

The Figured Author:
Authorial Cameos in Post-Romantic Russian Literature

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines representations of authorship in Russian literature from a number of perspectives, including the specific Russian cultural context as well as the broader discourses of romanticism, autobiography, and narrative theory.

My main focus is a narrative device I call “the figured author,” that is, a background character in whom the reader may recognize the author of the work. I analyze the significance of the figured author in the works of several Russian nineteenth- and twentieth- century authors in an attempt to understand the influence of culture and literary tradition on the way Russian writers view and portray authorship and the self. The four chapters of my dissertation analyze the significance of the figured author in the following works: 1) Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Gogol's *Dead Souls*; 2) Chekhov's “Ariadna”; 3) Bulgakov's “Morphine”; 4) Nabokov's *The Gift*. In the Conclusion, I offer brief readings of Kharms’s “The Old Woman” and “A Fairy Tale” and Zoshchenko’s *Youth Restored*.

One feature in particular stands out when examining these works in the Russian context: from Pushkin to Nabokov and Kharms, the “I” of the figured author gradually recedes further into the margins of narrative, until this figure becomes a third-person presence, a “he.” Such a deflation of the authorial “I” can be seen as symptomatic of the heightened self-consciousness of Russian culture, and its literature in particular. By examining figured authors across these works, I explore authorship in Russia as a self-questioning, and potentially self-erasing, practice.

I argue that the figured author captures something essential about Russian culture. The

author's cameo is secondary (or completely marginal) in relation to the protagonist, who is the work's central figure. The tension—between self and other, actor and observer, center and periphery—that lies at the core of the figured author speaks eloquently to Russian culture's attempts at self-definition in various contexts of influence and oppression (such as, for example, Western thought, Tolstoy's powerful dogma, or the Soviet regime). The figured author is defined primarily in relation to the hero of the work; similarly, the Russian literary tradition often painfully defines itself in relation to another—particularly the West.

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Note on Translations

All translations from Russian are my own, unless otherwise noted. Where it was necessary to transliterate Russian, I have used the Library of Congress system without the diacritical marks; however, the names of well-known Russian writers are given in their more familiar forms (e.g. Dostoevsky rather than Dostoevskii). When discussing Nabokov's *The Gift*, I have reproduced the transliteration used in the authorized translation of that novel (e.g., Chernyshevski rather than Chernyshevskii or Chernyshevsky).

Introduction. I-He-Author-Hero: Who is the Figured Author?

L'auteur, dans son œuvre, doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout et visible nulle part.

The artist should be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; one should feel him everywhere, but one should not see him.

Gustave Flaubert¹

Художник часто изображает себя в картине (с краю её), пишет и свой автопортрет. Но в автопортрете мы *не видим* автора как такового (его нельзя видеть); ...больше всего он раскрывается в лучших картинах данного автора.

The artist often paints himself into the picture (on its periphery), paints a self-portrait. But in the self-portrait we *don't see* the actual author (he can't be seen); ... he is most clearly revealed in the best paintings of this particular author.

Mikhail Bakhtin²

The artist's self-portrait in the corner of his own painting, described by Bakhtin, is the focus of this dissertation. Examples of this device abound in painting. Jan van Eyck's 1434 *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife*, for example, shows a miniature image of the artist's figure reflected in the convex mirror hanging on the wall behind the two central figures in the painting. In Diego Velazquez's 1656 *Las Meninas*, the artist is shown standing in front of his canvas, brush in hand, and facing the viewer; the image of the artist is off center, he stands to the left and behind the painting's main characters—the young Infanta Margarita of Spain and her maids of honor. Karl Briullov's *The Last Day of Pompeii* (1830-1833) shows an epic scene of chaos and destruction, in which Briullov has included his self-portrait in the upper left-hand corner. His body mostly concealed by other figures that are shown fleeing the scene in panic, the artist's image is not easy to find. While the panic on his face allows him to blend in with the

¹ Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1980) 2:204. Translation from Eric Gans, *Madame Bovary: The End of Romance* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989) xi-xii.

² M. M. Bakhtin, "K metodologii gumanitarnykh nauk" in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979) 363.

other characters in the painting, he can be identified by the painter's case he holds above his head. Another Russian work, the 1907 *Portrait of Henrietta Girshman* by Valentin Serov, shows the title heroine in the center of the canvas while the mirror behind her reflects the artist's shoulder and part of his face. In all these examples, the artist is recognizable by his instruments (the brushes, the canvas, the painter's case); at the same time, his image is small and marginal in relation to the painting's main subject.

Another example can be found in cinematography. A cameo, in film terminology, is a brief appearance in a film, usually by a recognizable celebrity. A cameo appearance by a film's director can be used as his signature: Alfred Hitchcock's cameo performances in his own films "became so famous that he took care to 'come on as early as possible – [I] don't want to hold them in suspense for the wrong reason!'"³ Here, the status of the artist in the world outside of his art imposes on the artistic creation itself, allowing the audience and its expectations to shape some aspects of the work. While "cameo" as a cinematic term was coined in 1956, the phenomenon is linked to the earlier tradition in the fine arts described above (Bakhtin's "self-portrait in the corner") and, as I would like to argue, in literature.

In literature, the device of the authorial cameo is at least as old as the Western tradition: for example, we can identify such non-central characters as Nestor in the *Iliad* and the blind poet Demodocus in the *Odyssey* as figures for Homer.⁴ Nestor is significantly older than the warrior-protagonists of the *Iliad* Achilles and Agamemnon. Like Homer, who sings to his audience about the legendary heroes of old, Nestor speaks at length of old times when he gives military advice to the younger characters. In one of the most moving scenes in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus

³ Quoted in Jonathan Law, ed., *Cassell Companion to Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1995) 89.

⁴ Although these figures are not specifically rooted in Homer's biography, of which we know little, they at least refer to his artistic endeavours: being the author of the *Iliad* and a singer of the legendary past.

weeps as he listens to Demodocus sing about the Trojan War. The episode functions as a mini-reproduction of the *Iliad*, with the incidental character Demodocus seemingly echoing Homer's own performance of his earlier epic poem. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a character named "Chaucer" is one of the pilgrims who take turns telling stories. This character is reticent and shy, described by the Host as "always staring at the ground"; moreover, ironically, this Chaucer finds it difficult to summon up a tale.⁵ Even more so than in the other examples from visual arts and literature, Chaucer's authorial figuration in *Canterbury Tales* is marginal and self-effacing.

In this study, I focus on such authorial self-portraits, but examine them specifically in Russian literature, paying particular attention to authorial marginality and self-effacement. I argue that these aspects of the authorial cameo have a special meaning in the Russian cultural context. I examine the author's self-portrait in the corner of a work of art, as in Bakhtin's analogy, as a device in several works of Russian literature. In concert with Flaubert, Bakhtin stresses the larger authorial image that emerges from the totality of the author's work as a truer likeness of the artist than the self-portrait in the corner. But I will show that this miniature self-portrait is a key aspect, and in some ways an equivalent, of Flaubert's Godlike omnipresent artist.

Scholars of literature have long debated the question: where in a literary text can we locate its author? The Russian Formalists, reacting to predominantly biographical methods of contemporary literary criticism, claimed that there is no need to look for an author behind a work in order to understand it. Instead, the Formalists held, a critic should examine a literary text as

⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, Prologue of Sir Topaz, lines 696-709.

an entity unto itself, a complex self-referential structure independent of its creator.⁶ Perhaps more dramatically, Western thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, writing some decades after the Formalists, pondered the figurative death of the author and of the book in the wake of a new cultural era that came to rely on the amorphous, all-engulfing notions of “writing” and “text.”⁷ These two groups of twentieth-century thinkers, in other words, located primary authority in the work itself: they claimed that a literary text is its own self-portrait, *not* its author’s.

Opposing these views, Wayne Booth in his 1961 book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* insists that a literary text simply cannot be treated in isolation from its author because “...the author’s judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it...though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear.”⁸ Aspects of the author’s personality, his beliefs and the social milieu that informed them, according to Booth, seep into the text. Booth argues that no literary work can be fully objective: no matter how impersonal the narration appears to be, how little direct judgment is expressed, an agent Booth terms the “implied author” is always present and discernible in the work.

According to Booth, the author cannot help but be visible in his works, yet he can resort to a number of rhetorical and artistic devices either to amplify or to subdue his presence as implied author. Some authors like to be visible and present, others consciously try to “erase” themselves from their narratives. The degree of this self-erasure and the means by which it is achieved will be relevant to my discussion of figured authors.

⁶ See, for example, Viktor Shklovsky’s 1917 essay “Iskusstvo kak priem,” in *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929) 7-23.

⁷ See Barthes’ “Death of the Author” in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-148 and Foucault’s “What is an Author?” in Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 205-222.

⁸ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1983) 20.

What happens when an author of a literary work “paints” himself into the work? The artist’s signature seldom occupies a central space in the work, and thus such a self-portrait is by definition de-centered. The author’s cameo is secondary (or completely marginal) in relation to the protagonist, who is the work’s central figure. This dissertation project examines works of literary fiction into which the author has inserted a figure of himself, casting it in a secondary role. I term this literary cameo the “figured author.” I examine the figured author as a narrative device, defining it as the embodied presence of the authorial persona in the space of fictional narrative, usually in the background of a scene or an event. The figured author is a character among other characters in the work, but he is a character of a different order—an autobiographical island in a mostly fictional sea.⁹

An important aspect of the figured author device is the effect of the reader’s recognition of the work’s author within the narrative. While the reader recognizes the author figure by matching biographical facts that link this figure to the author of the book, the work itself is not an autobiography but a work of fiction into which a cluster of autobiographical clues has been inserted. The moment of recognition of the author in a particular character, thus, differentiates such a work from a conventional autobiography where the presence of the author’s persona is expected from the outset. Two planes, the fictional and the autobiographical, thus collide in a single work to create the very effect that adds unexpected suspense to Hitchcock’s thrillers. The same thrilling and bewildering effect is produced when readers of Anton Chekhov, Mikhail

⁹ Where possible, once I identify the figured author in a particular work, I refer to this character by his name. Sometimes, however, such a character is nameless, and in those cases I use my own designation. For example, in my discussions of *Eugene Onegin* and *Dead Souls*, I refer to the author-narrator of each of the works as “the Author” because this is how each character primarily refers to himself. In the case of *Dead Souls*, the situation is even more complicated, since the Author there is an unstable, dual presence: thus, I talk about “the younger Author” and “the older Author.”

Bulgakov, and especially Vladimir Nabokov recognize the author of the words on the page in a secondary character who exists in the work in the shadow of its main hero.¹⁰

As we have seen in the Hitchcock example, the cameo allows the audience to play a role in the artistic process itself. Similarly, in works of literature, the appearance of the figured author depends on the reader for its effect. The device will have little effect on the reader who is unfamiliar with the context of the work and with its author's biography. Vladimir Nabokov became an international celebrity following the publication of *Lolita* in 1955. His figured author appears in his 1938 novel *The Gift* (Дар) and in the 1957 *Pnin*.¹¹ Clearly, the effects created by these two instances of self-figuration at the time (and place) of the respective publications of these works differ tremendously in scope. In 1938, Nabokov was writing in Berlin under the pseudonym of Sirin and was known as a writer only to a narrow circle of émigré literati. A reader of *The Gift* at that time would have to be a part of that circle to pick up on the cameo and to experience its thrill of bridging the fictional and the extra-fictional. At the time of the publication of *Pnin* in book form, however, the same readers who had been quick to (mistakenly) recognize Nabokov in Humbert Humbert, might strain harder and dig deeper to find Nabokov's hiding place among Timofey Pnin's fleeting acquaintances.¹² Nabokov, in turn, fond of puzzles as he was, might also have taken greater effort to conceal his textual alter egos from the nosy

¹⁰ Compare the effect of character cameos in Balzac's colossal *La Comédie Humaine*: a protagonist of one novel may appear as a mere passerby in another. Such an act of juxtaposing, opening and joining the self-enclosed worlds of these different novels and stories, creates the effect of a single stereoscopic universe. In the authorial cameo, by contrast, the two worlds juxtaposed are not novel and novel, but novel and world, and the effect is to create a sense of a single metaphysical sphere of which art and reality are equal and interpenetrating dimensions.

¹¹ As well as in some of his other works, such as the 1947 *Bend Sinister*, 1974 *Look at the Harlequins!* and the screenplay for *Lolita* (written in 1960, revised in 1973).

¹² *Pnin* was actually first published serially in 1955 in *The New Yorker*, while Nabokov was looking for a publisher for *Lolita*. One can thus speak about two audiences of *Pnin* – pre- and post-*Lolita* fame.

reader.¹³ In certain cases, then, authorial cameos may result in a back-and-forth interaction between author and reader, fueling the author's creativity. Thus, in discussions of figured authors, the role of the reader is as important as the biographical stature of the author.

To clarify my point of departure in terms of genre, I want to make note of the critical debate addressing the relationship between autobiography and fiction. Critics have long disagreed about autobiography's status vis-à-vis fictional genres. Although some critics maintain that autobiography falls into the category of documentary literature and is thus a "lower" literary form than fiction,¹⁴ others see the development of modern autobiography as concurrent with and influenced by the development of European romanticism. These critics claim that autobiography was in large measure "inspired by the poetics of self-consciousness defining romantic lyric poetry."¹⁵ Similarly, William Spengemann in his 1979 study *The Forms of Autobiography* outlines several evolutionary stages that characterize autobiographical texts dating from the Middle Ages and through modernity: "historical self-explanation, philosophical self-scrutiny, poetic self-expression, and poetic self-invention."¹⁶ Of these four stages of autobiographical writing, the final two show the point of coincidence between autobiography and poetry, autobiography and the novel, culminating in Spengemann's claim that "fiction is the only true autobiography."¹⁷

¹³ A counterexample of this is Nabokov's revelatory statement in the 1962 preface to the English translation of *The Gift* that he recognizes himself in the "incidental character" Vladimirov; the role of Nabokov's English prefaces as partially decoding addenda to his novels is also of interest to my discussion of reader recognition of figured authors.

¹⁴ See Lydia Ginzburg, *O literaturnom geroe* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1979).

¹⁵ Jane Gary Harris, ed., *Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1990) 4. See also Harold Bloom, *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* (Norton, 1970).

¹⁶ William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980) xvi.

¹⁷ Spengemann 137.

We can say, then, that with the advent of romanticism in Europe and through the development of modern post-romantic literature, fiction came to be seen by scholars as the ideal autobiography. This supports Bakhtin's (and Booth's) claim that the image of the author (or artist) can be fully revealed only in the totality of his best work, in the constellation of the artist's compositional and stylistic choices, in the shape and texture of his poetic world. This interpretation of the Western literary tradition, in which the self-reflexive autobiographical narrator can be viewed as a version of the self-conscious lyrical ego of the romantic poet, constitutes the larger context of my discussion of figured authors in Russian post-romantic literature.

