as somewhat surprising since Smerdiakov, after all, turns out to be the murderer. The chronicler may not think, however, that this murderer deserves particular attention. Before Olga Meerson published *Dostoevsky's Taboos* in 1998, many Dostoevsky scholars agreed with him, considering Smerdiakov's character significant only in so far as he serves as Ivan's disciple and less-intelligent double. Ultimately the chronicler's judgment of Smerdiakov coincides with Fedor Pavlovich's and Ivan's: "And furthermore to hell with him, really, is he worth talking about?" asks Fedor. "Of course not," answers Ivan (132; 14:122). They, like the chronicler, have taken the primary for the secondary.

Revenge from the Corner

Yet, apparently, the Lord himself this time
allowed the minority to prevail temporarily.

—The chronicler (331; 14:299)

The corner is a symbol that Dostoevsky would revisit in almost all his major works. A hallmark of urban poverty,[13] in Dostoevsky's fiction the corner is a liminal space where demonic and heavenly forces meet: devils lurk in corners, but icons hang there, too. The protagonist of *Poor Folk*, Makar Devushkin, lives quite literally in the corner of a kitchen. The Underground Man and Raskolnikov both live in the corners, as it were, of their respective buildings, the former in a cramped basement, the latter in a tiny, coffin-like attic. In *Demons* Kirillov commits suicide while crouched in the corner of his room, and, according to Petr Verkhovensky, he came up with his terrorist plots while "looking at [Stavrogin] from a corner."[14] The protagonist of *The Adolescent*, Arkady Dolgorukii, dreams of retreating from society to his own corner, where he plans to become the next Rothschild. *Poor Folk*, *Notes From Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Adolescent* all concentrate on corner-dwellers, socially marginalized (or self-marginalizing) protagonists. One of Dostoevsky's creative innovations in *The Brothers Karamazov* was to allot the corner-dwelling characters marginal narrative positions as well. In *The Brothers Karamazov* characters who dwell in corners *in* the novel, dwell in the corners *of* the novel, treated by the chronicler as characters of decidedly the second

[13] Nikolai Nekrasov wrote a famous physiological sketch called "Petersburg Corners" [*Peterburgskie ugly*] in 1845, deploring the impoverished lifestyle of city residents. Dostoevsky was clearly drawing on both Nekrasov's themes and his imagery (a mainstay of the so-called "Natural School" of the 1840s) when he wrote *Poor Folk*.

[14] Of his son Stepan Trofimovich says, "Il y a la dedans quelque chose d'aveugle et de louche" (10:172). *Louche* can mean "dodgy" or "shady," but the verb *loucher* literally means "to squint." Smerdiakov's squinting glances "from the corner" closely associate him with Petr Verkhovensky.

(or even the third) order. Their social position in the town of Skotoprigonevsk is isomorphic to their narrative position in the structure of *The Brothers Karamazov* itself.

Three of the novel's most villainous characters (Father Ferapont, a monk at Zosima's monastery; Rakitin, a poor seminarian; and Smerdiakov) all lurk in corners. Father Ferapont lives apart from the other monks, on the far edge of the monastery, "beyond the hermitage apiary, in a corner of the wall [*v uglu steny*], in an old, half-ruined wooden cell" (166; 14:151). Rakitin, a minor figure at the monastery (the chronicler refers to him as "an insignificant person" [лицо мелкое, 85; 14:79], a phrase that could also be translated as "an insignificant character") must stand in the very corner of Zosima's cell when the elder receives guests.[15] When Grushenka and Alesha develop an ecstatic and unexpected emotional connection, Grushenka exiles Rakitin (who had lured Alesha to her house for a 25-ruble reward) to the corner: "Be quiet, Rakitka, you don't understand anything about us! And don't you dare speak familiarly with me again, I forbid it. You're too bold, that's what! Sit in the corner like my lackey and be quiet" (353; 14:320).[16]

Of the three, Smerdiakov is the most insistently associated with corners. When he was a child, he would retreat to a corner after Grigory beat and insulted him (calling him a "monster" and "bathhouse slime"). Even when he is not literally standing in the corner, he brings the mentality of the corner along with him: his perpetual place on the edge of the Karamazov household has permanently changed his perspective on the world. As

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[15] The chronicler explains that Rakitin must stand at the edge of the cell, "not being their equal, but, on the contrary, a subordinate and dependent person" [как лицо им не равное, а, напротив, подведомственное и зависимое] (39; 14:36). In this phrase, too, the word "person" [*litso*] can also mean "literary character."

[16] Notice, also, Grushenka's use of the word "lackey" to describe her relative Rakitin, the same word that the chronicler, and eventually even Alesha, use to describe Smerdiakov.

Grigory explains, “the boy grew up ‘without any gratitude’ […] solitary, and looking at the world from a corner” [смотря на свет из угла] (124; 14:114). After Smerdiakov’s first epileptic fit Fedor Pavlovich shows interest in the boy for the first time, but Smerdiakov “looked askance at him as at others and was always silent” [на него глядел так же косо, как и на других, и все молчал] (126; 14:116).

Much as Ferapont, Rakitin, and Smerdiakov occupy marginal positions in the world of the novel, the chronicler relegates them to marginal positions in the narrative as well, treating them as secondary social forces in Skotoprigonevsk and secondary characters in his story. I have already discussed the way he dismisses Smerdiakov as an “ordinary lackey” and a tangential figure to his narrative. At times the chronicler seems to underestimate Father Ferapont, and the danger he poses to the life of the monastery, as well. The chronicler insists that those “who hated and envied” [ненавистники и завистники] Father Zosima were already becoming fewer, and that “the vast majority were already undoubtedly on the elder Zosima’s side” (29; 14:28). Yet the chronicler’s insistence that Zosima is massively popular (and does not the chronicler’s use of the adverb, “undoubtedly,” suggest that he may indeed have his doubts?) is undermined by the size of the rebellion Ferapont ignites after Zosima’s death. The chronicler dismisses Rakitin even more completely than the other two. Smerdiakov and Ferapont both have chapters that carry their names, but the chapter in which Rakitin first speaks is simply entitled “A Seminarian-Careerist,” a title that suggests that Rakitin is no more than a social type, who behaves in a manner so pre-formulated and determinable, his name is hardly worth mentioning.

Most of the socially and narratively marginal characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* stay humbly in their places. Marfa submits to her husband Grigory's authority, though she knows she is the more intelligent party. Soon after their marriage, Marfa dances out into in the center of a circle of peasant women, displaying the moves she learned when she worked as a servant in the city, and Grigory beats her for it. Marfa does not complain, however, but simply stops dancing, and stands on the sidelines for the rest of her life. Katerina Ivanovna's peasant-like half-sister does not resent being less beautiful and refined than the aristocratic Katerina, but rather gladly serves her. As Dmitry says, she and her aunt "adored this sister, haughty Katya, humbled themselves before her, were like her maids" (112; 14:103). Yet these self-abnegating characters, by virtue of their very self-abnegation, only appear for brief moments on the pages of the novel. They do not attract the attention of the other characters (or the chronicler or the reader, either). Ferapont, Rakitin, and Smerdiakov, however, refuse to stay in their places; they hurl themselves from their corners toward a more socially central position in Skotoprigonevsk, and, by extension, toward a more central place in the novel itself.[17]

It is no coincidence that Ivan mentally equates Smerdiakov with something that has not been left in its proper *place*. Walking home from the pub where he told Alesha the story of the Grand Inquisitor, Ivan experiences an inexplicable feeling of *ennui*:

[17] In his "Talks and Homilies" Father Zosima warns that scientific materialism has led to a world in which the poor turn to "envy and murder, for they have been given rights, but have not yet been shown any way of satisfying their needs" (313; 14:284). This onslaught of envy brings with it the threat of violent social insurrection: "[T]he poor, so far, simply drown their unsatisfied needs and envy in drink. But soon they will get drunk on blood instead of wine, they are being led to that" (314; 14:285). However, Zosima suggests, envy has an antidote, and that antidote lives within the Russian people themselves. A Russian peasant, uncorrupted by scientific materialism, is "not vengeful, not envious. 'You are noble, you are rich, you are intelligent and talented, very well, God bless you. I honor you, but I know that I, too, am a man. By honoring you without envy, I show my human dignity before you'" (316; 14:286). The two types of socially marginalized characters in the novel, the envious aggressors (Ferapont, Rakitin, Smerdiakov) and the humble (Marfa, the novice Porfiry, Katya's half-sister, the crippled Ninochka) could be argued to belong respectively to the first and second categories that Zosima identifies.

> Somewhere some being or object was standing and sticking up just as when something sometimes sticks up in front of your eye and you don't notice it for a long time, being busy or in heated conversation, and meanwhile you are clearly annoyed, almost suffering, and at last it dawns on you to remove the offending object, often quite trifling and ridiculous, something left not in its proper place, a handkerchief dropped on the floor, a book not put back in the bookcase, etc. etc. (265-6; 14:242)

When Ivan catches sight of the squint-eyed servant waiting for him by the gate, he suddenly realizes that the "offending thing" is Smerdiakov himself. This passage elucidates Ivan's subconscious feelings about his illegitimate brother: Ivan not only sees Smerdiakov as a thing (comparable to a book or a handkerchief), but also a *trifling* thing. But it also serves as a premonition and a warning: Smerdiakov will not stay in his "proper place" forever.

Ferapont

Ferapont, Rakitin, and Smerdiakov do not gain the power to influence public opinion in Skotoprigonevsk in spite of their social marginality; rather their status as outsiders is precisely what gives them strength. When the head monks allow Father Ferapont to isolate himself in the corner of the monastery, skipping communal meals and prayer, they actually help him construct his reputation for holiness and moral independence (what makes him such a dangerous adversary). The monks worry that forcing this great keeper of silence to comply with monastery rules would cause anger amongst the other monks. They make a sore miscalculation, however: Ferapont's isolation only reinforces his mystique as a righteous objector to the system of eldership, and to the monastery leadership as a whole. When Ferapont bursts out of his corner cell and into the center of the great room during Zosima's funeral, his supporters say: "It is he who should be made

an elder." Others answer: "He would not be made an elder … he would refuse … he would not serve a cursed innovation … he would not ape their foolery" (336; 14:304). Note how distinctly Ferapont ("he") stands out in their minds from the monastery leaders ("them"); by permitting Ferapont to isolate himself from the rest of the monastery, the leaders have helped establish this very distinction.

Ferapont's supporters do not notice (or, more likely, choose not to notice) that he fights against the system of eldership less out of theological principle than out of his personal envy for Father Zosima. Ferapont unwittingly reveals the fact himself when he cries out with a child-like sob, "Tomorrow they will sing 'My Helper and Defender' over him—a glorious canon—and over me when I croak just 'What Earthly Joy'—a little song" (336; 14:303-4). The angry monks gather behind him anyway and, as the chronicler says, "it was hard to imagine where it would end" (336; 14:304). Only the timely chiming of the church bells calling the monks to mass prevents full-scale rebellion.

Rakitin's Revenge

Rakitin, like Ferapont, soon bursts out of the marginal place he occupies as an "insignificant person" at the monastery, and within a few short chapters can be seen collecting gossip all over town. As Dmitry explains, Rakitin cannot be contained: "Rakitin will squeeze himself in, he'll squeeze himself through some crack" (588; 15:28). And much like Ferapont, Rakitin capitalizes on his status as an outsider, and in particular an outsider to the Karamazov family. As an "objective" observer to the Karamazov drama who "knew everything, knew surprisingly much, had really been everywhere, seen

everything, spoken with everyone, knew in the most detailed way the biography of Fyodor Pavlovich and all of the Karamazovs" (666; 15:99), he becomes an essential witness to the prosecution, and, by publishing a pamphlet on the murder, launches his career as a left-wing journalist.

Dmitry, Ivan, Grushenka, and even Alesha are all partially responsible for how powerful Rakitin becomes: they all, at times, reject and belittle him, making him into an "outsider" and thereby inadvertently giving him strength. Rakitin's disdain for the Karamazovs could be explained as a simple case of class envy. When Alesha asks if Grushenka is Rakitin's cousin, he responds venomously: "No, you gentlemen Karamazovs pose as some sort of great and ancient nobility […] Granted I'm only a priest's son and a worm next to you noblemen, but still don't go offending me so gaily and easily" (83; 14:77). The fact that Dmitry and Ivan repeatedly remind Rakitin of their social and moral superiority makes matters significantly worse, however. Ivan has "written" Rakitin's future: he mockingly foresees Rakitin's career as a journalist with socialist leanings (whose principles will not keep him from getting rich as an unscrupulous landlord, however) down to the exact street on which he will build his house. When Rakitin repeats the story to Alesha, he makes a significant observation: "[Ivan] was trouncing me right and left" [он отделывал меня на чем свет стоит] (82; 14:76). The verb Pevear and Volokhonsky translate as "trouncing" (*otdelyvat'*) generally means "to scold or insult," but can also signify "to finish something off." Ivan's story "finishes off" Rakitin to the point of negating his freedom to determine his own future; to use Bakhtin's terminology, it "objectifies" and "finalizes" him. Alesha, usually so sensitive in his interactions with others, cheerfully agrees with his brother: "Ah, Misha,

but it will all, perhaps, be just as he says, down to the last word!” (83; 14:77). Alesha’s ambivalent “perhaps” throws a shadow of doubt over Ivan’s prediction, but it cannot outweigh the overall decisiveness of the entire sentence. Alesha’s words at once remind the reader how reductive Ivan’s narrative really is (he has said the “last word” on Rakitin, literally speaking), and hint that Ivan must be right.

While Ivan defines Rakitin’s future in a less-than-flattering way, Dmitry goes a step further: he actually defines *himself* and his brothers against Rakitin, making Rakitin into the embodiment of everything non-Karamazovian, insensitive, and ignoble. In a conversation he has with Alesha in prison, Dmitry uses Rakitin solely as a foil for his brother: “Rakitin wouldn’t understand this […] but you, you will understand everything” (591; 15:30). A few sentences later he brings up Rakitin again, this time to juxtapose him with Ivan: “Brother Ivan is not Rakitin, he is hiding an idea” (592; 15:32). Dmitry not only considers Rakitin the antithesis of a Karamazov, he even excludes him from the category of real Russian. And he tells this to Rakitin in person: “The Karamazovs are not scoundrels, but philosophers, because all real Russians are philosophers, and you, even though you’ve studied, are not a philosopher, you’re a stinking churl [*smerd*]” (588; 15:28). The word he uses to insult Rakitin, *smerd*, has enormous symbolic significance in this novel. It not only suggests a person of the lowest class, but also someone who literally stinks. It is the root of Lizaveta Smerdiashchaia’s nickname (meaning “Stinking Lizaveta”), which becomes the offensive last name of her son, Smerdiakov. Smerdiakov hates the entire world, and his father in particular, not least because he has had to bear this demeaning name (instead of “Karamazov,” the name he might have born had Fedor

Pavlovich acknowledged him). Unsurprisingly, Rakitin, whom Dmitry calls a *non*-Karamazov and a *smerd*, is deeply offended as well.

By calling Rakitin a non-philosopher, a false Russian, and someone who does not understand, Dmitry stakes out his own (and Alesha's and Ivan's) status as philosophers, real Russians, and people who "understand." Some critics, seduced by Dmitry's arguments, have taken Dmitry's judgment as the final word on Rakitin's role in the novel: V. S. Dorovatskaia-Liubimova, for example, describes Rakitin as "a minus sign, he has meaning only in so far as he is the opposite side of the Karamazovs."[18] According to Liubimova, Rakitin functions as a typical minor character in *The Brothers Karamazov*: he serves as a foil for the heroes and nothing more. What Liubimova does not acknowledge is that Dmitry participates in turning Rakitin into a "minus sign" by treating him as a "foil and a contrast" and a minor character in his life. Grushenka does something similar when she compares Rakitin to Alesha: "Rakitka, you're a mushroom, but he is a prince!" (349; 14:316). She treats Rakitin as the anti-Alesha, a "contrast" for the hero; and then, for good measure, verbally demotes him from human being to fungus.[19]

Rakitin's testimony at the trial, the articles he publishes, and the pamphlet he writes about the murder can all be read as a sort of narrative revenge; through them Rakitin both reinvents and redefines himself, and punishes the family that insulted him.[20] Throughout the novel we watch Rakitin avenge himself against the people who have,

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[18] V. S. Dorovatskaia-Liubimova, "Dostoevskii i shestidesiatniki," in *Dostoevskii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia akadamiia khudzhostvennykh nauk, 1928) 14.

[19] Her insult resonates with Grigory's taunting of Smerdiakov, whom he calls "bathhouse slime."

[20] To use Sarah Young's vocabulary, Rakitin rewrites the "script" of his relationship with the Karamazov brothers, Grushenka, and even Madame Khokhlakova, in his articles. See Young, *Dostoevsky's* The Idiot *and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating, Scripting* (London: Anthem Press, 2004).

intentionally or unintentionally, offended him. He takes Alesha to Grushenka's in part because Grushenka has promised him twenty-five rubles, but also because he hopes to invert the story of his relationship with the youngest Karamazov. Alesha has a reputation for piety and goodness, Rakitin a reputation for lack of principle, and Rakitin relishes the thought of watching the temptress Grushenka bring Alesha down to his level. On the way to Grushenka's house, Rakitin mutters to himself: "Your dear brother Vanechka once pronounced me a 'giftless liberal windbag.' And you, too, could not help letting me know once that I was 'dishonest' … Very well! Now we'll see how gifted and honest you are" (342; 14:309).

Rakitin's reductive, humiliating descriptions of Grushenka's and Dmitry's personalities at the trial could be read as still another act of narrative revenge. The prosecutor quotes Rakitin's pamphlet in his final speech, praising the young man for "defin[ing] this heroine's character in a few concise and characteristic phrases" (702; 15:132). Of Grushenka Rakitin writes (and the prosecutor repeats): "Anger was buried far too early in a young heart, which perhaps contained much good. What formed was a calculating, money-hoarding character. What formed was a derisive and vengeful attitude towards society" (702; 15:132). While Rakitin's description is not inaccurate, it denies Grushenka subjecthood. He rarely makes Grushenka the grammatical subject of a sentence, instead relying heavily on impersonal constructions. Doubtless Rakitin (a young materialist) has a predisposition to this sort of objectifying narration: his entire life philosophy, his shallow liberalism, and belief in environmental determinism privileges the external and physical over the internal and spiritual. But might not the vindictive Rakitin also be using this public forum to take revenge on the woman who insulted him?

In her living room Grushenka silenced him, sent him to a corner, called him a mushroom rather than a man, and at the trial he does something similar to her. He treats her as the passive object rather than the active subject of her own life story, not a person but, as it were, a mushroom.

Rakitin ends up being humiliated at the trial. When the defense attorney reveals that Grushenka and Rakitin are, in fact, related, the public (originally in ecstasy over Rakitin's testimony) laughs him out of the courtroom. Yet it would be a mistake to underestimate the threat that Rakitin continues to pose, both to the Karamazovs themselves and, with his "rational" materialism, to Alesha's system of belief. If his life path follows that of Eliseev, the liberal critic on whom Dostoevsky partly based Rakitin's character,[21] then he will overcome his embarrassment in the courtroom, move to St. Petersburg, and become a hugely influential journalist.

"My Hut is on the Edge of Town": Smerdiakov's Narrations from the Side

Of the novel's three corner-dwelling villains, only Smerdiakov fully understands just how much power his position on the edges of social life in Skotoprigonevsk affords him. He realizes that his social marginality, the reputation as lackey, idiot, and outsider to the Karamazov family that he so bitterly resents, is in fact his greatest strength. Unlike Ferapont and Rakitin, who throw themselves into the center of public events (the funeral, the trial), Smerdiakov presses himself back into his corner still further, both literally and figuratively speaking. Silently observing everyone around him, he himself remains

[21] Robert Belknap, *The Genesis of* The Brothers Karamazov (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 124.

unobserved, poised to take his revenge on the father who refused to acknowledge him and the siblings who, as Olga Meerson has so convincingly shown, fail to recognize in him either a blood or a spiritual brother.[22]

At the trial the prosecutor entertains the possibility, only to dismiss it moments later, that Dmitry and Smerdiakov committed the crime together. In this scenario Dmitry would have killed his father, while Smerdiakov lay in bed and let it happen, thinking to himself: "[A]nd you can kill him any way you like, it's none of my apples" [а ты там убивай себе как угодно, моя изба с краю] (711; 15:140). The saying, which Pevear and Volokhonsky translate as "it's none of my apples," literally means "my hut is on the edge of town." It suggests that the speaker knows nothing about the matter at hand and does not wish to get involved. As the prosecutor utters these words, however, he does not himself realize what a fortuitous phrase he has happened upon: it describes Smerdiakov's criminal strategy to perfection.