In my view, the marginal position of the figured author represents a shift that occurred in Russian post-romantic literature, away from the lyrical ego as the central narrative consciousness. Pushkin's 1830 poem "No, I do not treasure the rebellious delight..." (Нет, я не дорожу мятежным наслаждением...) represents an interesting transition in this respect. In the poem, the narrator speaks in the first person about a sexual encounter with an unnamed lyrical addressee. In his commentary to the poem, N. M. Botvinnik suggests that Pushkin deliberately tried to cover up the poem's deeply autobiographical nature by originally titling it "Anthology poem" (Антологическое стихотворение), pointing to its source in a Greek epigram rather than in his own life.¹⁸ The poem contains hidden autobiographical detail and a prominent lyrical "I." In the same way, the figured authors of this study are constructed on the basis of hidden autobiographical clues; yet the authorial lyrical "I" has gradually been deflated.

Apart from the romantic tradition, I examine the implementation of the figured author device on a more local scale in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian literature,

¹⁸ N. M. Botvinnik, "O stikhotvorenii Pushkina 'Net, ia ne dorozhu miatezhnym naslazhdeniem,'" *Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii*, 1976 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979) 147-156.

viewing this phenomenon as a result and intersection of several well-established traditions within Russian literature, such as the memoir, the superfluous man, and the use of framed narration. Most importantly, however, I trace the device back to the convention of the intrusive narrator, as seen in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Gogol's *Dead Souls*.

All of these traditions, so characteristic of Russian literature of the romantic and post-romantic period, can be said to be symptoms of a single cultural condition endemic to Russia of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While both European and Russian romantic movements were characterized by a heightened self-consciousness of their narrators and heroes, a still thicker cloth of self-consciousness overlays the Russian literary tradition in its own right. In her essay, "The Origins of Self-Consciousness as a National Trait of the Russian Literary Tradition," Donna Orwin illustrates how rapid historical and social changes in Russia of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries taught educated Russians, and in particular Russian authors, "to observe themselves from a distance, and ironically."¹⁹ Peter's modernizing reforms of the early eighteenth century "created two Russias out of one: side by side with the old ways, Peter's Russia was a social experiment hatched in the mind of one man and continued by his successors... [The choices created by this change] encouraged the development of irony and self-consciousness as national traits among literary elites."²⁰ Through literature and philosophy, Russian elites were now introduced to Western ideas of politics and individual freedom. Thus the modern sensibility of Russia's educated classes was a result of a transformation of mere decades, by contrast to Western Europe where such changes had evolved over centuries.

¹⁹ Donna Orwin, *Consequences of Consciousness: Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy* (Stanford University Press, 2007) 14.

²⁰ Orwin 13.

For Russian literature, this had remarkable consequences. For one, Russian writers of the early nineteenth century struggled to create a literary language that would bridge the gap between Western literary models and the Russian language spoken by non-elites. More importantly, the very youth of the Russian literary tradition at that time, paired with Russian society's newfound oscillation between the Western and the native, resulted in an unprecedented mixture of "cultural plenitude and contradictions, ... an interplay of many discourses (folk, aristocratic, 'Russian,' Westernized)."²¹ The gentry's desire to imitate Western literary and social models clashed with the equally compelling need to emphasize Russian national uniqueness and originality.

Concurrent with these developments, the Russian romantic movement of the early nineteenth century spun Russia's newly emergent crisis of identity into a profusion of literary creativity that combined the influence of European romanticism with a newfound interest in Russia's own unique voice, idiom, setting. Due to this very internal contradiction of Russian romanticism, and because it pursued national goals on the basis of Western models, this movement represents a unique phenomenon among other romantic movements. In his study of Russian romanticism, Lauren G. Leighton focuses on the idea of *narodnost*' (or "national originality") and its importance to Russian romantic thought.²² The irony of this phenomenon, in Leighton's words, is that "the articulated concept of *narodnost*' originated almost entirely in European romantic thought and fell on the fertile soil of Russian minds made receptive to it by the traumatic national experience of 1812."²³ The Russian romantics' preoccupation with

²¹ William Mills Todd, *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin: Ideology, Institutions, and Narrative* (Harvard University Press, 1986) 5.

²² Lauren G. Leighton, *Russian Romanticism: Two Essays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

²³ Leighton 45.

national originality thus becomes the more problematic in view of the very Western origins of this concept, leading to more self-conscious soul-searching in Russia's literary output of this period. Later in the century, Russian authors of psychological prose condensed the extreme self-consciousness of Russian romanticism into portrayals of individual heroes tortured by their own loss of spontaneity and an overly reflective desire for self-representation, from Lermontov's hero Pechorin to Dostoyevsky's Underground Man, "simultaneously the most emotional and most cynical of men" who came to represent the modern Russian individual.²⁴

The nineteenth-century Russian literary tradition can thus be characterized as intensely self-conscious and split within itself (between East and West, civilization and barbarity, submission and rebellion, emotion and detachment). In addition to this, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bolshevik Revolution further divided Russian culture into Soviet and émigré cultures, thus giving rise to two mutually isolated literary traditions that nevertheless, to paraphrase Vladimir Nabokov, "fed upon the same root," that is, the colossal and complex root of Russia's nineteenth-century literary corpus.²⁵ The internally conflicted quality of Russian literature can be said to have intensified further as a result of these changes, multiplying the lenses through which this literature could view and represent itself: Western, Russian, Soviet, émigré.

My interest lies in the self-consciousness and self-alteration of the Russian literary tradition, starting with the innovations of Pushkin and Gogol in the first half of the nineteenth century and proceeding through and beyond its dramatic rupture in the first decades of the twentieth century. For that reason, I chose three authors who can be said to represent the stalk

²⁴ Orwin 33.

²⁵ See Nabokov "On Translating *Eugene Onegin*" in *The New Yorker*, January 8, 1955.

and two branches of this tradition: Chekhov the late classic, Bulgakov the Soviet writer, and Nabokov the émigré writer. My discussion of these authors is set against the background of Gogol and Pushkin, whose art significantly informed the art of all three later authors.

My analysis focuses primarily on the following works, all relying prominently on the figured author device: Anton Chekhov's short story "Ariadna" (1895), Mikhail Bulgakov's short story "Morphine" (Морфий, part of his short story cycle *Notes of a Young Doctor* [Записки юного врача]),²⁶ and Vladimir Nabokov's novel *The Gift* (Дар, published serially in 1937-38). All of them are works of artistic fiction in which the author's biographical persona appears in various distinct forms. In "Ariadna," the characters recognize the story's framing narrator as a famous author in a way that allows us to transpose Chekhov's own identity onto this nameless narrator. In "Morphine" (and *Notes of a Young Doctor* as a whole), the doctor-narrator bears a resemblance to Bulgakov sufficient for some critics to posit the work as predominantly autobiographical, while others decry such autobiographical readings as destructive to Bulgakov's artistic design.²⁷ In Nabokov's *The Gift*, multiple characters may be said to resemble Nabokov in outlook, taste, and family background, yet it is the silent and inconspicuous figure of the writer Vladimirov, present at one of the literary meetings depicted in the novel, who is unmistakably marked as Nabokov's stand-in, as well as explicitly identified as such by Nabokov himself in his 1962 preface to the English translation of *The Gift*.

Significantly, in all of these works, the authorial stand-in is presented as passive, indecisive, or silent: Chekhov is a nameless listener (to Shamokhin's verbose teller in

²⁶ The cycle was first published serially in 1925-27 in the medical journal *Medical Worker* (Медицинский работник).

²⁷ For autobiographical readings of the cycle, see Ellendea Proffer, *Bulgakov: Life and Work* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984) and A. Colin Wright, *Mikhail Bulgakov: Life and Interpretations* (University of Toronto Press, 1978); for counter-autobiographical interpretations, see Efim Etkind, "Sumerechnyi mir doktora Bomgarda," *Vremia i my*, No. 81 (1984) 120-132.

“Ariadna”), Nabokov’s Vladimirov is a silent backdrop in a scene depicting an émigré literary gathering, and Bulgakov’s stand-in Doctor Bomgard (nameless in most stories of the cycle) is young and inexperienced, most often depicted struggling with fear, weakness, and indecision when faced with his patients’ suffering. In “Morphine,” moreover, Bomgard is a secondary presence in relation to the central voice of the story—that of Doctor Poliakov, whose diary Bomgard inherits following Poliakov’s suicide. In contrast to the prominent quality of Pushkin’s and Gogol’s chatty narrator-authors, then, these later authors choose to place themselves in their works, yet to underscore their own marginal status within them.

Why is this done? Wayne Booth’s implied author paradigm seems applicable here, allowing us to analyze how each author negotiates the degree of his perceived presence in the work and to what end the author might want to manipulate this variable. While Booth’s implied author is a diffused presence visible everywhere in the work, the figured author is a concentrated, embodied presence, yet a character relegated to the background of the narrative action. Is the inclusion of the figured author in the narrative, then, a way to strengthen or weaken the implied author of the work? I argue that Chekhov, although a close precursor of both Nabokov and Bulgakov in the use of the figured author device, pursues goals that are very different from those of the two later authors. Chekhov’s stand-in is a nameless listener because Chekhov attempts to find a new place for the author in the literary tradition, to erase the oppressive implied author of his literary precursors, particularly Tolstoy. In contrast, for Bulgakov and Nabokov, in my opinion, what mattered was addressing the displaced status of the Russian author of the 1920s and 1930s: displaced either by Soviet censorship, by the fragmentary and uneasy character of the literary circles of the time, or by cultural and linguistic exile.

All three of the authors model their respective figured authors on a member of an audience: a listener (Chekhov), a reader (Bulgakov), and a spectator (Nabokov). I will show that these authors felt some need to identify with an audience, to imagine themselves in a receptive, inconspicuous role. The role of the reader/audience, then, becomes an important key to understanding the function of the figured author device in these works.

In his article “Who Is the Narrator?” Richard Walsh argues against the existence of the narrator as a distinct agent in fiction. Instead, Walsh claims, “fictions are narrated by their authors, or by characters.”²⁸ This kind of binary organization of narrative voice is useful for discussing the figured author in fiction. The figured author is a figure for the author; but he is also a character. Unlike Booth’s implied author, the figured author is embodied in the narrative. Further, the figured author always exists in a work in relation, and in contrast, to the work’s hero. My project defines the place occupied by the figured author in the narrative and explains the significance of this placement. The I-he, author-hero variables are extremely pertinent to my discussion. One of my main arguments in this dissertation is that the flamboyant “I” of the chatty narrator-authors of Pushkin and Gogol of the first half of the nineteenth century is transformed, over the course of a century, into the “he” of Nabokov’s stand-in Vladimirov in *The Gift*. Vladimirov is especially well hidden among other secondary characters in *The Gift*; yet this game of mimicry is cancelled out by the unusually flat and surface portrayal of Vladimirov – no interiority, no voice, but only physical appearance and biographical facts that strikingly match Nabokov’s. Vladimirov is a quintessential “he” (character, not author); yet he is the author camouflaged as a character, and Nabokov is calling the reader’s attention to this camouflage.

From Pushkin to Nabokov, the authorial “I” gradually recedes further and further into the margins of narrative, eventually becoming a third-person presence, a “he.” This raises many

²⁸ Richard Walsh, “Who Is the Narrator,” *Poetics Today*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter 1997) 510.

questions about the roles of the author and of the reader: do these Russian authors progressively view themselves as less in control of their work? Do they hide themselves to engage the reader more with the works? Or do they use the figured author as a signature, i.e. to “brand” the work as their product, and not the reader’s? In the course of my dissertation, I answer these and other questions about the unstable I/he of author and reader (“I” being the subject dictating the rules of the work), as well as the I/he of author/character.

In my view, the gradual deflation of the “I” in Russian literature is caused not only by the modernist tendencies in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art, but more importantly by the very self-consciousness that came to characterize Russian culture following Peter’s westernizing reforms. In the twentieth century, I argue, further displacement of the authorial “I” toward the authorial “he” occurred as a result of Soviet censorship and persecution of authors (as is the case with Bulgakov and others) or of the geographical and cultural displacement resulting from political exile (the case of Nabokov).

In addition to the three central authors examined in this dissertation, a number of nineteenth- and twentieth- century Russian authors have in some way contributed to the gradual refinement of the figured author as a device. Among these are Pushkin and Gogol (discussed at greater length in the first chapter); Mikhail Lermontov and his attempts to combine in a single text a romantic hero and an ethnographer-narrator in *A Hero of Our Time*; Ivan Turgenev and his initiation into literary discourse of the “superfluous man” figure;²⁹ and Nikolai Leskov and his quasi-authorial narrator. In the twentieth century, Isaak Babel, Mikhail Zoshchenko, and Daniil Kharms experimented with some form of fictional autobiography and I/he code-switching, reacting at least in part to the pressures endured by authors of the early Soviet period.

²⁹ Significantly, Turgenev’s superfluous man cannot realize himself as an author. Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* features another character who can be said to have no place in the narrative he is trying to create.

In Chapter One, “Pushkin and Gogol: I, the Interrupter,” my focus is on the analysis and comparison of authorial self-representation in Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* and Gogol’s *Dead Souls*. I posit the authorial “I” in these works as the springboard for the evolution of the figured author in Russian literature. I begin with a discussion of Russian romanticism, addressing the scholarly debate about the existence of such a phenomenon and its traits that are specific to the Russian cultural context. The rest of the chapter consists of a close reading of Pushkin’s and Gogol’s texts in an attempt to define their first-person author-narrators as part of a single stage in the development of the figured author—i.e. the stage of the inflated “I,” the attention-seeking interrupter.

Pushkin and Gogol, through their reliance on intrusive self-conscious narrators who seem to be either posing as authors of their respective novels/poems³⁰ or to be being used as ironic masks by the authors themselves, can be said to exemplify the beginning of the tradition of Russian self-consciousness, a tradition whose literary neuroses created such an abundance of stylistic games, masks, images, and archetypes so as to continue feeding the imagination of Russian authors well into the twentieth century. The intrusive narrators of Pushkin and Gogol are, in my opinion, direct precursors and mirror images of the “figured authors” in the works of Chekhov, Bulgakov, and Nabokov. All of these authorial images are embodied as characters in the narrative. But while Pushkin’s and Gogol’s respective narrators are only briefly present as characters in the narrative and are distinguished primarily by their verbal digressions, which take up textual space on the page, the figured author of Chekhov and Nabokov is a verbally inconspicuous presence in the narrative, taking up physical space next to other characters. The

³⁰ Both *Eugene Onegin*, subtitled “A novel in verse,” and *Dead Souls*, a novel christened a “poema” by its author, deliberately straddle the boundary between generic conventions of poetry and prose. This touches on the larger theme of self-representation in these works, which is significant to this thesis.

first chapter analyzes how Pushkin's and Gogol's narrators came to be transformed into figured authors nearly a century later.

In the second chapter, "Chekhov: I, the Listener," I speak about the Chekhovian figured author. I discuss Chekhov's artistic program as trying to work against the Tolstoyan tradition of authorial omniscience and moral absolutism in order to provide a new vision of the author as a non-judging listener and observer. Chekhov's interest in the listener can be inferred from his widespread reliance on framed narration and teller/listener setups. I argue that Chekhov's listener gradually acquires more power in his oeuvre, eventually coinciding with the figure of Chekhov himself, as seen in "Ariadna." Chekhov's interest in listening, which characterizes his late period, can be further adduced from the fact that so many of his short stories are titled or sub-titled a *rasskaz* (tale) of this or that character, stressing the oral storytelling component of his art and, more importantly, Chekhov's status as a listener and transcriber of stories.³¹

For Chekhov, foreground and background, presence and absence, action and inaction are recurrent paradigms. As Carol Flath points out, the catastrophic inaction of the hero Shamokhin can be linked both to the literary tradition of the superfluous man and to Chekhov's own passivity, which informed both his life choices and his "unique, 'objective' art." While Flath acknowledges that in so arguing she is making a "bold...critical leap from Shamokhin...to Chekhov himself," I agree that the question of passivity is deeply ingrained in Chekhov's

³¹ Consider the following titles and subtitles: "Fear. My Friend's Story" ("Страх. Рассказ моего приятеля," 1892), "A Story Told by an Unknown Man" ("Рассказ неизвестного человека," 1893) [considered titles: "My Patient's Story" ("Рассказ моего пациента"), "A Story Told by an Acquaintance" ("Рассказ знакомого")], "A Story Told by the Senior Gardener" ("Рассказ старшего садовника," 1894), "House with an Attic. An Artist's Story." ("Дом с мезонином. Рассказ художника," 1896), "My Life. The Story of a Provincial Man." ("Моя жизнь. Рассказ провинциала," 1896), and, with more of a figured author twist, "At Christmas. Anton Chekhov's Story." ("На святках. Рассказ Антона Чехова," 1900).

poetics.³² However, in the case of “Ariadna,” I identify this Chekhovian passivity not in Shamokhin’s fear of marrying Ariadna, but rather in the meek, marginal stance of Chekhov’s nameless figured author.

Stories such as “Fear” (“Страх”), “The Story of an Unknown Man” (“Рассказ неизвестного человека,” and its provisional title “The Story of My Patient” (“Рассказ моего пациента”), serve as earlier, and subtler, examples of Chekhov’s use of the figured author as an illustration of his diluted authorial presence. In “Fear,” for instance, the space occupied by the figured author is limited to the subtitle of the story—“my friend’s story.” Such a play with authorial presence and absence, with uncertainty of voice and agency, points to one of the main characteristics of Chekhov’s late writing: stories featuring a narrator who constantly undermines the truth of his own words (through using expressions like “it seemed,” “they said,” “apparently,” and so on) and thus leaving the reader solely responsible for locating the sources of truth and integrity in the narrative.³³ In stories like “Fear,” the insertion of the possessive “my” in the story’s subtitle and the erasure of the traces of the ego that is its referent elsewhere in the story illustrates an evasion of authorial responsibility predicated upon the intricate and self-negating narrative construction of Chekhov’s late art.

In my third and fourth chapters, I discuss Bulgakov and Nabokov, respectively, making a case for their use of the figured author device to comment on what they perceived to be a displacement and fragmentation of authorship and selfhood in the decades following the Bolshevik Revolution. I draw a distinction between the social environments that informed the

³² Carol Flath, “Writing about Nothing: Chekhov’s ‘Ariadna’ and the Narcissistic Narrator,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (April 1999) 238-9.

³³ For a discussion of this sort of “narrative hedging” in Chekhov, see Aleksandr Chudakov, *Poetika Chekhova* (Moskva: Nauka, 1971) and Petr Bitsilli, *Tvorchestvo Chekhova: opyt stilisticheskogo analiza* (Universitetskaia pechatnitsa, 1942).

writings of each author – Bulgakov’s plight in Soviet Russia of the 1920s and 1930s and Nabokov’s exile in Berlin.

In the third chapter, “Bulgakov: I, the Reader,” I discuss Mikhail Bulgakov’s short story cycle *Notes of a Young Doctor*. Most critics group all nine medical stories together into this cycle.³⁴ Critics agree that these medical stories are unified by the figure of their naïve doctor-narrator and the theme of his lonely fight against death. The stories “Morphine” and “I Killed” (Я убил) represent some deviation from this structure: they employ frame narratives in which the main narrator exists in the frame, while the insert is the first-person voice of another doctor. This doubling of voice in which the main narrator is pushed to the background of another doctor’s story is especially relevant to my discussion of figured authors.³⁵ The naïve narrator (in “Morphine” we find out he is called Dr. Bomgard) has many biographical parallels to Bulgakov, who, like Bomgard, served as a *zemstvo* doctor in a remote Russian village, while the rest of Russia was swept up in the turmoil of the Civil War and the Revolution.

Of particular interest to this project is the story “Morphine,” in which Bulgakov’s stand-in Dr. Bomgard happens to read a diary of another doctor (Poliakov), who had just committed suicide. Poliakov’s diary is at the center of the story, while Bomgard’s reading of the diary is the frame. The multiplication of voices, narrators, doctors in this and other stories in the cycle suggests some loss of center and control that pervades all the stories in the cycle. Indeed, in most of the stories, the naïve narrator Bomgard is internally divided: his interior monologues are dominated by two feuding voices, betraying his panic before the chaos of death that surrounds

³⁴ Colin Wright proposes a different grouping of the stories: “Morphine,” “I Killed” and “Starry Rash” should not be included in the cycle, as they lack the “lighthearted tone” of the other six. See Wright, *Mikhail Bulgakov: Life and Interpretations* 10.

³⁵ Significantly, when the stories were first published as a collection in 1963, the two frame narrative stories were omitted from publication (as well as another story, “Starry Rash”). While Efim Etkind claims that the stories were perhaps “too bloody” and “too pathological” to be published in a Soviet collection, I suggest that the passivity and hopelessness implied by the split, uncertain narrating “I” in these stories also played a role.

him. My focus in this chapter is on Bomgard the reader: I will show that Bomgard is Bulgakov's figured author and that his status as a reader functions as a Christian paradigm of the witness and healer in Bulgakov's work.

In chapter four, "Nabokov: I the Eye and He the Silent Spectator," I talk about Nabokov's novel *The Gift* to discuss how he addresses the Russian literary tradition in his use of figured authors. *The Gift* represents an especially provocative case for studying the figured author as a device. While I have already identified the "incidental character" Vladimirov as perhaps the most interesting and clear-cut case of Nabokov's cameo in the novel, there are other instances of Nabokov's self-figuration in the novel.³⁶ Another secondary character, a novelist by the name of Shirin, represents a parodic inverted double of Vladimirov, pointing to Nabokov's pseudonym (Sirin) at the time of *The Gift*'s composition and first publication. The poet Koncheyev, admired by the novel's protagonist Fyodor, also contains "odds and ends" of Nabokov's biographical persona circa 1925.³⁷ Significantly, the extended conversations that take place between Koncheyev and Fyodor in the space of the novel are in fact imagined by Fyodor: thus, as Nabokov's stand-in, Koncheyev is as silent as Vladimirov.

Fyodor's own unstable status in *The Gift*, as both its eventual author and its hero, the "I" and the "he" of narrative, addresses and complicates the questions I want to pose in relation to the figured authors in Nabokov's novel: Where in this work is the author? Is he more powerful than his hero, than his reader? Why is he replicated in the "incidental" characters in the narrative? And why is he silenced in those instances?

³⁶ See Nabokov's "Foreword," in Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*, trans. Michael Scammel and Dmitry Nabokov with Vladimir Nabokov (New York: Penguin Books, 1980) 8.

³⁷ Nabokov's "Foreword" 8.

My analysis of Vladimirov and other figured authors in *The Gift* addresses Nabokov's theatrical exposition of many key scenes in the novel. The émigré literary salon meetings, where the reader encounters both Vladimirov and Koncheyev as silent observers of the action, are depicted in a Gogolian farcical, claustrophobic, and distinctly theatrical manner. The presence of the figured authors as outsiders in these scenes underscores to my mind the restricted and uncomfortable position of Russian authorship in exile of Nabokov's time. On the other hand, Nabokov's cinematic montage-like descriptions of Fyodor's meanderings through the streets of Berlin establish the eye, and the "I" of Fyodor, as the central consciousness of the novel. The distinction between the narrating and authorial "I" as the text's central visual guide on the one hand, and the "he" of silent spectatorship of Vladimirov on the other inform my discussion of author and hero, center and periphery, silence and voice in Nabokov's novel.

My conclusion suggests some further avenues for exploring the figured author and its significance in twentieth-century Russian literature, especially in the historical context. In particular, I propose some readings of the authorial figurations in the work of Daniil Kharms in the 1930s, Mikhail Zoshchenko in the 1940s, and Joseph Brodsky in the 1980s.

Chapter One. Pushkin and Gogol: I, the Interrupter

Romanticism and Russia

The subject of this study is the self-represented author who enters the fictional space of his work and shares this space with his hero. My aim is to trace the methods and goals of this authorial self-representation and their interaction with the literary tradition. I believe that the origins of Russian literature's figured author lie in the authorial images created by Alexander Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol in their most famous works, *Eugene Onegin* and *Dead Souls*. Although these authorial images are, in my view, directly related and paternal to the specific figured authors of Chekhov, Bulgakov and Nabokov that I will examine in the chapters to follow, in several important ways they are opposites of the later figured authors. Pushkin's and Gogol's author-narrators are a vocal and imposing presence in the narrative, while their literary descendants are mostly silent, marginal and unassuming.

However, the most important thing that sets apart Pushkin's and Gogol's author-narrators is their central preoccupation with language and linguistic play. These figures are anchored in and defined by their language: they engage in casual *causerie* with and about the reader; interrupt the action of the narrative filling the void with unbridled, digressive language; and comment on various uses of language in their contemporary culture, as well as on their own newly created forms of language. To define themselves in the space of the narrative, they incessantly call attention to themselves by exercising creative power over language, observing it, distancing it and recasting it into new forms. These figures loom large in the narrative precisely through their power to interrupt and to create the self and its language *within* the space of narrative rupture.

Modern Western culture traces the beginnings of its interest in the self and its artistic representations back to the European Renaissance. In particular, Stephen Greenblatt identifies the roots of individual and poetic self-fashioning in sixteenth-century Europe, suggesting that it was during that time in the Western world that “there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process.”³⁸ Greenblatt posits a new relationship between society and the individual, which according to him arose during the Renaissance. In his cultural and literary analysis of six English poets of the Tudor period—More, Tyndale, Wyatt, Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare—Greenblatt shows how these artists “fashioned” their own selves in response to the demands of their culture and society and reflected on this self-fashioning in their poetry. As one commentator puts it, Greenblatt’s argument demonstrates “the inseparability of author, writing, nation, and cultural climate.”³⁹ The constructed artistic self of this period came to reflect society and its expectations, while at the same time these individual influential selves came to shape society itself.

Greenblatt claims that the sixteenth-century cultural moment is inseparable from our own modern mentality. “To experience Renaissance culture is to feel what it was like to form our own identity,” he writes.⁴⁰ If the Renaissance was a new cultural moment for the Western world, which made individuality and self-presentation suddenly important in a way that is still current and recognizable in the West, for Russian culture it is the period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that contains the seeds of the modern Russian self. In many ways,

³⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 2.

³⁹ Philip Edwards, review in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Summer, 1982) 317-321 (317).

⁴⁰ Greenblatt 175.

this period in Russian history can be termed culturally “new” and “self-conscious” because it arose as a consequence of radical innovation—Peter’s reforms of the early eighteenth century—and of the subsequent pressing need to define what was Russian in the context of a newly Europeanized society. In particular, it was the unclear status of the Russian literary language that led to the heightened cultural self-contemplation of this period. During this time, the Russian language felt alien, unfamiliar and barren to most members of the educated Russian elite, especially to poets and writers.⁴¹ In this chapter, I will show that both Pushkin and Gogol created for the Russian language a new potential to negotiate the role of the author in relation to his reader and his hero.

The European Renaissance as an artistically diverse and fertile cultural epoch followed a darker, more stifled medieval period. In this respect, Russian late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century culture can be said to have experienced an explosion of artistic plenitude parallel to that of the Renaissance in Western Europe. As Pushkin observed in an essay discussing the state of literature in the Russia of his time, this new culture represents the first step into the light out of Russia’s own dark ages: “Sadly, we do not have any ancient literature. Behind us is a dark steppe [...]. Our literature emerged suddenly in the eighteenth century, similarly to the Russian nobility, without ancestors or genealogy.”⁴²

⁴¹ For example, Boris Unbegaun writes about the merging of the Russian spoken idiom and Church Slavonic. By the middle of the eighteenth century, he writes, they were integrated to become the standard language of Imperial Russia. Only a few generations later, in Pushkin’s time, there was still little experience of writing literature in this new language that was neither pure vernacular nor pure Church Slavonic. See B. O. Unbegaun, “The Russian Literary Language: A Comparative View,” *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 1973) xix-xxv. Nikolai Karamzin also discusses the inadequacy of the Russian literary language at the end of the eighteenth century in his *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (*Письма русского путешественника*). See especially the letters from July 4 and July 6, 1789.

⁴² A. S. Pushkin, “O russkoi slovesnosti” in *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, ed. D. D. Blagoi et al., (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959-1962) 6:367.

The sudden emergence of Russian letters out of a dark void⁴³ placed a burden of urgency and uncertainty upon the authors of this period, who felt they were working with a limited and underdeveloped cultural and linguistic apparatus to produce a body of art that aspired to rival the much older and more evolved European literary tradition. The need for authorial self-fashioning in this period was perhaps exacerbated by such anxious self-comparisons to European culture, but also it was intensified the strangely displaced national identity of the educated Russians coming of age during this time. Peter's westernizing reforms, introduced a century earlier, had produced several generations of Russian aristocrats who were educated in Western ideas and spoke primarily French from childhood. These educated elites now tried to contemplate Russia and their own Russianness in terms of their "foreign" upbringing, and often struggled with the question of their cultural identity.⁴⁴ The influx of Western thought and education throughout the eighteenth century resulted also in the growing popularity of Western literature in Russia, and it can be said that Russia's own unique interest in the questions of identity and self-fashioning both borrowed from and added to the Western game of self-fashioning, which in its turn had evolved for centuries since the Renaissance.

If the development of modern Western consciousness and art is rooted in the European Renaissance and its interest in self-fashioning, for Russia it was the romantic period that started

⁴³ Pushkin's notion of Russia's pre-eighteenth-century literature as "a dark steppe" can be disputed if we recall, among many others, such innovative and generically diverse works of ancient and medieval Russian literature as the anonymous "Legend and Passion and Eulogy of the Holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb" (Сказание и страдание и похвала святым мученикам Борису и Глебу), dating from the end of the 11th or beginning of the 12th century; Sofonii's "Zadonschina" (Задонщина) dating from the end of the 14th century; Afanasii Nikitin's "Journey Across the Seas" (Хождение за три моря) dating from 1475; or "Life of the Archpriest Avvakum Written by Himself" (Житие Протопопа Аввакума им самим написанное), written in 1672-73 and widely considered as the first Russian autobiography.