Smerdiakov asserts himself by effacing himself; he becomes the central plot-driving force in *The Brothers Karamazov* by acting even more peripheral. First, in order to deflect suspicion, he *physically* removes himself further and further from the scene of Fedor's murder. He fakes a fit so that he will be moved out of the hallway where he sleeps in the main house (as Fedor Pavlovich's "guard") and into the servants' quarters; the day after Fedor Pavlovich's death he is brought even further away, to the hospital;

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[22] The plight of illegitimate children was close to Dostoevsky's heart. Anne Hruska, arguing that Smerdiakov simultaneously inhabits the position of victim and victimizer, quotes a passage from Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* in which Dostoevsky meditates on what will happen to illegitimate children when they grow up: "The highest type of them—they will be able to forgive; the others, perhaps, will begin to take vengeance for themselves—on whom, on what—they will never solve that, and they won't understand, but they will take vengeance." Smerdiakov is clearly not one of the "highest type." See Anne Hruska, "The Sins of the Children in *The Brothers Karamazov*: Serfdom, Hierarchy and Transcendence," *Christianity and Literature* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 481.

and when he recovers he moves to the house of his almost fiancée, Maria Kondratievna, into a hut that is situated quite literally on the edge of town. Second, and more importantly, Smerdiakov uses his peripheral social status to mask his schemes. The townspeople believe Smerdiakov to be stupid, sickly, and cowardly, so he acts even more stupid, sickly, and cowardly in order to convince the investigators of his innocence (because who would suspect a “chicken” like him of such a cunning crime?).

In this way Smerdiakov not only manages to commit the murder undetected, but also to sow the seeds of the narrative that will wrongfully convict Dmitry for the crime. And he builds this story “from his corner,” narrating just as indirectly and crookedly as he sees the world through his squinted left eye. Socially and politically disenfranchised, barely literate (not to mention a potential murder suspect!), Smerdiakov knows that his own opinion does not count for much. So he manipulates the police and medical authorities into speaking *for* him. He feeds his doctors the fabricated theory that he had an epileptic fit because he feared he would have one, and they, not suspecting him capable of tricking them, immediately seize on the idea. By the time of the trial Smerdiakov's “theory” about epilepsy has morphed from a lie into scientific fact, from what Smerdiakov says, to—as the prosecutor proclaims with solemn certainty before the jury—"So says medical science" [Так говорит медицина] (708; 15:137). By speaking indirectly, through hints and suggestions rather than open declarations, Smerdiakov gives his ideas infinitely more weight than they would have had had he uttered them himself.

When he does speak Smerdiakov exaggerates his lowliness, adopting the most servile forms and grammatical expressions. He refers to Dmitry in the plural, not so much a sign of respect as one of subordination, and peppers his language with *slovoers*, the

short form for *sudar'* (sir)—the linguistic mark of a person of low class speaking to his social superiors. He uses this "lackey-like" speech to deflect suspicion, but more importantly, he uses it with barbed irony, as a way of emphasizing his own social inferiority, which he considers undeserved. When Ivan accuses Smerdiakov of thinking everyone as cowardly as he himself is, the former servant's response bristles with conflicting connotations: "Forgive me, sir, I thought you were like I am" [Простите-с, подумал, что и вы, как и я] (608; 15:46). Ivan addresses Smerdiakov in the informal register, *ty*, and Smerdiakov answers in the formal, *vy*. Smerdiakov draws even greater attention to his probable brother's social superiority by adding the servile *slovoers* to the end of the first word, *prostite-s*. Yet the grammatical trappings of inferiority do not distract from Smerdiakov's radical message: the servant says to the nobleman, "I thought that you were like I am." Smerdiakov builds a sentence that is intentionally discordant, a semantic claim of equality cloaked in self-subordinating grammar. He claims that he and Ivan are—or should be—equals (if Smerdiakov is a coward, then no more a coward than Ivan himself!), while drawing attention to the fact that they are not.

Just as Smerdiakov emphasizes his own social marginality in order to convince the town of his innocence, he uses his brothers' nobility to push suspicion Dmitry's way. Smerdiakov deeply envies Dmitry for his noble status. He complains to Maria Kondratievna:

> Dmitry Fyodorovich is worse than any lackey, in his behavior, and in his intelligence, and in his poverty, miss, and he's not fit for anything, but on the contrary, he gets honor from everybody […] Dmitry is a ragamuffin, but if he were to challenge the biggest count's son to a duel, he would accept, miss, and how is he any better than me? Because he's a lot stupider than me. (225; 14:205)

Resentful that the undeserving Dmitry enjoys high social status, Smerdiakov uses that social status against him. He feeds the prosecutor the idea that no one but Dmitry would have left the envelope that held Fedor Pavlovich's 3000 rubles at the crime scene "because he's an unaccustomed thief, sir, and before that never stole anything obviously, because he's a born nobleman, sir [ибо родовые дворяне-с], and even if he did decide to steal this time, it was not precisely to steal, as it were, but only to get his own back" (630; 15:66).

Smerdiakov even manages to turn his greatest shame, the legacy of his mother, Stinking Lizaveta, into a psychological weapon against the brothers who do not acknowledge him. Lizaveta's muteness signifies her extreme social marginalization (the one who cannot speak can neither participate normally in town life nor name her rapist), but also her holiness and humility. Characteristically, however, Smerdiakov fails to see the potential for holiness in his mother's silence; he can only read the shame in her, and by extension his own, voicelessness. He uses silence, this symbol of his inferiority, in order to take revenge on the Karamazovs: his final attack against his illegitimate brothers—his suicide—is ultimately an act of self-silencing. He hangs himself on the night before the trial, which means that he cannot be called to testify in court. He cannot face the questions of the lawyer, who already suspects him, nor can he respond to Ivan, who plans to accuse him of the murder. Most fatally, Smerdiakov is "silent" in his suicide note on the subject of Fedor's murder, and as Gary Saul Morson has argued, his failure to confess his crime (which upends the genre of the suicide note) makes Dmitry's conviction almost inevitable.[23] The defense lawyer astutely observes that Smerdiakov did not

[23] See Gary Saul Morson, "Verbal Pollution in *The Brothers Karamazov,*" in *Critical Essays on Dostoevsky*, ed. Robin Feuer Miller (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1986), 240.

necessarily kill himself out of remorse for his crimes: “Despair can be malicious and implacable, and the suicide, as he was taking his life, may at that moment have felt twice as much hatred for those whom he had envied all his life” (740; 15:166). By committing suicide, Smerdiakov assures that no one will believe Ivan, and that his own story will win the day in court. It is Smerdiakov’s final and most extreme act of self-negating aggression.

By making Smerdiakov into their servant (rather than recognizing him as a family member) the Karamazovs not only inspire in him deep envy and hatred of them, but also exponentially increase his power to do them harm. By keeping Smerdiakov at arm’s length, a servant who stands by the edge of table, but cannot sit down with the rest of the family, Fedor Pavlovich ensures that the young man will look at him askance. From his spot in the corner, Smerdiakov *physically* cannot look at the Karamazov family in any other way. Sideways glances always carry with them a potential danger in Dostoevsky’s fiction. Makar Devushkin, for example, writes that “he, the poor man, is exacting; he looks at God’s world differently, and looks askance [*koso*] at every passerby” (1:68). If Smerdiakov were as timid as Devushkin, his sideways glances would fall harmlessly enough; unfortunately for Fedor Pavlovich, Smerdiakov is no Devushkin.

The Reappearing Corner

Just as socially and narratively marginalized characters like Ferapont, Rakitin, and Smerdiakov tend to reappear (unexpectedly and unpleasantly) in the lives of the people who ignored and rejected them, they also have a tendency to reappear in the discourse of the novel itself, long after the reader might think they had disappeared for good. By the

end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Robert Belknap has argued, "Fedor, Smerdjakov and the Pole are eliminated by death or derision […] as the history presented in the novel develops toward a conclusion and stability."[24] I suggest that Fedor, Smerdiakov, and the Pole are not "eliminated" from the novel as cleanly, or as completely, as it might seem. Smerdiakov does die, but his suicide is a form of revenge, and even after death he continues to "speak" through the prosecutor, who has swallowed his mendacious hints and repeats them at the trial wholesale. Rakitin is laughed out of court, but even that cannot silence him: the prosecutor quotes Rakitin's dehumanizing characterization of Grushenka *after* the seminarian himself has walked off the novel's stage. When Dmitry locks the Pole into a side room at Mokroe, the Pole does not vanish from the novel; he does not even leave town. He starts begging Grushenka for money, provoking Dmitry's jealousy and causing serious strains in his and Grushenka's relationship.

Even the murdered Fedor "comes back" into the novel metaphorically speaking, in the figure of his lesser double, the lecherous, sponging, lying non-landowner, Maksimov. Father Zosima's criticism of judicial punishment helps explain why the metaphorical return of a character such as Fedor might take place. Father Zosima explains that when we sentence criminals to death, imprisonment, and exile, we do not actually rid ourselves of them: "[I]t turns out that society, thus, is not protected at all, for although the harmful member is mechanically cut off and sent far away out of sight, another criminal appears at once to take his place, perhaps even two others" (64; 14:59-60). Zosima's warning becomes narrative fact in Book 8. Almost everyone in the novel, Zosima excluded, wants Fedor out of the way: Dmitry threatens to kill him, Ivan runs off

[24] Robert Belknap, *The Structure of* The Brothers Karamazov (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 70.

to Moscow and allows the murder to take place, Smerdiakov commits the act itself, and, as Carol Apollonio argues, even Alesha passively (albeit subconsciously) acquiesces to his father's murder.[25] But just as "mechanically" exiling or executing criminals only leaves a space in which more criminals soon appear, so doing away with the "harmful member" that is Fedor Pavlovich does nothing to remedy the social dynamics that help create characters like his. In fact, by the time Dmitry has reached Mokroe a few hours after Fedor Pavlovich's death, another, extremely similar character has reappeared (after a nearly 400-page absence) to take his place. The homeless Maksimov, a "landowner" in title alone, resembles no one so much as Fedor Pavlovich before he made his fortune, when he was still playing the clown to earn his meals at other men's tables. In Mokroe, drinking liqueurs, gobbling sweets, and telling salacious anecdotes, Maksimov almost, to quote Robert Belknap, "seems to be Fyodor himself resurrected."[26]

The Brothers Karamazov suggests, both in the events of the story and through its very narrative structure, that marginalizing, isolating, or killing even the most destructive and harmful people will not solve the social danger that they represent. To the contrary, it makes them *stronger*. So how are we to cope with unlovable, difficult, and even dangerous people? Dostoevsky gives the reader a hint through a tale Ivan tells Alesha

[25] Carol Apollonio, *Dostoevsky's Secrets: Reading against the Grain* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 157.