⁴⁴ For a more in-depth discussion of this phenomenon, see Donna Orwin, *Consequences of Consciousness: Turgenyev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

the creation of its “first truly modern national literature.”⁴⁵ Romanticism came to Russia from Europe a few decades after it became fashionable in Germany and England; in Russia, its development was almost concurrent with French romanticism. In Europe of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the growing popularity of romanticism as an artistic and social worldview took self-fashioning to new heights: the romantic poet created a melancholy and misunderstood hero, positing this hero as the voice and representative of the poet’s own psyche. As a form of rebellion against the power of reason and the rigid sobriety of the Enlightenment and the neoclassical aesthetic, romanticism introduced a “qualitatively new kind of hero,” previously unknown in literature – an extraordinary individual, who finds himself opposed to society and to the prosaic reality of the everyday, choosing instead a life of exile and tragic adventure.⁴⁶ Intensely subjective, focused on poetic and individual freedom and rooted in contradiction and ambiguity, romanticism appeared to European audiences as a strange and attractive new form. Friedrich Schlegel, one of its first theorists, envisioned romanticism as the new and necessary direction for all poetry. In 1798, in a series of short articles on romanticism, he wrote that romantic poetry is “a progressive universal poetry,” which comprehends and unites all genres.⁴⁷

Even though Russian romanticism was greatly influenced by the German and English romantics, the Russians were concerned with the creation of their own national literature and thus were “highly selective about their interests in European thought,” giving preference to those European romantics who addressed the relationship between literature and nation.⁴⁸ At the same

⁴⁵ Lauren G. Leighton, *Russian Romanticism: Two Essays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 25.

⁴⁶ E. A. Maimin, *O russkom romantizme* (Moscow: Prosveschenie, 1975) 9.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Frederick Garber, ed., *Romantic Irony* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1988) 17.

⁴⁸ *Romantic Irony* 28.

time, while adapting the romantic worldview from its European origins, Russian romantic literature “acquired a character... which was eclectic and, at the same time, took on a perceivable local coloration which conforms to the historical conditions of Russian life.”⁴⁹ Having taken on a European literary trend already rooted in an intensely subjective relationship with the world, the Russians infused it with an additional degree of poetic subjectivity, informed by national self-consciousness and the need to affirm Russia’s literary uniqueness.

Pushkin took these tensions and contradictions to a much more sophisticated level than his Russian contemporaries. In *Eugene Onegin*, he masterfully integrated both Russia’s search for a means of national expression and the more subtly ironic stance of the European romantics. While *Onegin* is without a doubt the creation of a romantic ironist, it departs considerably from the work of other Russian romantics. Monika Greenleaf writes about the peculiar syncretism of Russian culture during this time, noting that the speed with which Russia began to appropriate Western trends following the Petrine reforms resulted in the simultaneous co-existence of genres and forms that in Europe had developed in temporal succession, with one form or genre dominating in a given cultural period to the exclusion of the previously evolved forms.⁵⁰ For this reason, Russian romanticism did not oppose itself either to Enlightenment ideas or to the classical tradition quite in the same way as did European romanticism, in a sense resulting in more diluted romantic features than those of western romanticism.⁵¹ Romantic irony, in

⁴⁹ Quoted in Leighton 25.

⁵⁰ Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford University Press, 1994) 15.

⁵¹ See Maimin, *O russkom romantizme* 19.

particular, according to E. A. Maimin and Roman S. Struc,⁵² went unnoticed by the Russian romantics, who were only mildly concerned with the theme of the individual and subjectivity as compared to their European colleagues. Yet, throughout his life, Pushkin's work remained intensely subjective and concerned with authorial freedom. Despite Russian romantic poetry's relatively limited interest in and practice of romantic irony, which Schlegel had characterized as the primary mode and voice of the romantic worldview, in *Onegin* Pushkin proves to be a romantic ironist on par with, if not, as Greenleaf claims, superior to such European masters of romantic irony as Byron and Laurence Sterne.

Schlegel named irony one of romanticism's most significant pillars. Building on the ancient Socratic use of irony as a rhetorical device, he redefined and expanded the concept to express an entire worldview he termed romantic. As a poetic insight that "allows one to avoid taking jest for earnest and vice versa," romantic irony expresses the artist's "clear awareness of eternal agility, of infinitely full chaos," which signifies his supreme freedom and control over his creation.⁵³ Schlegel compared this new, broader incarnation of irony to "a permanent parabasis," referring to instances in Greek comedy when the chorus speaks to the audience in the author's name. The authorial intrusions characteristic of the work of Sterne, Cervantes and Byron represent this idea: the author is always in control of his creation, free to interrupt the story and remind the reader of its status as artifice and invention. The fundamental antithesis recognized by Schlegel to be at the very core of human existence, communication and art finds its best expression in this kind of irony, which deliberately confuses literature with life, chaos with

⁵² See Maimin, *O russkom romantizme* and Roman S. Struc's "Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol: Ironic Modes in Russian Romanticism" in *Romantic Irony* 241-250.

⁵³ *Romantic Irony* 18.

artifice, poetry with prose, resulting in a “harmony of dissonances” (*Harmonie von Dissonanzen*).⁵⁴

Since, as Orwin argues, Russian culture of Pushkin’s time was itself informed by the structures of ironic self-distancing, it would seem that romantic irony would organically translate into the works of Russian romantic poets.⁵⁵ And yet as an aesthetic stance it remained alien to Russian romanticism. *Eugene Onegin*, in which the author-narrator continually subverts or questions the opinions of characters and situations that he himself offers to the reader, thus maintaining an ironic detachment from everything he depicts, represents perhaps the only exception.⁵⁶ In this sense, Pushkin was the first poet to intuit the contrariness at the core of Russian culture and to find the means to represent it artistically in his novel in verse. The later succession in Russian literature of anxiously self-ironizing characters who came to be known as superfluous men represents a fertile development of romantic irony following Pushkin’s lead.⁵⁷ Many of these superfluous men were pathological diarists, thus in a sense authors attempting to exercise control, in writing, over their disintegrating selves. This new kind of irony, in which

⁵⁴ From “Über Goethes Meister,” quoted in *Romantic Irony* 21.

⁵⁵ See Orwin, *Consequences of Consciousness* for further discussion of this ironic self-distancing.

⁵⁶ Roman S. Struc suggests that although Lermontov and Gogol both employed irony in some of their works, Pushkin’s use of irony comes closest to Schlegel’s definition of romantic irony: “[Pushkin] uses it sparingly and delicately, always balanced by high seriousness. Lermontov could be said to employ irony in its tragic sense. [...]. Gogol’s irony does not hover, as Schlegel put it, over the antinomies of life and the world, but rather it exposes mercilessly the abyss behind appearances.” See “Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov: Ironic Modes in Russian Romanticism” in *Romantic Irony* 249.

⁵⁷ Hugh McLean defines the superfluous man as “a traditional designation for a series of characters in Russian literature who are perceived—or regard themselves—as being in a state of disharmony with the world around them, rejecting it or being rejected by it.” These characters—such as, for example, Chulkaturin, the hero of Turgenev’s 1850 novella *Diary of a Superfluous Man*, or the protagonist of Dostoevsky’s 1864 *Notes from the Underground*—are often “writers” in the sense that they record their disaffection with Russian society in diary form. The superfluous man in Russian literature may be a reflection of a socioeconomic situation in nineteenth-century Russia that allowed Russian gentry to live on the income from their lands without the obligation to serve the state: “living off the labor of others, they were social parasites...and this fact lay heavy on their consciences, producing another cliché character of Russian literature, the ‘repentant nobleman.’” See “Superfluous man” in Victor Terras, ed., *Handbook of Russian Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 454.

“the authorial ironist withdraws completely to create characters who ironize themselves” and create a kind of second order ironic reality based in an “overwrought subjectivity,”⁵⁸ is what Lilian R. Furst terms unstable irony, a direct heir to romantic irony, yet already looking forward to modernism and the literature of the absurd.⁵⁹ In this way, if we view Pushkin’s Author as a character, his ironizing and self-ironizing practices make him similar and parallel to Dostoevsky’s Underground Man. But if we view this Author as an authorial voice in his own right, a creator in relation to other characters, then he is a guide—a steadier, although still deliberately wobbly, precursor—to Dostoevsky’s neurotic diarist. The Underground Man adopts the Author’s self-reflective ironic attitude, but in the end turns it into an instrument of self-destruction and self-entrapment rather than freedom and creativity.

The question of whether *Onegin*’s Author is a character or an authorial voice or both has been of great interest to many critics and is most significant to this study. In what way is this Author a character and in what way is he not? Is he more of a hero in the novel than the eponymous Onegin? On one level, the novel can be viewed as Pushkin’s autobiography or the Author’s self-portrait, while on another it is a romantic poem whose hero is Onegin. To my mind, the novel represents a breakdown of the romantic form, in which vestiges of the romantic framework are preserved as well as deconstructed, resulting in a new generic form focused on authorship as its main subject.

To be sure, romanticism itself has encoded in it biographical modes of reading. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, romantic poetry in Russia introduced its readership to a new way of relating to the poet. Unlike the readers of the classical genres, the reader of the

⁵⁸ The phrase is Kierkegaard’s in his criticism of irony as an essentially negative reality, quoted in *Romantic Irony* 305.

⁵⁹ For a fascinating discussion of stable, romantic and unstable irony from a narratological perspective, see Lilian Furst’s “Romantic Irony and Narrative Stance” in *Romantic Irony* 293-309.

romantic period tended to view the life and personality of the romantic poet as an extension of his art. In his biography of Pushkin, Yuri Lotman writes about the readership of the 1820s and Pushkin's new responsibility to his reader:

The poet's art came to be seen as one big autobiographical novel, in which short and long poems formed chapters, while the biography served as the main plot. [...]. This romantic view of life...was pivotal for Pushkin. Based on it, he went further and created not just a wholly unique verbal art, but also a wholly unique art of living.⁶⁰

While the poet's life and art together formed an entity akin to an autobiographical text, the hero of a romantic poem was at once a character in a story and a projection of the authorial persona, thus combining two functions, fictional and autobiographical, in a single figure. Such was the poetry of Lord Byron, which had a strong influence on Pushkin, in particular on his long poem *Prisoner of the Caucasus*,⁶¹ referred to as "the first Russian romantic work of the lyric-narrative type, full of dissatisfaction with the existing order of life, imbued with passionate love of freedom, [which] opened a whole new period in Russian society's spiritual life."⁶² After 1821, when *Prisoner of the Caucasus* appeared, Pushkin was imitated and studied by his Russian contemporaries as an exemplary romantic. Over the course of the 1820s, however, a shift occurred in Pushkin's artistic vision that led him to separate the author from the hero, placing them side by side in the pages of *Eugene Onegin*. Pushkin's search for the author's new place in art vis-à-vis the hero, the reader and his own biography is the beginning of a long line of experiments in self-fashioning and self-figuration attempted by Russian authors in the century that followed.

⁶⁰ Yuri Lotman, *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin: Biografiia pisatel'ia* (Leningrad: Prosvetshenie, 1983) 54-55.

⁶¹ V. Zhirmunskii notes that Pushkin's Southern poems, which included *Prisoner* and were written in the period of 1820-1824, were "directly influenced" by Byron's Oriental tales (1813-1814). See *Bairon i Pushkin* (Leningrad: Academia, 1924) 23.

⁶² D. D. Blagoi, quoted in Maimin, E. A. *O russkom romantizme* 74.

Along with *Eugene Onegin*, another major nineteenth-century work set the tone and served as the backbone for the evolution of the figured author in Russian literature. *Onegin*, written over the course of seven years from 1823 to 1830, and Gogol's unfinished prose *poema* *Dead Souls*, the first volume of which was published in 1842, were extremely innovative in their time, and, importantly, remained unique within their respective *sui generis* categories, their forms unrepeatably in subsequent literary eras. Scholars consider both works to be transitional on the road from romantic to realist poetics, and it is precisely this ambiguous, transitional character that served as the opening and invitation for the genesis of the novelistic masterpieces of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Turgenev. Simon Franklin calls the two works (along with Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*) "one-off" experiments in genre and form," contrasting and linking them to the great tradition of the Russian realist novel that came to flourish in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶³ The abrupt, unresolved plot ending in the case of both *Onegin* and *Dead Souls*, Franklin argues, "focuses attention upon itself" in a deliberate play with convention and reader's expectation.⁶⁴ Because of this interest in form and device, in the processes of their own creation, rather than in the plot and its characters, Franklin sees both works as mere explorations in genre, experimental "novels of possibility" whose plots and characters are yet "shallow" and underdeveloped and whose endings "provide useful places from which to start" the creation of the fully integrated Russian novel.⁶⁵

In a similar vein, the unique forms of authorial self-figuration in *Onegin* and *Dead Souls* are directly related to the radical shifts the two works prompted in Russian literature. Whereas

⁶³ Simon Franklin, "Novels without End: Notes on 'Eugene Onegin' and 'Dead Souls'" *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (Apr., 1984) 372-383.

⁶⁴ Franklin 378.

⁶⁵ Franklin 382-382.

Franklin sees a “resolute concentration on the superficial” in both works’ focus on their own texture rather than on the story of the characters, however, I propose to view the works’ self-reflective play with illusion, effect and “pretense” as telling a story much more profound and meaningful than that of the psychologically flat Onegin or Chichikov—the story of a character much more complex and nuanced: the character of the Author. In many ways, this character as depicted in *Onegin* and *Dead Souls* can rival the most complex and contradictory creations of Dostoevsky, an author praised worldwide for his mastery of psychological portraiture.

In both *Onegin* and *Dead Souls*, the Author character competes with the hero for the reader’s attention in a way that challenges the reader’s ability to concentrate on a single storyline, hero and narrative plane. Each of the two works is narrated by a verbose, “chatty” character who identifies himself as the work’s author and whose self-description matches the known biography of its actual author. At multiple points throughout each work, this figured author interrupts the flow of the narrative to launch into lengthy digressions, in which he reminisces about his own past, comments on his creation of the work, polemicizes with the reader about possible interpretations of the work and its characters, and professes to share a close personal relationship with the hero he is depicting.

This self-conscious quasi-autobiographical narration synthesized and reinterpreted several traditions popular at the time of Pushkin’s and Gogol’s maturation as authors, including the metafictional narrative style of Laurence Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy*, the author-hero nexus of Byron’s narrative poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, where the hero is implied to be the mouthpiece and extension of the author, and the language and tone of romantic lyric poetry and sentimentalist prose, the predominant genres of early nineteenth-century Russian literature.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ On the influence of Sterne on Gogol, see F. D. Reeve’s “Through Hell on a Hobby-Horse: Notes on Gogol and Sterne,” *Symposium* (Syracuse, New York, 1959). On Pushkin and Byron, see in particular Leon Stilman,

However, in using and fusing these mostly imported literary devices, Pushkin's and Gogol's intent was the creation of something completely new and, more importantly, very much anchored in the issues and discourses of the Russia contemporary to them.

As I have noted, in contrast to later figured authors, Pushkin's and Gogol's authorial characters are a primarily verbal presence in their respective works. To be sure, Pushkin the character does physically materialize as Onegin's companion on the banks of the Neva, and Gogol's figured author does claim that he is afraid to speak too loudly lest he disturb his hero's sleep in the carriage. These episodes hint at the figured authors' physical presence in their heroes' lives, yet such presence is sparse in both works. Much more than in body, these figured authors are present in these works in language. This language, extending over large expanses of the text, points to and describes an *I* that in each case shares the personal and biographical features of either Pushkin or Gogol. But more importantly, language itself is the primary object of these chatty authors' attentions. Not only are they both aware of *the other's language*—the various registers, codes and clichés of language flooding the fictional world around them—and engaged in dizzying linguistic play, but they also use this variety and richness of language as the primary material for fashioning and reinventing themselves as heroic creators of a new kind of art and discourse. Indeed, they are compelled to interrupt the stories they are telling to serve as the reader's guides to their innovative creations. In explaining and illustrating their methods to the reader, these figured authors are in the process of creating their own selves, whether mischievous or somber, but in one way or another always responsive to the reader's perceived expectation or authority.

“Problemy literaturnykh zhanrov i traditsii v ‘Evgenii Onegine’ Pushkina” in *American Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavists* (Moscow: Mouton & Co., 1958).

The Author in *Eugene Onegin*

Insofar as *Eugene Onegin* is itself a work based on contradiction, the figure of the Author is central to its contradictory structure. The discourse generated by this character can be termed *unfinalizable* in the Bakhtinian sense, in that he constantly confers a multitude of judgments upon characters, his contemporary culture, other poets, but is never willing to proclaim any of them as his final word or let his reader settle upon them as such. If “Dostoevsky’s hero always seeks to destroy that framework of *other people’s* words about him that might finalize and deaden him,”⁶⁷ *Onegin’s* Author enters a similar relationship with his reader, constantly attempting, through his ironic attitude, to prevent the reader’s judgment from congealing and solidifying around his heroes and around the Author’s own statements. A number of critics have argued that an important change occurs in this character somewhere in the middle of the work. Irina Semenko, for instance, claims that the sixth chapter marks a shift in Russia’s cultural mood in the aftermath of the failed Decembrist revolt, a shift that accounts for the mature, more genuine and less bouncy Author who appears toward the end of the novel and whose voice stands closer to Pushkin’s own.⁶⁸ Yuri Lotman observes that the contradictions in Chapter One became part of Pushkin’s plan for the entire work, even though initially he may have planned to smooth them away.⁶⁹ Monika Greenleaf focuses on the ways in which the characters in the novel “act out the poet’s metapoetic maturation,” from young elegist Lensky to the ironic Onegin

⁶⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984) 59.

⁶⁸ I. M. Semenko, “O roli obraza avtora v ‘Evgenii Onegine,’” *Trudy Leningradskogo bibliotechnogo instituta* (Leningrad, 1957) 127-146.

⁶⁹ Yuri Lotman, “Khudozhestvennaia struktura ‘Evgeniia Onegina’” in *Pushkin: Stat’i i zametki* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2008) 294-295.

to the creative, wise and quietly nostalgic Tatiana.⁷⁰ Similarly, J. Thomas Shaw suggests that the Author's changeability can be explained by the three stages of poetic maturation he undergoes by the end of the novel – enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment (the first two of which Lensky and Onegin, respectively, are unable to outgrow in a timely fashion).⁷¹ Such critical readings, based on embracing the contradictions in *Eugene Onegin* and at the same time, on discerning a growing, self-altering structure of the work as it expanded over eight years of Pushkin's life, imply a kind of unevenness, growth and development to the novel as well as to the Author, its most vocal character.

The introductory chapter of *Eugene Onegin* raises questions about the distribution of the roles of hero and author in relation to the known forms of the romantic poem. At first glance, Pushkin seems most preoccupied with introducing Onegin to the reader, familiarizing us with his lifestyle, his attitudes and the circumstances of his life, establishing him as the hero. Scrupulously groomed and attired for each occasion, Onegin, a true dandy, structures his life around nightly outings to fashionable St. Petersburg balls and salons. Despite the descriptive focus on Onegin's dress and everyday routine, no access to his physical appearance is provided to the reader. All we are left with to hold on to Onegin is the costume and the pose: we know about his "wide-brimmed bolivar," "double lorgnette," and his "pedantic" attention to clothing. His "philosopher's study" is in actuality a well-stocked dressing room where he, "like the flighty Venus," puts on his costume before departing for the "masquerade." However, as the Author goes on describing Onegin's outfit, he comes up against an artistic obstacle: he is unable to

⁷⁰ Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994) 283. For the analysis of parallel creative evolutions of Pushkin and Tatiana, see William Mills Todd, *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986) 130-132.

⁷¹ J. Thomas Shaw, "The Problem of Unity of Author-Narrator's Stance in 'Eugene Onegin'" in *Pushkin's Poems and Other Studies* (Los Angeles: Charles Schlacks, Jr., 1964) 25-47.

render Onegin's costume for the sheer lack of Russian words fit to refer to its elements, all of which can only be described in foreign terms: "But *pantaloons, frock coat, vest*/ None of these words exist in Russian" (Но *панталоны, фрак, жилет*, / *Всех этих слов на русском нет*).⁷² The Author goes on playfully to confess to the reader that his vocabulary is "motley" with foreignisms, despite his attempts to consult a dictionary. In this instance, the Author's failure to describe Onegin's costume suddenly provides the reader with a glimpse of the Author's own identity—his playful attention to language and his ironic attitude to himself. The hero's external appearance thus unexpectedly cracks to reveal the author's linguistic musings. Moreover, in this passage, both the Russian language and the hero Onegin are presented as lacking in substance, this lack disguised by either foreign borrowings or the posture of a disenchanted young "philosopher."

As the Author directs the reader back to Onegin, inviting us to follow his hero to a ball, a more pronounced substitution of the author's portrait for that of the hero occurs. Rushing after Onegin, who seems to have departed for the ball while the Author was distracted by the contemplation of his Russian vocabulary, the Author lets the reader follow Onegin as he enters the ballroom. As soon as Onegin's entrance is established and the ballroom setting is described, the Author suddenly veers away from the ball scene and launches into a lyrical reminiscence of his younger days. This prolonged digression, famously culminating in a dithyrambic tribute to women's feet, is another window into the Author's personal world, as well as into his mastery of various linguistic and poetic registers.

⁷² The graphic emphasis on foreign words is Pushkin's own, see 1/XXVI/7-8 in A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, ed. B. Tomashevskii et al., 10 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977-1979), 5:18. (All quotations from *Eugene Onegin* and other texts by Pushkin are from this edition, unless otherwise noted. All further references to this edition will be given in the text, with the first number indicating the volume and the second, the page).

The life of love and the life of poetry appear here in one of their many juxtapositions throughout the novel: “I write this because/ I have not sinned in a long time” (Я это потому пишу, / Что уж давно я не грешу), claims the Author, and indeed in the space of *Onegin* love and poetry are not to be combined in the same time frame (5:19). True poetic language is borne only of temporal removal from the love experience. Monika Greenleaf refers to this as the elegiac language, or the language of loss, claiming that in *Eugene Onegin* the elegiac mood is closely related to the ironic one. In this digression, for instance, the Author mourns the loss of his youth and of his many beloveds whose feet he admired. At the same time, the elegiac mood is undermined by the clash of the elevated lyrical language, including many archaisms, which characterized high poetic style in the eighteenth century, with the stylistically “base” choice of *nozki* (feet) as the addressee of this lyrical outpouring. Thus, for example, next to the lines “to lie down adoringly at her feet” (с любовью лечь к ее ногам) and “to touch the lovely feet with my lips” (коснуться милых ног устами)—where the elevated *usta* (lips) and the mundane *nogi* (feet) are already combined to great parodic effect—in stanza XXXIII we find the highly periphrastic archaic cluster, in which the choice of the words *lanity*, *persi*, *usta* (archaic: cheeks, bosom, lips) to represent the beloveds’ body parts is made comical by the directly preceding *nogi* (feet):

Нет, никогда [...]
 Я не желал с таким мученьем
 Лобзать уста молодых Армид,
 Иль розы пламенных ланит,
 Иль перси, полные томленьем. (5:21)

No, never [...]
 Have I wished, with such torment,
 To kiss the lips of young Armides,
 Or the roses of their fiery cheeks,
 Or the bosom, full of yearning.

In this digression, “permeated by longing, passion and emotional intensity which are completely absent from Onegin’s world,” the Author not only shares his intimate feelings with the reader but also invites him to laugh at the dead and rigid forms other poets have continued to recycle since the previous century to express their mourning for lost love.⁷³ The distancing, in relation to the Author thus occurs on two fronts: Onegin’s world of boredom, surface and routine as well as the hackneyed poetic diction of Pushkin’s time are both presented as counterpoints to the Author’s preoccupations. The Author’s self-portrait that emerges in the digression is one of a) a person who has suffered yet overcome loss and adopted a humorous self-awareness toward it; and b) a poet who ingeniously commands a variety of poetic and verbal strata, recombining them into a creative network rich with new meaning. Having left Onegin at the moment of the latter’s arrival at the ball, the Author has called the reader away to witness his poetic reminiscences, only to recall Onegin as he returns from the ball: “And what of my Onegin? Half asleep/ He is returning to his bed from the ball” (Что ж мой Онегин? Полусонный/ В постелю с бала еден он, 5:22). The description of Onegin’s lifestyle continues from here.

Onegin’s arrival and subsequent departure from the ball thus frame a scene that has been taken away from the reader: the Author does not allow us to see what happens at the ball, despite having rushed us in a hurry to follow Onegin there. The events of Onegin’s life and the Author’s digressions in this section appear to unfold simultaneously: while the Author reminisces, Onegin’s evening at the ball flies by, both events concluding at approximately the same moment. The Author thus chooses for the reader which of the two paths to pursue, Onegin’s or his own, and decides in favor of himself. The frame, then, has been fitted to an unexpected canvas: the ball arrival and departure scenes close around the Author’s self-presentation as a likeable,

⁷³ Sona Hoisington, “*Eugene Onegin*: An Inverted Byronic Poem,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1975) 136-152 (146).

humorous character and a gifted poet. Onegin, meanwhile, is temporarily erased from the reader's and the Author's memory ("And what of my Onegin?"). Such a brazen displacement of Onegin by the Author's verbal self-portraits suggests Pushkin's interest in playing with the concept of *hero* as it came to be known in romantic literature. In the First Chapter, Onegin is shown to be a faceless and featureless individual, characterized by his routine and his interest in costume and masquerade. In the crevices of his portrayal, Pushkin plants careful seeds of another image—one that increasingly dominates the narrative, while searching for openings to enter into its world.

The Author's image thus exists in the narrative in competition with the image of the work's supposed hero, Onegin. The reader's expectation of encountering on the pages of *Onegin* a central hero typical of the genre of the romantic poem is thwarted to be replaced by a new structure: the hero is characterized in terms of accumulated surface (clothing and routine), while his "friend" the Author paints his own interiority for a striking contrast. Prior to his work on the first chapter of *Onegin*, Pushkin began to discover the limitations of the genre of the romantic poem, specifically, its vision of the romantic hero as the embodiment of the poet's private feelings and thoughts. In 1822, Pushkin writes to V. P. Gorchakov about his recently completed poem *Prisoner of the Caucasus*: "The character of the Prisoner is unsuccessful; this proves that I am not fit to be a hero of a romantic poem" (10:41-42). The hero's character is written unevenly, the letter explains, because Pushkin himself has difficulty understanding the Prisoner's actions: "Why did my Prisoner not drown himself, after the Circassian woman did so? As a person, he acted reasonably, but the hero of a poem is not required to be reasonable" (Ibid.). The distinction between *person* and *hero* here is a telling one for Pushkin's upcoming work: Pushkin the person is not the same as Prisoner the hero, nor does one understand the other, but the established

romantic form suggests that the hero reflects the author, and here emerges Pushkin's lack of "fit," his outgrowing of romanticism. In *Onegin*, then, the internal dissonance of the Prisoner as character is resolved by separating out and contrasting the two elements Pushkin deemed irreconcilable in the single figure of the hero: the mature, "reasonable" author and someone who on the surface resembles a disenchanting romantic (we may recall Onegin's interest in "masquerade" and his boudoir, disguised as a "philosopher's study"). We will see that in the course of *Onegin*, the Author progressively matures, while Onegin, from an initial position of world-weariness and affected maturity, regresses to a stage of infantile impulsiveness, becoming that reckless prisoner of passion with whom Pushkin can no longer identify. These two trajectories (maturation and regression) intersect briefly but eloquently in that strange episode when the Author suddenly materializes in the narrative as Onegin's friend.

This scene is the most striking instance of Pushkin's insistence that the *I* of his author-narrator is distinct from his hero Onegin. No longer interested in inscribing himself into the fictional outline of his hero, Pushkin underscores his departure from the Byronic model of author-hero identification, explicitly stating in the opening chapter of his novel that they are distinct individuals: "I am always glad to note the difference/ between Onegin and myself" (Всегда я рад заметить разность / Между Онегиным и мной, 5:29). The famous sketch sent by Pushkin in 1824 to his brother in St. Petersburg with instructions that it be made to serve as the prototype for an illustration to Chapter One of *Onegin* provides a graphic example of this point. In the accompanying note, Pushkin insisted on the importance of this visual arrangement being reproduced on the pages of his novel: the Author and his friend Onegin are standing next to each other on the embankment of the Neva with the Peter-and-Paul Fortress in the background. In the sketch, the Author is seen from the back facing the river, his hair long and

curly, whereas Onegin stands in profile facing the Author and *opershisia na granit*⁷⁴ (the phrase was underlined by Pushkin in his description of the sketch and also appears in the text of *Onegin*), “leaning on the granite” of the railing in unconscious imitation of the traditional romantic poet-hero.⁷⁵

This representation of Onegin as a figure unknowingly frozen in a romantic cliché ironically clothes in a poetic guise someone who has no gift for poetry: the lovelorn Onegin in Chapter Eight is the Author’s “dim-witted apprentice” (мой бестолковый ученик) in matters of poetry writing who, as we know from the first chapter, “could not tell a trochee from an iamb” despite the Author’s persistent instruction (не мог он ямба от хорея, / как мы ни бились, отличить, 5:11). Such an ironic game points to a hero who pretends to be a poet, in contrast to a poet who is unwilling to be a hero of a romantic poem, but at the same time works hard at carving out a special place for himself *next to* the hero, thus stressing to the reader what he, the Author, is not. Just as Tatiana, his “faithful ideal,” is described in a long series of negations and have-nots when compared to the uninspiring and fickle society coquettes, so Pushkin’s Author emerges briefly strolling next to Onegin to point out Onegin’s romantic pose as something the Author wants to alienate and purge from his own self-portrait.