[26] Belknap, *The Structure of* The Brothers Karamazov, 41. The extraordinary number of similarities between Fedor Pavlovich and Maksimov has been discussed many times before. Both men are about sixty years old, both love candies, liqueurs, and much younger women; both were married twice and had a wife desert them; both babble, pepper their speech with French words, mention Piron, and brag about being beaten. Fedor Pavlovich compares Maksimov to the elderly murder victim von Sohn (ignominiously poisoned in a brothel), and so, in the words of Maxim D. Shrayer, "inevitably has converted Maksimov into his own double," since Fedor Pavlovich resembles von Sohn himself: not only will the old Karamazov be murdered, but, like von Sohn, he will die while trying to pay a young woman for sex. Maxim D. Shrayer, "Metamorphoses of 'Bezobrazie' in Dostoevskij's *The Brothers Karamazov*: Maksimov—Von Sohn—Karamazov," *Russian Literature* 37 (1995): 103.

about St. John the Merciful (which is actually drawn from a story by Flaubert). John, coming upon a sick and shivering stranger, "began breathing into his mouth, which was foul-smelling and festering with some terrible disease" [начал дышать ему в гноящийся и зловонный от какой-то ужасной болезни рот] (236-7; 14:215). Smerdiakov, Rakitin, and Ferapont, like John the Merciful's sick man, are all associated with foul smells. Smerdiakov's last name literally means "stinker" (though he himself wears perfume, as if to hide the "smell" of his unclean origins). And Ivan refers to him as a "stinking lackey" (*voniuchii lakei*), which has the same root as the adjective (*zlovonnyi*) that he uses to describe the stranger's smelling mouth. Dmitry, as I have already mentioned, once calls Rakitin a "stinking churl" (*smerd*). Ferapont claims to kill demons who then rot and stink in corners: "He dropped dead on the spot, like a squashed spider. He must be rotten and stinking [*smerdit*] in that corner now, and they don't see, they don't smell a thing" (169; 14:154). And since he never changes his shirt, Ferapont probably smells none too sweet himself. The story of St. John suggests that moral virtue lies in kissing and embracing even these most "stinking" and repellent people, and recognizing that we ourselves do not smell so sweet. After all, even the saintly Father Zosima's corpse begins to stink after he dies. If, as Zosima insists, we all carry guilt for each other's crimes, and all are guilty before all, then we all give off, in one way or another, our own "odor of corruption" [тлетворный дух]. Dmitry comes to a similar realization after his father's murder. He feels sorry that he despised Fedor Pavlovich's fleshy and sagging face so vehemently: "I'm not so beautiful myself, and therefore I had no right to consider him repulsive, that's the thing" (462; 14:417).[27]

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[27]Dmitry, after he dreams of a blackened peasant woman, burnt out of her hut, and the starving child crying at her breast, fantasizes about redeeming even the most hardened criminals: "You can revive and resurrect

A. G. Gacheva, in her compelling analysis of the question of universal salvation in *The Brothers Karamazov*, argues that the ideas of the Russian philosophers Nikolai Fedorov and Vladimir Solov'ev (who was Dostoevsky's close friend) had a huge influence on Dostoevsky just before, and while, he was writing the novel. Both thinkers believed in the possibility of universal salvation and even of avoiding the Last Judgment (which they saw as a prophecy that might or might not be fulfilled). Fedorov, Gacheva explains, saw two potential outcomes for mankind: if it failed to become a brotherhood it would be subject to the Last Judgment. The wicked would go to hell, the righteous to heaven, but all would suffer, for the righteous would forever grieve at the sight of their brothers' torment. If, however, people managed to overcome their internal disunities, to join together in one indivisible whole, then they would, through their mutual effort, raise the dead, paradise would be established on earth, and *all* would be saved.[28] If we accept Gacheva's claim that Fedorov's model of salvation, or something close to it, functions in *The Brothers Karamazov*, then whether or not we can draw Smerdiakov and his ilk into the collective becomes a question not just of saving them (or keeping them from harming us), but of *universal salvation*. If we cannot, then mankind will remain in discord, the Last Judgment will come, and all will suffer; if we can, then all will be saved.

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the frozen heart in this convict, you can look after him for years, and finally bring up from the cave into the light a soul that is lofty now, a suffering consciousness, you can revive an angel, resurrect a hero! And there are many of them, there are hundreds, and we're all guilty for them!" (591; 15:31). It is perhaps a sign of Dmitry's emotional immaturity that his dream of redeeming the fallen remains entirely theoretical. He never notices that Rakitin, who visits him in prison every day, may be precisely one of these "frozen hearts" that needs "resurrecting."

[28] A. G. Gacheva, "Problema vseobshchnosti spaseniia v romane 'Brat'ia Karamazovy' (v kontekste eskhatologicheskikh idei N. F. Fedorova i V. S. Solov'eva)," in *Roman Dostoevskogo* "Brat'ia Karamazovy," ed. T. A. Kasatkina, 226-82.

Yet embracing people like Smerdiakov, Ferapont, and Fedor Pavlovich is extraordinarily difficult. Ivan tells the story of John the Merciful only to question its genuineness: “I’m convinced he did it with the strain of a lie, out of love enforced by duty, out of self-imposed penance” (237; 14:215). If half of *The Brothers Karamazov* stresses the danger of marginalizing or ignoring unlikeable, volatile, and even violent, people, then the other half emphasizes just how difficult it can be to include them. Zosima fervently believes that under the influence of Christian love and compassion even the most desperate criminals will one day be able to return to the fold; but not quite yet. For, as the events of *The Brothers Karamazov* demonstrate, it is not just hardened criminals who are difficult to integrate into the life of the community: it is also the excessively garrulous, the drunks and the lechers, the self-asserting and unlikeable, who make it nearly impossible to live with them. Once again Dostoevsky uses a secondary character to model his point. The peripheral Maksimov, I argue, does not fit easily either into the community of Skotoprigonevsk, or into the structure of the novel that describes it. In Maksimov problems of social and narrative marginalization are tightly intertwined: the question of how to incorporate a socially disruptive person into the *community* becomes, simultaneously, the question of how to incorporate a narratively disruptive minor character into a *novel.*

“Where is Maksimov?”

Fedor’s parodic double is less offensive than the original in every way: he is less aggressive, less self-promoting, less financially successful, and wields less social and economic power. In comparison to the repulsive Fedor Pavlovich, bringing Maksimov

back into the fold should be easy. Yet as the two characters, Kalganov and Grushenka, who make a concerted effort to include Maksimov in their lives discover, learning to see even this harmless-seeming variant of Fedor Pavlovich as a brother is an enormous challenge.

From the very first time the reader meets Maksimov, Dostoevsky emphasizes just how *un*-integrated the old man is into social life. He is peripheral in every sense of the word: he is physically small, and the other characters refer to him almost exclusively in diminutives ("Maksimushka" or "Starikashka"—little old man). He has no family or friends, and is utterly peripheral to everyone and everything in the novel itself. When, by chance, he meets the Karamazov party on their way to Father Zosima's cell, he jogs alongside the group, struggling to keep up. Miusov pointedly excludes Maksimov from the collective: "You see, we have come to this elder on a private matter […] and therefore, though we thank you for showing us the way, we cannot invite you to go in with us" (35-36; 14:33).

No one will even allow the minuscule "landowner" to speak (or rather babble, since when he talks he usually babbles): "But his disjointed speech was cut short by a little monk who overtook them" (36; 14:34). After the scandal at the luncheon Fedor Pavlovich invites Maksimov to come drinking with him, but there is only enough room in the carriage for two (Fedor himself and Ivan). Fedor jokes, "Let him in, Vanya, it will be fun. We'll find room for him somewhere at our feet. Will you lie at our feet, von Sohn? Or shall we stick him in the box with the coachman…?" (91; 14:84). But Ivan, in a displaced act of filial aggression, *shoves* his father's double off the step, out of the

carriage, and out of the novel for hundreds of pages.[29] Interestingly, Maksimov is self-aware: he understands his own peripheral position in Skotoprigonevsk, and in the Karamazovs' story, and even plays it up. He claims, for example, to be the very same Maksimov who is mentioned only once in *Dead Souls* for having been beaten by Nozdrev. Maksimov identifies with a character so minor that he barely exists.[30]

The next time Maksimov appears in the novel at Mokroe his fortunes have already begun to change. The kind and attractive Kalganov has taken Maksimov under his wing. He explains to Dmitry that he decided to adopt the homeless sponger precisely *because* Maksimov had been mistreated and excluded: "Ever since the day your brother pushed him out of the carriage and sent him flying, remember? That made me very interested in him then, and I took him to the village with me" (420; 14:379). Kalganov pulls Maksimov into his carriage, and allows the man who had been interrupted to speak, but when Maksimov opens his mouth Kalganov does not like what he has to say. Kalganov is taking the old man back to town because Maksimov "keeps telling such lies that I'm ashamed to be with him" (420; 14:379). Maksimov's halting stories, almost always laced with sexual innuendo, are broken by giggles and pauses (his one-paragraph

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[29] Intriguingly, Henry James would use the image of someone who was attempting to get into a carriage, but could never quite make it onto the step, when describing where the secondary characters in *A Portrait of a Lady* fit into the narrative as a whole: "Maria Gostrey and Miss Stackpole are cases, each, of the light *ficelle*, not of the true agent; they may run beside the coach 'for all they are worth,' they may cling to it till they are out of breath (as poor Miss Stackpole all so vividly does), but neither, all the while, so much as gets her foot on the step, neither ceases for a moment to tread the dusty road." It is interesting that Maksimov *does* manage to "get his foot on the step" of the Karamazovs' carriage, albeit only to be shoved off a second later. See Henry James, "Preface to 'The Portrait of a Lady,'" in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. 1934), 55.

[30] Yet Gogol's Maksimov, although he never appears on the stage of the *poema*, plays a big role in its plot. Thanks to this beaten, never-to-be-seen Maksimov a district police officer shows up on Nozdrev's estate, just in time to save Chichikov from getting beaten himself (6:87-8). In general, Maksimov (like a comic version of Smerdiakov) asserts himself by humiliating himself, and when he identifies with a minor character, he identifies with one that nevertheless creates a splash.

story about pretty little Polish misses and Russian officers contains a total of nine ellipses). The more he is encouraged to speak, the less coherent his tales become, and after he tells an incomprehensible story referencing Piron, Sappho, and Boileau, and concluding with the logically dissonant lines, "Then they up and thrashed me […] for my education. A man can be thrashed for all sorts of reasons" (423; 14:382), Grushenka silences him in disgust. His ever-expanding monologues amuse for an instant, but then quickly tire his listeners (not to mention the novel's *reader*, who may even be tempted to flip a page ahead).