⁷⁴ Pushkin’s footnote cites the final stanza from Mikhail Muraviev’s poem *Bogine Nevy* (“To the Neva Goddess,” 1794) as the original source of this quotation. (Nabokov terms the quotation an “allusion to a stilted mediocrity.” See A. S. Pushkin, trans. Vladimir Nabokov, *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse: Commentary*, Volume Two (New York: Random House, 1964) 176).

⁷⁵ In 1829, an illustration of this scene by the artist Alexander Notbek appeared in the January edition of the journal *Nevskii Almanakh*. In his engraving, Notbek disregarded (perhaps unknowingly) Pushkin’s instructions for the illustration: in Notbek’s version, a figure recognizable as Pushkin is standing with his back to the river and the Peter-and-Paul Fortress, facing the reader. Pushkin commented on Notbek’s illustration with an epigram, recording his displeasure with the fact that in the image, “With bottom on the granite propped/Aleksandr Sergeich Pushkin himself/Stands next to Monsieur Onegin” (Опершись жопой на гранит/ Сам Александр Сергееч Пушкин/ С мосье Онегиным стоит). I believe that the epigram confirms Pushkin’s original intent to leave the Author an ambiguous figure, not immediately identifiable with himself, and that by turning this figure around to display Pushkin’s face, Notbek has violated the author’s design. Nabokov corroborates this intent to leave the Author/Pushkin relationship ambiguous when he suggests that in Pushkin’s initial sketch of the scene, “Pushkin gave himself long dark hair, which immediately makes us think about Lenski, whose only physical characteristics are the epithet ‘handsome’ and those curls.” (See *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse: Commentary*, 2:178).

The Author's ironic stance in relation to his hero Onegin can be contrasted to his emotional investment in and affection for the heroine, Tatiana. As we have seen, the question of whether *Onegin* can be considered a romantic poem is a nuanced one, since many of the traditionally romantic tropes and themes, such as the poet's emotional identification with his hero, are distanced and undercut by Pushkin. Throughout the text Pushkin relies heavily on what Viktor Zhirmunsky terms the "morphological signs" of the romantic mode of narration (such as the interrupting questions, addresses to the hero, exclamations and lyrical repetitions, all demonstrating the poet's personal interest in the hero), but does so in a complex and stratified way.⁷⁶ The function of these narrative devices in relation to Onegin, as well as to his friend Lensky, differs from the way they are applied to the characterization of Tatiana.⁷⁷ Although in the early chapters Pushkin gently mocks Tatiana's naïve identification with the heroines of sentimental novels, the reader has little doubt in the Author's genuine sympathy for Tatiana's heartache as it is evidenced in the following forewarning in Chapter Three:

Татьяна, милая Татьяна!
 С тобой теперь я слезы лью;
 Ты в руки модного тирана
 Уж отдала судьбу свою.
 Погибнешь, милая... (5:55)

Tatiana, darling Tatiana!
 Together with you I now shed tears;
 To the hands of a fashionable tyrant
 You have already given your fate.
 You'll perish, my darling...

Here, the Author's identification with the heroine and his agitation in the face of her future suffering are completely in line with the traditional romantic expression of kinship between an

⁷⁶ Viktor Zhirmunskii, *Bairon i Pushkin (iz istorii romanticheskoi poemy)* (Leningrad: 1924) 78-79.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of this difference, see also Sona Hoisington, "Eugene Onegin: An Inverted Byronic Poem," 143-145.

author and his characters. In relation to the character Onegin, however, the same romantic tropes function to imply distance and disparity between the narrator and the hero: thus, for example, in his farewell stanza in Chapter Eight, the Author addresses Onegin as “my strange companion” (мой спутник странный), underscoring Onegin’s otherness in relation to himself and their chance, unfounded proximity in the space of the novel. Throughout the text, the Author hints at Onegin’s status as forgettable and disposable: despite introducing him in the opening stanzas as “the hero of our novel” (герой нашего романа), the Author is often conscious of his reluctance to focus on Onegin. As we have seen, in the opening chapter, the extended digression on women’s feet ends with the Author reminding himself to return to his hero’s plot, “And what of my Onegin?” In the closing of Chapter Seven, he similarly applies special effort to remain interested in Onegin, clearly preferring to stay with Tatiana:

Но здесь с победою поздравим
 Татьяну милую мою
 И в сторону свой путь направим,
 Чтоб не забыть, о ком пою...
 Да кстати, здесь о том два слова:
Пою приятеля младого
И множество его причуд.
Благослови мой долгий труд,
О ты, эпическая муза!
И, верный посох мне вручив,
Не дай блуждать мне вкось и вкрив.
 Довольно. С плеч долой обуза!
 Я классицизму отдал честь:
 Хотя поздно, а вступление есть (5:142).

But here we will congratulate
 My darling Tatiana on her victory
 And direct our way off to the side,
 Not to forget of whom I sing...
 And by the way, two words about that:
I sing an ode to my young friend
And to his many quirks.
Give blessing to my lengthy labor,
Oh you, the epic muse!

*And, having handed me my trusty staff,
Don't let me wander amiss and askew.
Enough. Off with this burden!
I have paid my respects to classicism:
Even if late, I have a prologue.*

Once again, Onegin is close to being forgotten as the novel's hero at this point: in relation to the narrative, he is now merely tangential (в стороне). Moreover, the ensuing delayed "introduction"/invocation is ironically pointed both at the classical tradition of the epic poem (and its stock opening with the word *poiu* followed by an indication of the author's subject) and Onegin's paradoxical status as a hero who is too dull to keep even his creator's attention.⁷⁸ Both the traditional poetic tropes and the requirement to show interest in Onegin are a burden (обуза) with which the Author hastens to dispense in "a few words" (два слова) before the end of the chapter.

With regard to the genre of the romantic poem, then, the Author is careful to separate himself from the hero in order to undo the traditional association between the two. For this, he uses devices characteristic of romantic poetry with an ironic, distancing twist. The Author implies that his hero is forgettable, uninteresting and is only formally the focus of his novel. The Author does, however, rely on romantic tropes in a more straightforward manner when addressing Tatiana's plot, showing his lyrical identification with her more than with any other character in the novel. In the digressions, which interrupt Onegin's plot, the Author devotes considerable care to painting his own portrait and offering it to the reader, as in Chapter One, instead of Onegin's. In the hero Onegin, the romantic tradition is parodied and developed toward an interest in a new kind of character. This new type of character can be seen alternately in the representation of Tatiana and of the Author himself. As William Mills Todd notes, the

⁷⁸ See D. Blagoi's note on the epic poem tradition in "Primechaniia k romanu v stikhakh *Evgenii Onegin*" in Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, ed. D. D. Blagoi et al., 10 vols, 4:450.

affinity between these two characters lies in the story of their emotional maturation over the course of the novel, as well as in their status as creators able to fuse disparate cultural material turning it into an original artistic work. He writes, “The versatility with which both Pushkin and his ‘ideal,’ Tatiana, are both able to select, discard, and order the materials of their culture draws them together. [...] Tatiana, like the author-narrator, can both participate in her creation and critically distance herself from it, calling attention to its artificiality.”⁷⁹ Also, unlike Onegin and the young unimaginative poet Lensky, the two “evolved” characters, the Author and Tatiana, are novel and radical in their transgressive behaviors. Both dare to overcome the conventions that limit their self-expression, whether social, poetic or linguistic. For Tatiana it is the freedom to “cross gender borders” by usurping in her love letter the elegiac voice and the social role traditionally assigned to men. As Greenleaf shows, Tatiana’s originality lies “in the act of linguistic appropriation, her assumption in place of the customary feminine pronouns ‘she’ and ‘you’ of the subject’s grammatical position: ‘I.’ [In Tatiana], Pushkin has found a new representation, a new speaker, a new occasion for the old elegiac language and insights.”⁸⁰ Like Tatiana, Pushkin’s narrator inserts his “I” into an unlikely position both next to (literally, in the Neva embankment scene) *and* (figuratively/structurally) in counterpoint to the “he” of the hero. By demoting Onegin to the status of merely a “strange companion” to the lyrical “I” of the Author, Pushkin exposes a slowly widening rift between his creation and the romantic canon, between the new type of hero (the Author, Tatiana) and the type no longer relevant to Pushkin (Onegin).

⁷⁹ William Mills Todd, *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986) 130.

⁸⁰ Greenleaf 260.

My interest in the character I call the “Author” lies both in the function this character performs in the narrative and in his presentation, i.e. in the question of *why* the reader is able to construct this character as a figure for Pushkin. To begin addressing the questions raised by his function and presentation, we first have to look at an important structural element of *Eugene Onegin*, that is, the relationship between its lyrical digressions and the “story” of the characters.⁸¹ The exposition of the Author as a character occurs mainly in the space of his digressions, whereas the other characters reside in the “story.” The questions posed by critics writing about *Eugene Onegin* concern the treatment of these two elements either as a single structure in which the two are interlocked and dependent on each other *or* as two parallel realities, each of which can be treated as an isolated entity. While some, like Vladimir Nabokov, favor the “parallel realities” model and argue that the digressions tell a story that is separate from the characters’ plot, others, like Jan Meijer, offer a more organic reading suggesting that the digressions grow out of the story, resulting in a new form that reflects the transitional character of the novel. Meijer shows that, in the course of its writing, *Onegin* gradually developed into a “confrontation with romanticism,” resulting in an unrepeatable artistic form capturing the process of turning away from romanticism but not yet fully approaching realism. Meijer identifies one of the main functions of the digressions as pointing out “the problematic character of the romantic stock responses and of the romantic canon,” each digression growing out of and determined by its context in the plot.⁸² I agree that the work exists precisely *in relation* to romanticism, neither fully inside nor outside of it, by means of the interactions of the digressions with the characters’

⁸¹ I use here Jan Meijer’s terminology: the “story” of the characters and author’s “digressions.” Like Meijer, Greenleaf identifies in the common critical readings of *Onegin* the tendency to split the text into “a mimetic ‘story’” and “authorial ‘digressions.’” Both Meijer and Greenleaf proceed to show the actual indivisible unity of the two. See Greenleaf 17. See Jan Meijer, “The Digressions in ‘Evgenii Onegin,’” *Dutch Contributions to the Sixth International Congress of Slavists*, ed. A. G. F. Van Holk (The Hague: Mouton, 1968) 122-152.

⁸² Meijer 130.

story. Additionally, however, in my view the digressions combine into a jagged, contradictory superstructure to create a multidimensional portrait of another character, the Author, who supersedes his heroes in complexity and “hovers” uncertainly between the positions of character and creator.⁸³ To Meijer’s argument, then, I would add that this new perspective on romanticism that develops in the novel is also a function of the Author’s shifting status in the work, and that both his distance from and occasional proximity to the characters (strolling next to Onegin, being in material possession of Tatiana’s letter and of Lensky’s poems) underscore the fact that *Onegin* is a work that circles around romanticism, occasionally stepping back inside its confines but more often casting at it an amused, parodying glance. As an outspoken creator, the Author is a romantic ironist par excellence; as a figure sharing physical space with characters and producing “evidence” (documents) of this proximity, he steps into the realm of the novel and looks toward realism.⁸⁴ Most credibly, though, the Author occupies that space between romanticism and the not yet emerged realism that is characterized by departure, detachment from and the growing distortion of the current poetic mode, that is, the space of parody and transition, “the long goodbye” to romanticism.⁸⁵

Because of the ambiguities inherent in the transition between poetic modes (such as romanticism and realism), isolating *Onegin*’s Author as a character is further fraught with complexity. It is problematic to refer to this persona as “Pushkin,” for Pushkin is rather

⁸³ Monika Greenleaf makes the Author’s “hovering” one of the key concepts in her study of *Onegin*, relating it to the tension between the elegiac and ironic discourses in the work. She argues convincingly that all three main characters in the story are each linked to a stage in the Author’s maturation, thus representing a sequence of his “selves”: elegiac Lensky, ironic Onegin and integrated Tatiana. Her argument thus perfectly locks together the story/digressions into a single harmonious structure. See Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion*, 237-287.

⁸⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin writes in “Epic and Novel” in relation to the Neva embankment scene: “To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one’s contemporaries is...to step out of the world of epic into the world of the novel.” See *The Dialogic Imagination*, Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981) 14.

⁸⁵ Meijer 152.

determined both to distance himself from the Author as another created character and to endow him with multiple important milestones of his own biography. Just how autobiographical *is* the Author? If all autobiographical accounts have to negotiate the separation and a degree of estrangement between present and past self, then who is the autobiographer in *Onegin* and who is the past self? In relation to Pushkin the poet, Author the character can be viewed as the autobiographical protagonist, the represented self. But the Author also, if we agree with Greenleaf, exists in the text in relation to his own past self, compositely represented by the three central characters Lensky, Onegin and Tatiana. Instead of the dual *author/protagonist* structure of the self in autobiography, *Onegin* seems to have an additional layer: a triad in which the Author is both a created self (in relation to Pushkin) and a self-creator (in relation to the characters).

One way to assess the distance Pushkin observes between himself and the Author is to address the body of footnotes appended to *Onegin*. These footnotes are provided in Pushkin's own authorial voice and add a further layer of complexity to the question of autobiography versus character creation with respect to the figure of the Author. They contain Pushkin's comments falling into several categories: 1) clarifying meanings of words and phrases in the text, including archaisms, foreignisms or unusual phrasing; 2) citing sources for quotations and episodes occurring in the main text; 3) responding to critics of Pushkin's work, including earlier editions of *Onegin*; 4) identifying geographical locations where different parts of *Onegin* were written and thus clarifying references to them in the text; 5) clarifying references to the St. Petersburg cultural milieu, with which Pushkin himself was intimately familiar (such as, for example, the restaurant *Talon's* which Pushkin was known to frequent); 6) clarifying references to the folk tradition and ritual (in particular, in the fortunetelling section in Chapter Five); 7) in

one case, citing an alternative ending to a chapter from an earlier edition of *Onegin*. The footnotes, thus, in addition to explaining the work to a reader removed in time or in cultural geography from the St. Petersburg of Pushkin's epoch, also document the story of the writing of *Onegin* and of the details of Pushkin's own life: his reading, his exile, his interest in language and folk culture, his views of the literary polemics of the time. The same biographical facts, however, recur in the main text in relation to the Author's "I": he hints at exile in the first chapter ("but the north is harmful for me" [но вреден север для меня]), struggles to adapt the Russian language to his project, shows interest in and preference for tradition and *starina* (the old-fashioned ways) and launches quips in the direction of his literary contemporaries.

Comparing the footnotes and the main text of the novel, we note the difference between the voices of Pushkin and the Author. At the most immediate level, it lies in the distinction between verse and prose: Pushkin speaks in prose, while the Author speaks in verse. Yet, as we have seen, the Author's verse is different from the poetry of the romantic and classical poets whom he is able to mock by reshuffling their idiom, surpassing it with his own unique language. Secondly, regarding the Author's quotation of a line from Dante—"abandon all hope" (оставь надежду навсегда)—a footnote in Chapter Three clarifies: "*Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate*."⁸⁶ Our humble author translated only the first half of the great verse."⁸⁷ In this footnote, Pushkin clearly distances the Author from himself, not only referring to him in the third person in combination with the possessive pronoun "our" (Pushkin's use of possessives in *Eugene Onegin* consistently indicates objects of his creation, as in "my Onegin," "my Tatiana,"

⁸⁶ Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.

⁸⁷ See 3/XXII and footnotes, Pushkin, *PSS*, 5:57, 5:169.

“my Lensky,” “my novel”), but also exposes the Author as a somewhat comical figure not fully in control of the knowledge he flaunts.⁸⁸

The number of footnotes appended to each chapter decreases as the novel progresses, with Chapter Eight bearing only one footnote, in contrast to Chapter One’s eleven.⁸⁹ To me this indicates a steadily declining need, on Pushkin’s part, both to explicate the immediate cultural and literary context of his time and to provide an additional stratum of irony to the work by teasing his critics in the footnotes. Responses to the critics peak in chapter five and do not recur thereafter. All of these considerations combined point to Pushkin’s changing attitude toward his work and also indicates his changing relationship to the Author, as well as to the reader. If in the footnotes to Chapter Three, he shows the Author to be a comical *other* in relation to himself, in Chapter Five when the Author brings up his “cousin Buianov” (мой брат двоюродный Буянов), Pushkin provides a footnote to decode this relation from a new angle. Quoting his uncle V.L. Pushkin’s poem “Dangerous neighbor” (Опасный сосед), of which Buianov is the title character, Pushkin hints himself to be Buianov’s “cousin,” since the latter is his uncle’s “offspring.”⁹⁰ The Author and Pushkin thus coincide in the role of Buyanov’s cousin through a complex interaction of footnotes and text and by way of a metaphor that equates literary and familial relations. By the logic of the footnotes, then, between chapters Three and Five there is a

⁸⁸ In this way, the Author is not unlike Onegin who, by his very lifestyle and attitude, quotes a number of literary sources of which he has only a superficial grasp, prompting Tatiana (and the Author) to wonder, “Is he not just a parody?” (Уж не пародия ли он?)

⁸⁹ The footnote count per chapter is as follows: 1:11, 2:5, 3:6, 4:4, 5:10, 6:4, 7:3, 8:1. Chapter five falls out of the overall pattern with an unusually high number of footnotes, and this can be explained by the fortunetelling episode, which occurs in this chapter and requires a set of explanations of folk rituals relevant only to this particular section of the narrative. In addition, chapter five has three footnotes commenting on critics’ responses to earlier chapters of *Onegin*. Chapter four has two footnotes in this category and chapter three has one. No other chapters (besides three, four and five) have footnotes addressing critics. It can be argued that by the time chapters one and two were published not enough critical response had accumulated to warrant Pushkin’s attention, and following the publication of chapter five he was no longer interested in mocking the critics on the pages of *Onegin*, as the overall mood from chapter six onward had turned to a more serious one, as numerous critics have attested.

⁹⁰ See 5/XXVI and footnotes, Pushkin, *PSS*, 5:97, 5:169.

shift wherein the Author moves from the plane of character closer to that of biographical author. A growing seriousness of tone following Chapter Five and a decrease in ironic and contextual footnote remarks from this point on appear to relate the increasingly somber, valedictory mood of the novel to the Author's changing status, as he becomes closer to Pushkin. The reader no longer needs to be informed, in contrast to the opening chapters, of the context surrounding the work and connecting it to Pushkin's biography—Pushkin has led him, via the footnotes, into this inner circle and has made the reader his “friend” (*priiatel'*), but having done so, he leaves the reader behind, just as he has done with another *priiatel'*, Onegin:

Кто б ни был ты, о мой читатель,
 Друг, недруг, я хочу с тобой
 Расстаться нынче как приятель.
 Прости (5:164).

Whoever you are, my reader,
 A friend, a foe, I want
 To part with you now as a friend.
 Farewell.

The transformation of the reader from *chitatel'* to *priiatel'* owes much to the footnotes, which have steadily guided the reader into Pushkin's, and Onegin's, cultural milieu. In the final chapters, when the Author grows close to coinciding with Pushkin the biographical author, the footnotes decline as the reader has already entered the world of the characters, and in the farewell stanzas this reader is placed in a frozen finalizing image next to the hero Onegin, immobilized and no longer relevant, while Pushkin moves on to new characters and the new, unknown and uninformed, reader.

Irina Semenko's reading of the author image in *Onegin* is relevant here. Semenko suggests that the function of the Author is split in the text into Author-Poet and Author-Character

with an important shift occurring in the final three chapters.⁹¹ Up to and including Chapter Five, Semenko says, the narrative is dominated by the Author-Character, a chatty and jocular figure, whom Pushkin needs to fulfill the role of objectifying and ironizing the poetic conventions of romanticism with its elevated elegiac tone. Through the use of the Author-Character and his ironic voice, Pushkin overcomes romantic convention. But this figure is a stylized character that is not to be identified with Pushkin. Chapter Six represents a pivotal point in the novel, when Pushkin discards the Author-Character and himself steps into the narrative as Author-Poet. The final chapters, from which the Author-Character is absent, are thus less ironic and more lyrical. Pushkin moves into a new phase of his life, when a new sadness begins to affect his writing. The tragic aftermath of the thwarted Decembrist rebellion, the loss of friends and the sense that his youth is forever gone suggest that the chatty and whimsical Author-Character is no longer appropriate in the final chapters of *Onegin*, which similarly unfold in the aftermath of a tragedy—Lensky's death. Thus, in her argument, Semenko associates Pushkin with the lyrical and serious tones in *Onegin* and his creation Author with the ironic, jocular ones.

Both in the footnotes and in the final chapters of *Eugene Onegin* we hear a new authorial voice in relation to the rest of the text: it is a voice of Pushkin which first stresses and then dispels the contrast between himself and the Author. The footnotes give us Pushkin's prose voice in contrast to the Author's verse; the final chapters of the novel give us the Author's serious mature voice, which begins to coincide with Pushkin's. But one can argue that the new, unrecognizable authorial voice, which gets added to the main narrative via footnotes and the farewell chapters' somber tone, provides the same effect of contrast that was already present even at the very beginning of Pushkin's work on *Eugene Onegin*. Just as the Author's ironic and playful tone in the first five chapters of the novel is given as a counterpoint to the stale elegiac

⁹¹ See Semenko, "O roli obraza avtora v 'Yevgenii Onegine.'"

language of Lensky and to the similarly stale mal-du-siècle rhetoric of Onegin, so does the “new” voice of Pushkin—the serious, unrecognizable, “prosaic” voice—serve as a meaningful figure of contrast in relation to the Author’s chatter. The same play on contrast accompanied the initial publication of the First Chapter of *Eugene Onegin* in 1824, when Pushkin’s poem of the same year, “Conversation between a bookseller and a poet” (Разговор книгопродавца с поэтом), appeared as the introduction to the chapter. The poem thus can be read as part of a single textual block together with the first chapter of the novel and sheds light on Pushkin’s early vision for his future novel.

Arranged in the form of a dialogue between an idealistic poet and a cynical bookseller, “Conversation” ends in a striking transformation in the poet’s voice: his final line is spoken in jarring prose. On the level of plot, the line communicates the poet’s final concession to the bookseller’s appeal to reconcile the conflict between “payment” and “inspiration” by selling the manuscript. To the bookseller’s reasoning that “inspiration is not for sale, but you can sell a manuscript,” the poet finally replies, “You are absolutely right. Here is my manuscript. Let us strike a deal,” (Вы совершенно правы. Вот вам моя рукопись. Условимся, 2:180). With regard to this shift to prose, Catharine Nepomnyashchy points out that, in the context of the “growing commercialism” of literature in the 1820s, Pushkin felt more comfortable connecting profit and prose rather than with “selling out” poetry.⁹² In addition to this commercially motivated aspect of the transition, however, the shift from poetry to prose indicates also

⁹² Catharine Nepomnyashchy, “The Telltale Black Baby, or Why Pushkin Began *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great* but Didn’t Finish It,” in *Under the Sky of My Africa’: Alexander Pushkin and Blackness*, eds. Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, Nicole Svobodny and Ludmilla A. Trigos (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2006) 150-171 (152). As Nepomnyashchy specifies in personal correspondence, “Pushkin saw a natural connection between profit and prose precisely because prose supposedly would appeal to a less educated reader farther from the inner circle of gentleman who were Pushkin’s original ‘readers.’” This interest in making his work accessible to a broader readership at the time when he was beginning his work on *Onegin* may serve as an additional rationale behind the high number of explanatory footnotes in the first five chapters of the novel in verse. We can say that in this way Pushkin was educating his more culturally and socially remote readers in the details of the novel’s setting and cultural context.

Pushkin's growing artistic preference for the "prosaic" rather than "poetic" word. The poet's changing of sides not only coincides with a shift to prose, but hinges on the final word, *uslovimsia*, which connotes a monetary bargain that is rooted in "the word" (*slovo*). Pushkin's choice of this final word puts into focus the personal and artistic conflicts he was facing at the time: the need for financial independence, as well as his search for artistic freedom in the realm of *the word*—that is, creating new linguistic forms to overcome both the automatism of the romantic idiom and the expressive limits of the Russian language itself.

It would be pertinent to say here a few words about Pushkin's own financial and personal circumstances contemporaneous with the writing of "Conversation between a bookseller and a poet." In 1824, Pushkin resigned and was subsequently dismissed from government service in Odessa where he reported to Count Vorontsov, the deputy authority for the region of Bessarabia. The resignation, Pushkin's subsequent dismissal from service and the official exile to his family estate in Mikhailovskoe marked a complex development in Pushkin's increasingly strained relationship with Vorontsov. Vorontsov's low opinion of Pushkin's service, poetic talent and personal character are expressed in several reports addressed by Vorontsov to Russia's Foreign Affairs Minister Karl Nesselrode (dated March 27-28, 1824 and May 2, 1824), as well as in his letters to P. Kiselev (dated March 6, 1824) and to N. Longinov (dated April 8 and April 29, 1824).⁹³ In these letters, Vorontsov repeatedly voices requests to "be rid of Pushkin" (избавить меня от Пушкина) and asks to transfer the latter to another service district.⁹⁴

Under Vorontsov's command, Pushkin increasingly experienced financial difficulty, which he was sometimes able to offset by the revenue earned from publishing his poetry in St.

⁹³ See text of the original report to Nesselrode (letter number 270), as well as footnotes quoting Vorontsov's other letters, in *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin: Dokumenty k biografii, 1799-1829*, ed. V. Stark (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo, 2007) 414-420.

⁹⁴ *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin: Dokumenty k biografii* 418.

Petersburg. One of Vorontsov's attempts to send Pushkin away was his May 1824 assignment to the "locust mission" in the Kherson province, which Pushkin found degrading and incompatible with his career as a poet. The assignment led directly to Pushkin writing his letter of resignation to the tsar on June 2, 1824. Effectively, however, he was fired from service by a royal decree of July 8, 1824 and exiled as a result of Vorontsov's efforts during the preceding months to get rid of him and to discredit his service.

The crisis of financial, personal and artistic freedom that developed out of his conflict with Vorontsov informs Pushkin's decision to resign, as well as the themes he chooses to explore in his poetic work of this period. In an unsent (draft) letter to A. I. Kaznacheev, his immediate supervisor and the head of Vorontsov's chancellery, Pushkin explains his resignation by his intention to pursue a literary career:

Puisque mes occupations littéraires peuvent me procurer plus d'argent il est tout naturel de leur sacrifier des occupations de mon service. [...] Je n'aspire qu'à l'indépendance — pardonnez-moi le mot en faveur de la chose — à force de courage et de persévérance je finirai par en jouir. J'ai déjà vaincu ma répugnance d'écrire et de vendre mes vers pour vivre — le plus grand pas est fait. Si je n'écris encore que sous l'influence capricieuse de l'inspiration, les vers une fois écrits je ne les regarde plus que comme une marchandise à tant la pièce (10 :72).

My literary pursuits can bring me more money, so it is only natural that I sacrifice my services to them. [...] I aspire only to independence—please excuse the word in favor of the thing itself. Through courage and perseverance I will achieve it. I have already overcome my repugnance at writing and selling my verse for a living—the biggest step is behind me. If I am still writing under the capricious influence of inspiration, then I regard the verses, once written, as nothing more than merchandise priced by unit.⁹⁵

Pushkin's desire for financial independence and the attendant crises of artistic consciousness, apparent in this letter, provide an important key to understanding his plan for *Eugene Onegin*.

The movement toward artistic freedom and authorial intrusion, manifest in his use of romantic

⁹⁵ Translation by Simona Schneider, see "Paper Pushkin," *Harper's Magazine*, September 2008, pp 26-28.

irony and the invention of an oscillating figure such as the Author in *Onegin*, coincides with the search for personal freedom⁹⁶ and his interest in being a professional paid author (Yuri Lotman attributes to Pushkin a decisive role in establishing authorship as a paid profession in Russia).⁹⁷ Both of these strivings can be said to coincide with a movement to prose, including the elements of the “prosaic” Pushkin introduced in *Onegin*.⁹⁸ On another level, however, prose, as we have seen in “Conversation,” is connected to the dangerous path of bargaining and monetary transactions, which can threaten poetic freedom. The compromise Pushkin outlines in his letter to Kaznacheev—between the poetic process as inspiration and the finished product as merchandise—is a result of a long internal struggle, but the division into process and product, muse and money, allows him to preserve both his personal dignity—not being “dependent on bad or good digestion of this or that boss”—and his poetic one.⁹⁹

Such a compromise between the personal and the artistic, the autobiographical and the invented allows Pushkin to “have it both ways,” i.e. to possess both kinds of freedom. Pushkin needed *Onegin*, both as a vehicle for exploring a new artistic form, the novel in verse, and to save him from embarrassing debt and financial hardship, as numerous letters to his brother,

⁹⁶ Pushkin’s resignation from service (together with the events leading up to it), resulted in his strictly supervised exile to Mikhailovskoe. Ironically, it was in his solitude in Mikhailovskoe that Pushkin for the first time obtained true independence and the conditions necessary for intensive creative work. See *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin: Dokumenty k biografii* 453.

⁹⁷ Lotman, *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin: Biografiia pisatelii* 75-77. Andre Meynieux argues the same in *Pouchkine, Homme de Lettres et la Litterature Professionnelle en Russie* (Imprimerie F. Paillart, 1966).

⁹⁸ These “prosaic” elements include: 1) the invention of the special “Onegin stanza,” structured to accommodate enjambments and approximate the flow of everyday speech; 2) the use of what Sergei Bocharov terms “the naked word,” i.e. straightforward, simple, unadorned nouns and adjectives that avoid any kind of verbal build-up or periphrasis; 3) the widespread use of folk idiom (*prostorechiia*); 4) colloquialisms, interjections and conversational intonation in the speech of the author-narrator; among other devices. See Bocharov, S. G., *Poetika Pushkina: Ocherki* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974) 33.