Kalganov makes conscious and repeated efforts to defend Maksimov and justify his buffoonish behavior. When Maksimov tells the (partly true, but no doubt highly exaggerated) story about his lame wife, Kalganov turns to Dmitry: "even if he's lying—and he lies all the time—he's lying so as to give pleasure to us all: that's not mean, is it? You know, sometimes I love him. He's awfully mean, but naturally so, eh?" (422; 14:381). It turns out, however, that telling long, babbling, lying stories is not Maksimov's only vice. As Dmitry begins the party at Mokroe in earnest, with peasant girls, champagne and song, another of Maksimov's Karamazovian qualities, his sexual appetite, rears its head. He starts kissing Grushenka's fingers, and he will not leave the side of the girls Dmitry has hired to sing and dance. Finally he asks Dmitry for money to procure the services of one of them: "This girl Mariushka—hee, hee—could I possibly make her acquaintance, would you be so kind..." (436; 14:394). Up until this moment Kalganov had been worrying about his new friend, following him around the party as if to make sure that Maksimov does not get into too much trouble. When Kalganov wakes up from a nap the first question he asks is, "Where is Maksimov?" But after Maksimov

requests money to pay Mariushka for sexual services, Kalganov stops expressing interest in him. Repulsed by Maksimov's show of sensuality, and horrified by Dmitry's arrest—which takes place immediately thereafter—Kalganov gives Maksimov 5 rubles and tells him never to come to see him again. After sending away Maksimov, Kalganov quickly disappears from the novel himself. In book 11, chapter 3, Lise mentions him again, telling Alesha that Kalganov "walks about and dreams. He says: why live in reality, it's better to dream. One can dream up the gayest things, but to live is boring" (581; 15:22). Rejecting Maksimov, it would seem, was merely the first step on Kalganov's road to detachment, from the people around him, and from the novel itself. [31]

After Kalganov sends Maksimov away, another character, Grushenka, attempts to adopt him, consciously or subconsciously atoning for torturing Fedor Pavlovich by taking in his pathetic double.[32] When she finds out that Kalganov has abandoned him, and that he truly has nowhere else to go, she sets up a bed for him in her living room. So has the homeless Maksimov finally found his place? At first it seems that yes, he has, and in a most literal sense. Maksimov sits on his new bed and refuses to budge from it: "All that day he sat in the same place almost without stirring" (564; 15:6). As if afraid to lose his new home, he will not take even one step beyond the perimeters of Grushenka's property:

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[31] Kalganov's despairing tears at Dmitry's arrest parallel those of another innocent and good-looking young man (Alesha) when Father Zosima's corpse begins to stink. Kalganov's and Alesha's tears, however, lead to entirely different moral outcomes. Whereas Kalganov lets his despair draw him further and further away from life, and from the people he used to help and care about, Alesha's despair lasts a mere moment. While Kalganov sends away the difficult Maksimov and descends into a life of daydreaming, Alesha realizes his spiritual affinity with the sinner, Grushenka, embraces her with love, and experiences an ecstatic revival of faith in the "Cana of Galilee" chapter. It is significant that Kalganov tells Lise that life is "boring." He has a tendency to say that he is "bored" when he actually feels angered or disgusted by the behavior of the people around him. When the girls at Mokroe start singing a song about the desirability of marrying a rich merchant, "Kalganov even got angry […] And, almost offended, he declared then and there that he was bored, sat down on the sofa, and suddenly dozed off" (435; 14:393).

[32] Grushenka herself seems to recognize the similarity between the two men. She refers to them both as *starikashka* (little old man) at Mokroe.

"Even during her illness he did not leave the house" (564; 15:6). The reader gets the sense that Maksimov has "found his place" in a metaphorical sense as well. Not just a sponger anymore, the affectionately-dubbed "Maksimushka" plays cards with Grushenka to help her pass the time and forget her grief: "It turned out that the old man could occasionally come up with some story or other, so that finally he even became necessary to her" (564; 15:6). The old man's babbling stories turn out to be good for something after all!

The text also contains hints, however, that Grushenka may not have fully integrated Maksimov into her life. When Alesha comes to visit Grushenka, the hidden tensions in her relations with Maksimov quickly rise to the surface. Dmitry has become terribly jealous of another good deed and act of inclusion that Grushenka has taken upon herself: she is giving money to the Poles, her impoverished ex-lover and his companion, and it is not at all clear that she will be able to *continue* her charity toward them without seriously upsetting her relationship with Dmitry. She complains to Alesha, "What a fool! Well, there's no fear he'll get jealous of Maksimushka here" (566; 15:7). Paradoxically, Grushenka's denial that Dmitry could become jealous of Maksimov reminds the reader that this is, in fact, a distinct possibility. After all, Dmitry has an irrationally jealous personality, and the lascivious, if ridiculous Maksimov resembles Fedor Pavlovich too closely for comfort. If Dmitry starts becoming jealous of Maksimov, or even simply excessively irritated by him, could Maksimov really keep living with her?

And this moment is precisely where Grushenka and Maksimov's relationship begins to founder against the same shoals Kalganov's did: Maksimov's verbal and sexual incontinence. For Grushenka's words are actually an insult, and Maksimov responds by

indirectly asserting himself, reminding her of his sexual potency, and suggesting that he is quite capable of inspiring jealousy: "'My spouse was also very jealous over me, ma'am,' Maksimov put his own little word [*svoe slovtso*] in [...] 'Of the chambermaids, ma'am'" (566; 15:7-8). The phrase "his own little word" is essential: it reinforces that Maksimov is voicing *his own* thoughts here, not following Grushenka's "script" (to use Sarah Young's terminology).

It turns out, however, that even one "little word" from Maksimov is a word too many. Not only does Grushenka silence him, turning him from a minor participant in the conversation into no participant at all, she also cruelly reminds him of his dependent status in her household: "'Eh, be quiet, Maksimushka, I don't feel like laughing now, I'm even getting angry. Don't ogle the pirozhki, I won't give you any, they're bad for you; and I won't give you a drop to drink either. Must I bother with him, too? Really, it's like running an almshouse,' she laughed" (566; 15:8). Grushenka responds to Maksimov's sexual joke by insulting him, in part because she is in no mood for jokes, but perhaps even more because Maksimov will not stay within the confines of the role she has designated for him, that of a harmless little old man, who tells stories that amuse her but does not make inappropriate comments about maidservants. Her refusal to give Maksimov sweets could be read as yet another attempt to control his errant sexual impulses: sex and sweets go hand in hand for Maksimov as they did for Fedor Pavlovich.

Only when Maksimov repents of his "own little word," metaphorically retreating back into place, and calls himself "nothing" and "unnecessary," does Grushenka soften toward him: "Eh, everyone is necessary, Maksimushka, and how can anyone know who is more necessary?" (566; 15:8). Ironically, however, Maksimov disappears from the

novel the very moment Grushenka utters these words.[33] He is neither mentioned, nor says another word during this scene, which lasts for another several pages, and which is primarily a discussion between Alesha and Grushenka about her relationship with Dmitry (when Maksimov throws in "his own word," even just his own little word, he creates an interruption and a digression). In fact, the chronicler never mentions Maksimov again except to say that he is absent from the trial due to illness. I argue that Maksimov's sudden disappearance from the novel creates a tension, a tension between Grushenka's words (that Maksimov may be a more "necessary" person than he thinks), and his obvious superfluity to Grushenka's life, Grushenka's storyline (which ultimately revolves around Dmitry), and the novel as a whole. When Dmitry and Grushenka move to Siberia, or emigrate to America, will Maksimov get to keep staying on her couch?

I have argued that Kalganov and Grushenka do not fully succeed in integrating Maksimov into their lives. Neither does the chronicler, who abandons the little old man in the middle of a chapter, manage to fully integrate Maksimov's character into his tale. Not merely peripheral to the history of the brothers Karamazov, Maksimov says or does something irrelevant or inappropriate every time he walks into the room. He never forwards the plot, only retards or derails it: it is no wonder the chronicler turns away from him and does not look back. But if both the characters and the chronicler have forgotten about Maksimov, I do not believe that Dostoevsky has. When Maksimov suddenly disappears from the novel, at the precise moment that Grushenka insists that he may be

[33] Her statement is made even more ambivalent by the very next words that come out of her mouth: "I wish the Pole wasn't here at all [*khot' by i ne bylo etogo poliaka vovse*], Alyosha, he decided to get sick today" (566; 15:8). Pevear and Volokhonsky interpret her words charitably: they could also be taken to mean "I wish the Pole didn't *exist* at all." In general this scene emphasizes how much Grushenka has grown spiritually, but perhaps also how much further she still has to go.

socially necessary, a careful reader may well be prompted to repeat Kalganov's earlier question: "Where is Maksimov?" and realize that neither the chronicler, nor any of the characters, has quite figured out how to include him. Maksimov's tension-creating disappearance reinforces on the level of the novel's very *narrative structure* what has already become apparent in the story: it is hard to find a place for Maksimov. The social conundrum he poses for the other characters (and the narrative conundrum he poses for the chronicler) still has not been solved.

Into Iliusha's Corner

Besides Father Zosima, Alesha is the only character who succeeds unambiguously in bringing people who had been socially marginalized back into the life of the community. By establishing a relationship with the despised and humiliated Captain Snegirev and his little son, Iliusha, he brings two characters who had been peripheral (both in the life of the town, and in the structure of the novel itself), to the center of his attention and, by extension, into the center of the narrative as well.

Alesha is horrified when he discovers that Dmitry has dragged Captain Snegirev down the street by his beard, deaf to the pleadings of Snegirev's son, Iliusha. Unable to challenge Dmitry to a duel and thus restore his broken honor (Snegirev is the sole provider of a large family, and his death would mean his children's ruin), he starts to suffer Smerdiakov-like attacks of wounded pride. Like Smerdiakov, he adds the servile "-s" to the end of his words self-consciously: he introduces himself to Alesha as "Captain Yessirov instead of Snegiryov, because it's only in the second half of my life that I've started saying 'Yessir' [*slovoers*]. 'Yessir' is acquired in humiliation" (199; 14:182). And

he even starts screwing up his left eye. When Alesha tries to give Snegirev 200 rubles from Katerina Ivanovna, the captain reaches for the rainbow-colored bills, but suddenly "his mouth became twisted to the left side, his left eye squinted [левый глаз прищурился], he went on staring at Alesha as if his eyes were riveted to him" (211; 14:193), and he tramples the bills under his foot.

Snegirev may have good reasons to refuse the 200 rubles; accepting money from Dmitry's brother would amount to selling his honor (an actual practice in late 19th-century Russia, and one that Dostoevsky despised).[34] I am less concerned with the captain's motivations, however, than with their possible consequences. What would have happened to Snegirev if Alesha had taken the money back to Katerina Ivanovna, and never visited the former captain's family again? Perhaps Snegirev would have become more and more isolated from the rest of the community, and his left eye, like Smerdiakov's, would distort itself into a permanent squint. But Alesha immediately empathizes with Snegirev, understands why he could not accept the money, and returns again a few days later offering the two hundred rubles again and, more importantly, his friendship. Having proven that he cannot be bought, Snegirev can now accept both, and stops squinting.

Iliusha has gone even farther down Smerdiakov's path than his father. Anne Hruska points out many of the similarities between Smerdiakov and Iliusha, whom she identifies as simultaneous victims and tormentors: both are beaten (Smerdiakov by Grigory, Iliusha by his classmates), both are cruel to animals (in fact, it is Smerdiakov

[34] For more on this scene, the so-called "right to dishonor," and Dostoevsky's deeply ambivalent attitude toward dueling, see Irina Reyfman, *Ritualized Violence Russian Style: The Duel in Russian Culture and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), especially pg. 250.

who teaches Iliusha to torture dogs), and both draw human blood (Iliusha when he stabs Kolia Krasotkin with a pen knife and again when he bites Alesha's finger).[35] The likeness does not stop there, however. Both suffer from seeing a parent publicly dishonored, and both express the (never-to-be-realized) desire to challenge the guilty party to a duel. Iliusha swears he will learn to shoot when he gets older so that he can challenge Dmitry, and thus erase the Snegirev's shame. Less than twenty pages later, Smerdiakov tells Maria Kondratievna, "I'd have killed a man in a duel with a pistol for calling me lowborn, because I came from Stinking Lizaveta without a father" (224; 14:204).

Unlike Smerdiakov, however, Iliusha always remains sympathetic: he wants to fight a duel with Dmitry to restore his *father's* honor, whereas Smerdiakov would fight anyone who calls *him* "low-born." When Snegirev reminds his son that to kill is a sin, even in a duel, Iliusha revises his plan: "I'll rush at him, throw my sword over him and say: I could kill you now, but I forgive you, so there!" (207; 14:188-9). Smerdiakov shows no such mercy to Fedor Pavlovich. Nevertheless, the similarities between the humiliated boy and the despised illegitimate son are striking. The day after Dmitry drags Snegirev down the street, Iliusha falls silent and retreats into a *corner*: as Snegirev recalls, "All that day he hardly spoke to me, he was even completely silent, only I noticed him looking, looking at me from the corner" (206; 14:188).

It is hard to imagine Iliusha growing up to become a murderer and a thief; but his disturbing, Smerdiakov-like behavior suggests that he is, at the very least, in danger of becoming isolated, angry, and vengeful. From the moment Alesha first goes to visit the boy, however, and the curtain that separates him (lying, sick, in a corner) from the rest of

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[35] Anne Hruska, "The Sins of the Children": 483.

his family is pulled back, the reader realizes that Iliusha can and will be redeemed. The sick child has retreated not just to any corner, but to the so-called “red corner” (*krasnyi ugol*) where Russian families traditionally hang their icons: “The curtain was pulled aside, and Alyosha saw his recent enemy, in the corner, under the icons” (200; 14:182). When Alesha comes to Iliusha’s corner, bringing the children who once threw stones at the boy with him, he sets the process of redemption under way.

Unity by the Stone?

When Alesha brings the boys to Iliusha’s bedside he has two aims, one explicit and one less so: he is attempting to reincorporate the shunned child back into his schoolboy collective, but he also dreams of transforming that collective into a harmonious brotherhood, a microcosm of the universal brotherhood he believes will one day encompass all the earth. The second task, it turns out, is much more difficult than the first. Alesha soon encounters the same obstacles to establishing harmonious and inclusive communities that have arisen again and again in the novel. First of all, Snegirev’s hut is not large enough to fit all of the boys comfortably inside. When Alesha first visits, it is described as “rather spacious but extremely cluttered both with people and with all kinds of domestic chattels” (197; 14:180). I count only six people in the room (Alesha, Snegirev, his wife, two daughters, and Iliusha), but nevertheless the atmosphere in the hut is close and oppressive, the windows shut, the air unclean. When the boys crowd in to visit Iliusha, the room becomes even more overfull: “stuffy and crowded with a numerous gathering of visitors” (539; 14:484).[36]

[36] Iliusha’s mother accuses the boys of barging into the hut sitting on one another’s shoulders: “One sits on another’s shoulders in the entryway, and they come riding in like that, to see respectable people” (542;

There is simply not enough room for everyone, and tension within the group is both literally heightened and metaphorically reinforced by the lack of interior space. The young Kolia Krasotkin, dominator of boys, dogs, and dialogue, stands in the center of the hut and talks without ceasing, and other children find themselves pushed to the edges of the room both literally and figuratively speaking. One of these sidelined and silent boys, Kartashov, who "had said almost nothing till then, was silent and obviously shy […] was sitting just next to the door" (550; 14:496-7). Suddenly he speaks up and challenges Kolia's authority, saying that he knows who founded Troy too (the knowledge Kolia has used to assert himself over everyone, including his teachers). When Kartashov speaks out, however, something unexpected happens: "What is known as a dissonance [*dissonans*] came into the general mood." By challenging Kolia's dominance, the marginal Kartashov literally threatens to destroy the *harmony* of the schoolboy collective. The boys only relax into laughter once again after Kolia has shamed Kartashov, and put him, as it were, back in his place. Alesha dreams of a brotherhood in which there will be neither the exalted nor the oppressed, and every voice will resound together in unity in praise of God (31; 14:29). The community of boys still has a long way to go before it realizes Alesha's ideal. This large group, in its tiny space, *depends* on some members dominating others in order to maintain its imperfect, and necessarily temporary, harmony. It is inherently unstable: it has major characters (Kolia) and minor characters (Kartashov) who must stay in place if the group is not to collapse into internal fighting and chaos. And since Kartashov will not stay in place, "dissonance" is never far away.

14:488). While she has clearly imagined the entire scenario, the comic image of the boys piled one on top of the other reinforces the crowded atmosphere of the scene.

Iliusha's death, however, has a transformative effect on everything and everyone that touched him. It not only unites his family and friends together in grief, it actually seems to make Snegirev's hut *expand*, creating room for all those who were previously pushed to its corners. If, when Alesha first visited, the hut felt crowded with only six people inside, at least seventeen people surround Iliusha's coffin before the funeral, and there is no mention of tightness or lack of space. And the transformations do not stop there. Snegirev's landladies, who live the large house in front and never came to visit the sick boy, suddenly emerge from their closed off, isolated spaces to mourn the child's death. On Alesha's first visit they seemed to be deaf, and maybe even mute: "[O]n the left side of the hall lived the old landlady with her elderly daughter, both apparently deaf. In reply to his question about the captain, repeated several times, one of them finally understood that he was asking for the tenants and jabbed with her finger across the hall" (197; 14:179). After Iliusha's death, however, the landlady has miraculously acquired the power of communication. She visits Iliusha's coffin and impresses on Snegirev the importance of burying his son in the cemetery, not by the stone in unconsecrated ground. And this formerly deaf woman actually describes the sound of prayers emanating from the church: "You can hear singing from the church there, and the deacon is so clean-spoken and literal when he reads, it will all reach him every time, as if they were reading right over his grave" (770; 15:191).

I am not trying to suggest that Dostoevsky knowingly and intentionally transforms the landladies from deaf mutes into lovers of the sounds of church prayer. The first time the chronicler describes them he calls them mother and daughter; the second time, several hundred pages later, he refers to them as sister and sister, which suggests

that Dostoevsky himself may not have remembered every detail about these most minor characters. The inconsistency, however, is utterly *consistent* with the rest of the scene. The landladies' transformation from mother and daughter to sister and sister reinforces the neutralization of familial hierarchy that characterizes Iliusha's funeral, when Snegirev hugs his son's coffin with cries of "Batiushka!" (Father!). These reversals in hierarchy prophesy an end to the time when fathers rule over sons (as Fedor Pavlovich did), and everyone will truly become brothers or, as in the case of Snegirev's landladies, sisters.[37]

The inconsistency concerning the landladies is just another example of the sweeping transformative power of Iliusha's death. It ushers in a brief period of community, into which even the most marginal people in Iliusha's life (and many of the most marginal characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*) are drawn. The new community that gathers around Iliusha's coffin requires a new type of narrative to describe it, and a new type of minor character. Dostoevsky, perhaps subconsciously, transforms the landlady to fulfill her new function: no longer deaf, dumb, or physically isolated, or excessively garrulous like Maksimov, she speaks her mind without interrupting anyone else or being silenced herself; she stands in the crowded room without pushing anyone out of her way, or envying someone else's place. She both allows herself to be drawn into a community, and helps establish community herself: by insisting that Iliusha be buried in

[37] In her reminiscences, Anna Dostoevskaia laments that financial hardship, the need to write quickly and publish constantly, prevented Dostoevsky from reaching his full artistic potential: "And how my husband's work would have gained in the artistic sense if he had not had those self-imposed debts and could have written without hurry, looking over and rewriting his work before handing it over to the printer. Frequent comparisons are made, in literature and in society, between Dostoevsky's work and the work of other gifted writers, and Dostoevsky is criticized for excessive complexity, intricacy and accumulation of detail, whereas the work of others is polished…" She need not have worried. The all-too-revealing inconsistency concerning the landladies shows that even Dostoevsky's "mistakes" were artistically productive. Anna Dostoevsky, *Dostoevsky: Reminiscences*, ed. and trans. by Beatrice Stillman (New York: Liveright, 1975), 181-82.

the cemetery, and not by an isolated stone, she brings him, even in death, back into human society.

Yet just when the social and narrative questions the novel grapples with seem to have finally been solved, Dostoevsky hints that this new unity will not, in fact *can*not, last. Iliusha's death, much like the death of Christ, enacts miracles: a deaf-mute suddenly regains her sense of hearing and the power of speech; seventeen people fit into one hut, and no one steps on anyone else's toes. It provides the briefest glimpse of the Kingdom of Christ on earth, when those with squinted eyes, like Smerdiakov, will see clearly, the deaf will hear the sounds of prayer, everyone will share his love, time and space with everyone else, all will be brother and sister, and there will be neither major nor minor characters, in our lives or in our stories. But that day has not come yet, and, for now anyway, the scene in the hut both stretches the limits of physical possibility, and the limits of literary realism.

The spell is broken as soon as the boys venture out into the open air, where there truly is enough room for everyone. "Suddenly in a loud voice" (773; 15:194) Kartashov blurts out a tactless remark about the salmon to be served at the funeral reception. Kolia silences him: "I ask you seriously, Kartashov, not to interrupt anymore with your foolishness, especially when no one is talking to you or even cares to know of your existence" (773; 15:194). Dostoevsky emphasizes the disruptions within the group with a series of repeating images. Snegirev sprinkles breadcrumbs on Iliusha's grave, so that birds will gather at his tomb (a symbol of unity), but as they leave the cemetery one of the boys, Smurov, throws a brick at a flock of sparrows, replacing the symbol of unity with one of disorder and dispersion. When Alesha compares the boys to little pigeons

(774; 15:195), he only strengthens the reader's sense that this group will soon fly away in so many different directions. In his speech by the stone, Alesha attempts to reinforce this moment of communal brotherhood and love, and make sure that the boys remember it when it passes (as he knows it must). But as Alesha learns firsthand, it is just as difficult to compose a harmonious, all-inclusive speech, as it is to build a harmonious, all-inclusive brotherly community, one that does not leave anyone out.

Alesha does his best. He makes "inclusive" grammatical choices: Robert Louis Jackson points out that Alesha tries to connect himself with his audience, and his audience members to each other, by using "the plural 'we' and its variants ('us' 'our') thirty-seven times" in his speech.[38] Alesha both exhorts the boys to remember each other with love, and promises that he will remember every single one of them: "I give you my word, gentlemen, that for my part I will never forget any one of you; each face that is looking at me now, at this moment, I will remember, be it even after thirty years" (775; 15:196). He makes a concerted effort to draw each and every boy into his heart and into his speech.

Yet just as the chronicler has introduced the reader to some, but not all, of the boys in his history (only Kolia, Kartashov, and Smurov are named and described as individuals; the other nine boys remain an anonymous mass), so Alesha cannot help but single out some of the children, and not others, in his speech. He censures Kolia for chastising Kartashov, calling on all the boys to be "brave" like the former and "clever" like the latter. And here Alesha catches himself: as if realizing that he might be perceived as favoring Kolia and Kartashov by singling them out of the group, and thereby create

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[38] Jackson, "Alyosha's Speech at the Stone: 'The Whole Picture,'" in *A New Word on* The Brothers Karamazov, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 238.

even more social friction among the boys, he immediately qualifies his words: “But why am I talking about these two? You are all dear to me, gentlemen” (775; 15:196). But Alesha *has* to catch himself. No matter how hard he tries to compose an all-inclusive speech that touches on each boy equally, he cannot help but make some of them more central and others more peripheral to his story. Just to defend the maligned Kartashov against Kolia, Alesha must afford him more attention than Smurov, or the nine other boys who remain unnamed, and so, perhaps, plant the seeds of future dissension among them.

Even when the boys shout “Hurrah Karamazov!” in unison, the height of their brotherly harmony, there are hints of inequality within the group that could destabilize it in the future. Not all their voices resound with equal strength: Kolia cries out by himself five times; the other boys only ever cry in unison, except for “one voice, which seemed to be Kartashov’s” (776; 15:196). (It is curious that the chronicler cannot say with certainty whether the voice belongs to Kartashov or not. He always knows without a doubt when it is Kolia who is speaking; why does he fail to recognize Kartashov? Does the chronicler consider him too minor a character to warrant his undivided attention?) For the moment Kartashov does not seem to mind playing second fiddle, and repeating Kolia’s words, but how long will that last? Even these famously harmonious cries contain the fractures that could lead to future dissonance.[39]

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[39] Several critics have read the final scene as the epitome of brotherly love in the novel. According to Robert Louis Jackson, “[t]he harmonious family on earth, in the final chorus of *The Brothers Karamazov*, is a premonition of the harmonious family in heaven.” A growing contingent of scholars, however, has emphasized the cracks that underlie this harmony. Carol Apollonio, for example, points out that this brotherhood has no room for *women*, calling it “a stunted version of the world, like those facile communities that the author attacked in earlier works”; Joe Andrew objects to it for similar reasons. And, indeed, it is hard to imagine the harmony of this brotherhood remaining intact in the presence of an attractive young woman. What might have happened to the group if Lise, for example, had decided to attend Iliusha’s funeral instead of just sending flowers? See Jackson, “Alyosha’s Speech at the Stone,” 246; Apollonio, *Dostoevsky’s Secrets*, 164; and Joe Andrew, “For Men Only? Dostoevsky’s Patriarchal Vision

The Disharmony of Polyphony

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963) Mikhail Bakhtin famously argues that Dostoevsky's characters are "free people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him."[40] Dostoevsky treats his character "as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalizing artistic vision."[41] A close reading of Bakhtin's text, however, reveals an unresolved tension in his argument. Bakhtin, it would seem, had not quite decided whether every character in a Dostoevsky novel is "a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word"[42] or certain characters are more "autonomous" than others. Sometimes he implies that *all* of Dostoevsky's fictional beings enjoy the status of co-authors: "He reserved idealistic consciousness not for himself, but for his characters, and not only for one of them but for them all."[43] Other times he states his case with greater reserve, allotting co-author status only to the main characters: "Dostoevsky's major characters [*glavnye geroi*] are, by the very nature of his creative design, *not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*."[44] So which is it? Are all Dostoevskian characters created

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in *The Brothers Karamazov*," in *Aspects of Dostoevskii: Art, Ethics, Faith*, ed. Robert Reid and Joe Andrew (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 230.

[40] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6.

[41] Ibid., 5.

[42] Ibid., 6.

[43] Ibid., 87.

[44] Ibid., 7.

equal? Or are some, belonging to the category of "major" characters (as opposed to "minor" characters, *neglavnye geroi*) more equal than the rest?

Rather than coming down on one side or the other, I argue that the inconsistency in Bakhtin's argument is revealing in and of itself. Bakhtin has struck upon a major tension in Dostoevsky's fiction, one that he does not resolve because Dostoevsky himself never did. Indeed, throughout the 1870s Dostoevsky struggled over how much narrative attention and autonomy to grant his secondary characters: how many stories can you tell in one novel? How many voices can sound in one narrative before it collapses into cacophony? While working on *The Adolescent* Dostoevsky makes an (ultimately unsatisfactory) attempt to solve the problem of novelistic overpopulation by focusing his attention on the eponymous adolescent himself and relegating the secondary characters to the margins of the narrative. When he writes *The Brothers Karamazov*, however, he stops trying to resolve this formal conundrum, and instead *uses* it to reinforce, through the structure of the novel itself, the social and moral problems the characters face. The chronicler and Alesha both fail to compose perfectly inclusive narratives, stories in which not one, but each and every character is allowed to be a "fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word," to contribute his own word without being silenced or drowned out by the others. And that is precisely the point. *The Brothers Karamazov* shows that it is extraordinarily difficult to make enough room in our stories or our communities for all the many people, some self-aggrandizing, some envious and angry, who would fit into them.

In one of his most oft-quoted statements about art Dostoevsky wrote: "How do we recognize artistic merit in a work of art? If we see an accordance, as full as possible,

between the artistic idea and that form in which it is realized" (18:80). *The Brothers Karamazov* realizes this ideal with something very close to perfection. By interposing a narrator who continually confuses the primary with the secondary, Dostoevsky draws attention to a problem he grappled with while composing his own novels (faced with the reader's limited time, energy, and attention span, which characters should he emphasize, which deemphasize, and which exclude entirely?) In the story Dostoevsky shows his characters playing out in their lives moral dilemmas that closely resemble the *narrative* dilemma he himself faced. Just as Dostoevsky must decide which characters to focus his narrative attention on, and which to marginalize or exclude, so the characters themselves continually struggle, and very frequently fail, to appropriately divide their time, energy, and attention among the many people who surround them. Even the most well meaning of them come up against the physical impossibility of giving their attention and affection to all who need it. Alesha, for example, spends much of the first half of the novel trying to prevent catastrophe by (as per Zosima's advice) staying not by one, but by both of his legitimate brothers. He runs now to look for Dmitry, now for Ivan, now back to his dying elder (whom he cannot help but love most of all), but he always gets so engrossed in conversation with one that he momentarily forgets about the others. And that is not counting his stinking illegitimate brother, Smerdiakov, who perhaps needs his help most of all, and whom he does not even realize he has forgotten.

Father Zosima acknowledges that there will always be masters and servants, hieromonks and novices, the more and less talented, the richer and the poorer, in human society: "Equality is only in a man's spiritual dignity, and only among us will that be understood" (316; 14:286). He believes that one day men will recognize their universal

spiritual equality, and “it will come to pass that even the most corrupt of our rich men will finally be ashamed of his riches before the poor man, and the poor man, seeing his humility, will understand and yield to him in joy” (316; 14:286). The master will hurry to serve his servant, and the rich man to give his caftan to the poor. But until that day (which, the beginning of the Kingdom of Christ on Earth, is really the beginning of the end of time), the unequal distribution of wealth, prestige, and love will make for a chronically unstable social world, where those on top are always tempted to abuse their power, and those below always threaten to erupt in envious rebellion. Dostoevsky, I suggest, ultimately comes to an analogous conclusion about narrative structures to the one Zosima reaches about human social structures: even the most all-inclusive narrative will have main protagonists and secondary characters, focus on some stories and (mistakenly) exclude others, and this will always be a problem.

CONCLUSION

> One of the structuring anxieties of literary critics concerns the way in which a character in drama or fiction may be said to exist. The "purist" argument—in the ascendancy nowadays among critics—points out that characters do not exist at all except insofar as they are part of the images and events which bear and move them, that any effort to extract them from their context and to discuss them as if they are real human beings is a sentimental misunderstanding of the nature of literature. The "realistic" argument—on the defensive nowadays—insists that characters acquire, in the course of an action, a kind of independence from the events in which they live, and that they can be usefully discussed at some distance from their context.
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> —Marvin Mudrick, 1960.[1]

Studies of literary character usually begin by trying to define precisely what a literary character is. One of the chief questions that literary theorists have posed over the last few decades is to what degree a character resembles (or can resemble) an autonomous human being. Joel Weinsheimer has argued that characters even as psychologically complex as Anna Karenina and Ivan Karamazov are "at most patterns of recurrence, motifs which are continually recontextualized in other motifs."[2] Mieke Bal, by contrast, suggests that characters are significantly more person-like: "The character is not a human being, but it resembles one."[3] Bal's definition raises more questions than it provides answers,

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[1] Marvin Mudrick, "Character and Event in Fiction," *Yale Review* 50 (1960): 211, qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction,* 31-32.

[2] Joel Weinsheimer, "Theory of Character: *Emma,*" *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 195.

[3] Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, 80. Forster makes a similar claim: "Actors in a story are, or pretend to be, human beings." Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 43.

however: in what way does a character resemble a human being, and what are the limits to this resemblance?

I have not attempted to develop my own definition of literary character because Gogol, Goncharov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky themselves were all actively in search of one. The questions that twentieth-century literary theorists ask explicitly about literary characters, nineteenth-century Russian novelists have long since been posing implicitly in their works. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, for example, asks whether characters are "People or words?"[4] Are they just a series of "motifs" or are they, to quote Marvin Mudrick, independent beings that "can be usefully discussed at some distance from their context"? Gogol explores this very question in *Dead Souls*, both *in* the story and *through* the discourse (the disorderly structure of the *poema* itself). In Gogol's *poema* the meaning of a name scrawled on piece of paper (something very much like a literary character) has deep metaphysical significance. Do Chichikov's "characters"—the lists of deceased peasants he purchases all over Russia—enjoy some sort of immortal life (at least in Chichikov's own imagination), or are these former souls truly dead? Do their vivid nicknames retain the traces of a personality that the reader can imaginatively revive, or have they become "nothing but an intangible sound" (VI, 102)? The structure of *Dead Souls* itself suggests that whether or not we perceive names on a piece of paper as potential "people" or simply a pile of "words" has a lot to do with how many of them we encounter, and in how quick of a succession. The reader of the *poema* finds that the more names the narrator records, the harder it becomes to envision the potential human personality that each one contains within it, and the more quickly they disintegrate into

[4] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 31.

just so many sounds (something Gogol draws attention to by using lists of names as opportunities for elaborate linguistic play). Ultimately the unresolved question—are literary characters "people or words?"—allows Gogol to engage in a self-referential debate about the feasibility of his own ambitious artistic project. Can he succeed in writing a *poema* in which everyone and everything in Russia will appear? Or will his attempts to expand his work further and further (and further) result, as Cathy Popkin puts it, in the disappearance of the very "material" he is trying to capture?[5]

In *Oblomov* Goncharov also asks whether characters are "people or words," although he reframes the question to make it reflect his own moral concerns. He gives his reader a metafictional key to understanding the entire novel in one of its first scenes, when Oblomov declares that writers have an obligation to depict their characters as human beings ("love [your character], remember yourself in him and treat him as you would yourself" [25]). As Goncharov shows, however, although Oblomov believes that writers should treat their characters humanely, he himself has not learned to treat many of the living, breathing people around him in that same way. In scenes focalized by Oblomov Goncharov uses techniques of characterization of which Oblomov himself would disapprove, thereby drawing attention to his protagonist's moral limitations. When seen through Oblomov's eyes, women, servants, and members of the lower classes look significantly less than human. In order to capture Oblomov's dehumanizing visions of the people around him, Goncharov relies on Gogolian techniques of characterization (synecdoche in particular), reducing Anisia, Zakhar, Tarant'ev, and Agafia Matveevna to flitting parcels, noses, or a pair of plump elbows. In so doing, Goncharov implicitly

[5] Popkin, *The Pragmatics of Insignificance*, 206.

criticizes these narrative techniques themselves (even as he uses them): he marks Gogolian characterization as reductive and dehumanizing, a model of how one should try *not* to look at or think about other human beings.

Like Goncharov, Tolstoy utilizes several different techniques of characterization in *Anna Karenina*, some to depict human beings as he believed them essentially to be, and others to represent the ways they can be deformed, whether by impersonal social forces or by our own misperceptions of them. For Tolstoy, the type of novelistic structure Gogol calls for (although never realizes himself), in which everyone and everything that appears, appears "only because it is all too connected with the fate of the hero himself" (VIII, 481), presents a warped, and even potentially dangerous, picture of the relationship between individual and world. Like Goncharov, however, Tolstoy does not abandon the system of characterization that he disapproves of, but rather incorporates it into his fiction in a subversive way. The conventional secondary characters in Anna's half of the novel (two-dimensional plot pushers or doubles of the heroine) reflect both the dehumanizing forces in St. Petersburg high society and the heroine's increasing solipsism. As she becomes more and more incapable of seeing anyone or anything as being independent of her own fate, the scenes that she focalizes include fewer and fewer characters who are not in some way subsumed into her plot, and her story starts to resemble the type of novel Gogol described. Levin's half of the novel progresses in the opposite direction: there is a marked increase in the number of superfluous-seeming characters (who have only the loosest connection with the "fate of the hero") who appear over the course of Levin's story. And much as the absence of metonymic minor characters in Anna's plot indicate the heroine's loss of moral vision, their increasing numbers in Levin's narrative display

his moral growth, his newly-found ability to recognize the people around him as more than just actors in his own life story. He learns to see them as pieces of a universe that is infinitely bigger than he is, and of which he, too, makes up only one small part.

Dostoevsky believed that creating characters who resemble "real persons" was the height of artistic achievement, and the techniques of characterization he uses are shaped by his particular view of human nature (what he thinks a "real person" really is). First and foremost, for Dostoevsky all human beings are psychologically complex. In an entry to one of his notebooks for *Demons*, Dostoevsky negatively compares the "abstract" man, who looks at other people in a "malicious, cruel, one-sided, even vengeful" way, with the "practical" man, who "can view people with more compassion, justice, in a more many-sided and profound way, and is capable of forgiving them many things."[6] For Dostoevsky, portraying one's fellow human beings in a one-sided way (like Forster's flat characters) is both a moral and an aesthetic failing.

Second, and even more importantly, Dostoevsky believes that all people have the capacity for self-determination, and are ultimately responsible for the moral choices they make. Bakhtin has argued that Dostoevsky not only portrays his characters as free people, but also tries to grant them a sort of freedom of action in the structure of his novels (albeit one of a relative and conditional nature). Gary Saul Morson summarizes Bakhtin's claim adeptly: "Dostoevsky found a way to make plot isomorphic with human freedom and open time. The position of the author and the hero changes decisively; a character is truly capable of surprising his creator."[7] What neither Bakhtin nor Morson addresses, however,

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[6] Dostoevsky, *The Notebooks to* The Possessed, ed. Edward Wasiolek, trans. Victor Terras (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 199.

[7] Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994), 11.

are the formal difficulties that the attempt to include a great many three-dimensional, unpredictable, and free-seeming characters in one novel can create.[8] If each and every character starts acting unpredictably, and throwing his "own individual word" into the novel's discourse, the reader may indeed, as Strakhov claimed contemporary Russian readers actually did, get "lost in the multiplicity of characters and episodes, whose connection isn't clear."[9] How many characters can you develop fully, portraying in all their human complexity, before the novel, pulled in too many directions at once, starts to tear at the seams? To quote E. M. Forster, how many "round" characters can you include in one novel, and how much "freedom" can you give them, before "they kick the book to pieces"?[10] There is a danger that accompanies heteroglossia: what happens to the structure of the novel if one of the characters, especially a peripheral character, will not stop talking? At what point should the author cut him off? And would this make the silenced character less "free," and therefore less akin to an autonomous human being, than the others?

The compositional dilemmas that Dostoevsky himself grappled with throughout the 1870s become the framework on which he builds the structure of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky recognizes that every author must focus his attention on some

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[8] In her excellent study of *The Idiot*, Sarah Young acknowledges the negative side of novels whose structure is determined exclusively by the internal logic of the characters' behavior (which is to say, novels for which the author does not have a set plan: he merely invents a group of characters and then "watches" what they do). She points out that, while Gary Saul Morson's celebration of the "processual" way in which *The Idiot* was written "is in many ways convincing […] it fails to consider fully the negative implications of openness and process: the loss of form." Young, *Dostoevsky's* The Idiot *and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative*, 6. "Loss of form" is precisely what Dostoevsky feared.

[9] Nikolai Strakhov to Fedor Dostoevsky, 21 April 1871, in *Russkii Sovremenik,* ed. M. Gorkii et. al., vol. 1 (Moscow and Leningrad, 1924): 199.

[10] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 64.

characters at the expense of others, allowing some to speak for longer, others for shorter, periods of time. Some will be revealed in all their complexity, others, who appear in the novel only briefly will never be so fully realized. But, as Dostoevsky demonstrates through his chronicler's many confusions of the primary and the secondary, such narrative decisions are always problematic. What happens if we take as secondary the person we should be paying the most attention to, take as predictable the person whose behavior is in fact least possible to foresee, or silence the person whose words we most need to hear? On the level of the story, Dostoevsky shows his characters struggling with the same sorts of limitations of time, space, and attention in their lives as the author did while constructing his novels. In spite of his best efforts, Alesha finds it impossible to divide his attention appropriately between the many people who need it, and inadvertently neglects the very person who perhaps requires it most: Smerdiakov, the brother he does not even acknowledge that he has.

Having analyzed *Dead Souls, Oblomov, Anna Karenina*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, I am now in the position to return to the question that I posed in the introduction to this dissertation: why is a Russian novel like a phonebook? What artistic purpose do the hordes of seemingly superfluous characters who "clutter up" the pages of nineteenth-century novels serve? How can we account for what so many critics have seen as a national tradition of allowing the "background" figures who, as David Galef writes, "should they be noted as anything but animated scenery […] will detract from other, more important characters,"[11] to do precisely that? What may seem to be a formal quirk of Russian novels is, in fact, an essential way that writers like Gogol, Goncharov,

[11] David Galef, *The Supporting Cast*, 11.

Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky create meaning on many different levels of their works, from the metafictional to the psychological.

Gogol's impulse to embrace everything and everyone in a single *poema* drives him to include more and more characters in subsequent drafts of part one. As these characters accumulate, however, they take on yet another function: as the lists of names that litter the pages of *Dead Souls* begin to disintegrate into little more than plays of sound, they prove just how unrealizable (and potentially destructive) Gogol's own literary ambitions are. Goncharov introduces a metafictional scene in which his eponymous protagonist discusses the nature of literary characters in order, on the one hand, to raise a serious question about the status of fictional characters, and, on the other, to accentuate Oblomov's inability to see the human being in the women, servants, and lower-class characters who surround him. By presenting his female and "proletarian" characters from many different shifting points of view (portraying them now as more, now as less autonomous and powerful), Goncharov encourages his reader to consider what their nature truly is, and what role they should play in Russian society. Tolstoy, too, uses the enormous number of characters in *Anna Karenina* to explore questions of aesthetics, ethics, and psychology. In this novel an improperly hierarchized character system, with a plethora of metonymic, seemingly unnecessary characters, becomes the sign of the protagonist's well-lived life, and his increasing awareness that he is not the axis around which the world turns. By contrast, a character system with progressively fewer "superfluous" characters (characters not subsumed into the plot or symbolic structure of the heroine's love story) demonstrates the heroine's ever-growing solipsism. Dostoevsky uses the enormous number of characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* to pose

a series of questions relating to the negotiation of both narrative and social hierarchies; he shows that even the most inclusive and all-embracing character system, like the most inclusive human society, nevertheless excludes or marginalizes some of its members, and this can be extremely dangerous.

The scores of characters in nineteenth-century Russian novels send confused first-time (and even second- and third-time) readers back again and again to the “list of characters” page at the front of so many English-language translations. And yet, as I have argued, the “inordinate number of characters” in the works of Gogol, Goncharov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky in fact provides a key to understanding the most important aesthetic, psychological, social, and ethical questions that these works pose. The study of character systems in Russian novels has the power to open up their authors’ deepest moral concerns about what a human being is, whether or not we can respect the individual complexity of each and every person around us, and to what degree we can live in harmony with one another.

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