⁹⁹ “Je suis fatigué de dépendre de la digestion bonne ou mauvaise de tel et tel chef,” see letter to Kaznacheev. The reference here is to Vorontsov in particular.

editors and friends indicate. It is in the compromise between verse and prose, “the word and the thing itself,” as well as between personal and poetic freedom, that *Onegin* develops, and nowhere is this complex unity, struggle and liberation more apparent than in the novel’s, and the Author’s, attitude to language and the poetic word.

In his critical writings, Pushkin often pondered the development of Russian letters, and in a number of essays and critical fragments written concurrently with *Eugene Onegin* he addressed the problems he saw in the poetic forms and language of his time. The habit of “thinking in a foreign language” that characterized the upbringing of the Russian upper classes in Pushkin’s time resulted in a native literature that lacked “any metaphysical language”¹⁰⁰ and suffered from the “laziness” of writers who preferred to use “mechanical forms” of another language rather than invent new forms the Russian prose (“О причинах, замедливших ход нашей словесности,” 7:14). Russian literature, he claimed, was primitive and immature, because its language tended toward overwrought adornment imitated from the “affectations” (жеманство) of early French romantic poetry (“О поэзии классической и романтической,” 7:26). In contrast with such “monotonous works of art limited by conventional language,” he saw signs of mature literature in a willingness to draw on the popular idiom and its “strange, fresh” inventions (свежие вымыслы народные и странное просторечие).¹⁰¹ Turning away from the empty adornments of poetic form, Pushkin aimed to create literary language tending toward prose, simplicity, pure meaning, rooted in the language of the people.

¹⁰⁰ Irina Semenko explains that Pushkin’s oft-used phrase “metaphysical language” referred to “creating a language of new prose, capable of expressing thoughts and feelings of the modern man” (создание языка новой прозы, способной к выражению мыслей и чувств современного человека). See Pushkin, A. S., *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, Volume 9, Commentary to Letter 33 (“To P. A. Viazemsky”).

¹⁰¹ “V zreloi slovesnosti prikhodit vremia,” *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, 6:291.

Yuri Tynianov notes the effects of the “strange” and “fresh” word in the way Pushkin uses contrasting forms of language in *Eugene Onegin*. To break the habit, the automatism of current poetic language, Pushkin combines verse and the elements of prose letting them “distort” each other to make language “strange,” palpable, noticeable: “instead of masses of words, we now have a dynamic sign pointing to them,” the word shifts “beyond its normal boundary, becoming a word-gesture.”¹⁰² A meaningful synthesis arising out of strident contrast appears to be the principle of Pushkin’s experimentation with language. The voice of the Author, who is capable of representing the language of others, juxtaposing it with his own and thus creating a new, rich space of verbal friction, is the key element in this synthesizing vision of language. To Lensky’s ornate and hollow poetry, the Author provides a terse counterpoint in his own “prosaic” style:

Он мыслит: «Буду ей спаситель.
 Не потерплю, чтоб развратитель
 Огнем и вздохов и похвал
 Младое сердце искушал;
 Чтоб червь презренный, ядовитый
 Точил лилеи стебелек;
 Чтобы двухутренний цветок
 Увял еще полураскрытый».
 Все это значило, друзья:
 С приятелем стреляюсь я (5:110).

He thinks, “I will be her savior.
 I won’t tolerate that the seducer
 With the fire of his sighs and praises
 Tempt a young heart;
 That this despicable, poisonous worm
 Grind at the delicate stem of a lily;
 That the two-morning flower
 Wilt, still half-open.”
 All this meant, my friends, is:
 I challenge my friend to a duel.

¹⁰² Yuri Tynianov, “O kompozitsii ‘Evgeniia Onegina,’” *Poetika. Istoriiia literatury. Kino*. (Moscow: Nauka, 1977) 75.

The Author's translation of Lensky's verbose outpouring into a single pithy line of "prose" illustrates the kind of play between what Sergei Bocharov calls *svoi* and *chuzhoi* voices as viewed from the perspective of the Author (one's own and another's voice), one indicating the "prosaic," neutral perspective of the Author with his simple language, the other the "poetic," emotional voice of Lensky. The scene of Lensky's death provides a more eloquent example. Here, the description is first given in Lensky's exalted periphrastic style, and then in the more prosaic voice of the Author:

Младой певец
 Нашел безвременный конец!
 Дохнула буря, цвет прекрасный
 Увял на утренней заре,
 Потух огонь на алтаре!..
 Недвижим он лежал, и странен
 Был томный мир его чела.
 Под грудь он был навывлет ранен;
 Дымясь из раны кровь текла.
 [...]
 Теперь, как в доме опустелом,
 Все в нем и тихо и темно;
 Замолкло навсегда оно.
 Закрыты ставни, окна мелом
 Забелены. Хозяйки нет.
 А где, бог весть. Пропал и след. (5:115-116)

The young poet
 Found his untimely end!
 The storm has breathed, the wondrous blossom
 Has wilted at the dawn of morning,
 The fire at the altar has died!
 Unmoving he lay, and strange
 Was the languid stillness of his face.
 The bullet had gone through his chest;
 Steaming, blood poured out of the wound.
 [...]
 Now, as if in an empty house,
 All in him is dark and quiet;
 All is silent forever.
 The shutters are closed, the windows
 Painted over. The lady of the house is gone.

And where, God knows. All trace is vanished.

By embracing within his own “authorial” speech the subjective voice of the other, according to Bocharov, the Author is able to create a “fuller image” (объемный образ) of the scene, where the fullness and richness of representation is achieved precisely through contrast and synthesis of linguistic levels.¹⁰³ In relation to Lensky’s voice, then, the Author is prone to both 1) undercutting Lensky’s effusive language by translating this verbal “mass” into a single line, thus ironizing Lensky’s entrapment in the “word-costume” or “word-mask” (слово-одежда, слово-маска) with his own unadorned “naked word” (голое слово), to use Bocharov’s terminology;¹⁰⁴ and 2) including Lensky’s idiom into his own with the effect of creating an image of great artistic depth and intensity.

Following the description of Lensky’s death, the Author in the same chapter illustrates his turn to mature prose and outlook by similarly subverting the poetic voice of the younger Pushkin. Citing the opening words of Pushkin’s 1816 poem “Awakening” (Пробуждение), the Author “lowers” their tone by pointing out the automatism of their phrasing from the standpoint of the lucid, prose-oriented creator of *Eugene Onegin*:

Мечты, мечты! где ваша сладость?
 Где вечная к ней рифма, *младость*?
 [...]
 Весна моих промчалась дней
 [...]
 И ей ужель возврата нет?
 Ужель мне скоро тридцать лет? (5:120)

Dreams, dreams! Where is your sweetness?
 Where is its eternal rhyme, *youth*?
 [...]
 Gone is the spring of my days

¹⁰³ See Bocharov, *Poetika Pushkina* 93.

¹⁰⁴ Bocharov 33.

[...]
 And is it true it won't return?
 And is it true that soon I will turn thirty years old?

This ironic auto-citation comes at a turning point in Pushkin's novel, when tragedy, aging and a new lyrical mood become articulated in a profusion of farewells in the final chapters of *Onegin*: a farewell to youth, to the countryside, to the reader, heroes and finally to the novel itself. It is at this point that we are reminded of the autobiographical connection between Pushkin and the chatty Author: at once mourning and distancing their common poetic "awakening" of 1816, the Author goes on to launch into an extended autobiographical reminiscence in Chapter Eight in which Pushkin's own youth at the Lycée is unambiguously unveiled. In this closing autobiographical segment we approach again a self-portrait of the Author, and of Pushkin. The image of Pushkin that emerges in the text of *Eugene Onegin*, is primarily his "poetic face," where the autobiography is presented as filtered through the figure of the Muse, as Irina Semenko notes, and the Author is the closest personification of Pushkin the poet. The work is thus only a partial autobiography, focusing on the life of the poet and suppressing the story of personal tragedy and hardship.¹⁰⁵

In the final years of his life, Pushkin was still concerned with the movement in the direction of an unconstrained, prosaic and "living" literary language, bound to the folk tradition that had informed his work on *Eugene Onegin*. In the period between 1833 and 1837, he became involved in the project of translating and commenting on the recently discovered historical landmark of Russian medieval poetry, *Slovo o Polku Igoreve* (The Tale of Igor's Campaign). *Slovo* is an epic poem describing a disastrous campaign led by the Kievan Prince Igor against

¹⁰⁵ Pushkin's burning of the manuscript of Chapter Ten of *Onegin* attests to this: in this chapter, much weight was given to descriptions of Pushkin's personal friendship with the Decembrists and to recollections of their early meetings. Interestingly, the historical Pushkin (as opposed to the Author) appears in the third person in one scene depicting the meetings, where "Pushkin read his Christmas verses" (*Chital svoi noeli Pushkin*, 5: 184).

Polovtsian tribes in 1185; while its authenticity has been challenged, it purportedly dates from the twelfth century and was written by an anonymous author. When its last extant copy was discovered in Moscow in the final years of the eighteenth century, it was suspected of being an “Ossianic” forgery of a work of medieval art in part because of its colorful use of folk idiom at a time when no other extant works displayed such traits. (This copy, held in the library of Aleksei Musin-Pushkin, perished in the Moscow fire of 1812, thus making the task of proving the work’s authenticity even more difficult). Also, atypically for a heroic narrative of this kind, the presence of the author is very highly pronounced in the work: his lyrical digressions often overshadow the historical detail, which is scarce in comparison. Pushkin considered *Slovo* the towering monument in the otherwise “dark steppe” that was Russian literature prior to the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁶ In his unfinished 1836 commentary on *Slovo*, he praised its author for not imitating the language and poetry of the legendary medieval bard Boyan:

Поэт говорит сам от себя не по вымыслу Бояню, по былинам сего времени. Должно признаться, что это живое и быстрое описание стоит иносказаний соловья старого времени. (“Песнь о полку Игореве,” 7:349)

The poet speaks for himself, not following Boyan's fancy, but following the tales of his own time. I must admit that this lively and swift depiction is worth the verbal embellishments of the nightingale of the olden days.

Here Pushkin once again conjures up a romantic cliché—the image of the nightingale—to contrast it with the independent poetic voice of *Slovo*’s author. Just as Onegin’s leaning on the granite of the embankment wall is shown to be unoriginal in the presence of the Author, the independent poet, so Pushkin’s comparison of Boyan to a nightingale similarly exposes imitative poetic practices when placed next to the courage of innovation and originality. In *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin creates a figure of the Poet in which he both reflects and ostracizes his own

¹⁰⁶ “O russkoi slovesnosti,” *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, 6:367.

poetic biography. The figure of the Author creates, like the anonymous singer of *Slovo*, in the space of both the influence and the reaction to canonic voices. The Author both laments and ironically distances the poetry of the young Pushkin, whose autobiographical presence, like Boyan's, towers over the anonymous irreverent creator of the new word.

The Author in *Dead Souls*

In Nikolai Gogol's *poema Dead Souls*, the figure of the Author is similar to the Author of *Eugene Onegin*. Both figures are briefly embodied next to their heroes, Onegin and Chichikov, in their respective narratives. Both experiment with language. Both acquire tones of sadness and lamentation towards the end of the work. But in *Dead Souls*, the Author is a more disjointed, uneven presence. It is made up of two, very different, voices: one a humorous digressive and diffused narrative voice that is present mostly in the beginning of the work, the other a more serious, moralizing voice that becomes "louder" and more prevalent over the course of the work and dominates its final pages. In the analysis to follow, I will refer to the latter voice as the Author and the former one as the younger Author, and explore the strange rupture and self-conflict at the heart of Gogol's image of authorship in the *poema*.

Dead Souls is in many ways an heir to *Eugene Onegin*. According to Gogol himself, it was Pushkin who presented him with the idea for the plot of *Dead Souls*, urging him to apply his talent to writing "a large work" (большое сочинение) before his poor health interfered.¹⁰⁷ While some doubt the authenticity of this story, Gogol's references to Pushkin suggest that he saw Pushkin as a role model and mentor. "I undertook nothing without his advice," Gogol wrote in a letter to P. A. Pletnev after learning about Pushkin's death (11:88). *Dead Souls*, he claims,

¹⁰⁷ "Avtorskaia ispoved'," in Gogol, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 14 tomakh* (Moscow: Pushkinskii Dom, 1937-1952), 8:439. All quotations from Gogol's work are from this edition, unless otherwise noted. All further references to this edition will be given in the text, with the first number indicating the volume and the second, the page.

was a work “inspired by [Pushkin], his creation” (труд внушенный им, его создание, 11:88). “While I created,” he writes in another letter, “I saw only Pushkin in front of me” (Letter to M. P. Pogodin, 11:91). Gogol’s insistence that Pushkin influenced him here seems exaggerated, as if Gogol lacks confidence in his own independent ability to create. Whatever the actual extent of Pushkin’s impact on Gogol’s work, it is clear that Gogol invested his relationship with the famous poet with special meaning and labored to create a narrative of Pushkin’s personal participation in his art. The Ukrainian author and Gogol’s contemporary Panteleimon Kulish, for instance, notes a negative change in Gogol’s creative output following Pushkin’s death. This suggests that the association with Pushkin was paramount for Gogol’s confidence in his own writing:

We can suppose with some certainty that Pushkin helped Gogol in creating the plans, if not characters, for his comedies and narrative poems. And now recall how quickly there followed one after another such works as *Taras Bulba*, *The Inspector General* and the first part of *Dead Souls*, along with other less noteworthy works, and then look at what Gogol does after Pushkin’s death. He writes and then he burns his work. He has no mentor to encourage him, no equal genius to point him the direct way to poetic creation... During Pushkin’s lifetime Gogol was one kind of person, and after his death he became another.¹⁰⁸

Gogol’s strong need for artistic direction and his desire to cede much of the responsibility for the ideas behind his work to Pushkin explain the wavering self-confidence of his authorial figuration in *Dead Souls*. With respect to the creation of *Dead Souls*, Gogol’s famous account of Pushkin exclaiming, “God, how sad our Russia is!” (Боже, как грустна наша Россия) upon reading the opening chapters of the *poema* once again foregrounds Gogol’s interest in explicitly rooting his artistic works in Pushkin’s legacy. A certain seriousness of tone and sense of prophetic mission begin to characterize the narrator of *Dead Souls* in its final chapters. It is likely that these are related to some suggestion by Pushkin that Gogol abandon his merely humorous early stories in

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Gogol, *PSS*, 11:383 (see Notes to Letter 39).

pursuit of a more serious subject: “Pushkin made me take the matter seriously” (“Авторская исповедь,” 8:439). Gogol’s inclination to create in the relative safety and anonymity of Pushkin’s shadow and to abandon his own ideas in favor of those suggested by Pushkin explains the similarly intrusive yet exaggerated and unsteady quality of the Author in *Dead Souls* as compared to the Author in *Onegin*.

While Pushkin in the final decade of his life, including the years of his work on *Onegin*, grew preoccupied with questions of Russian culture and history as well as of new expressive methods for Russian literature and language, Gogol in his final decade explored similar issues from a new vantage point, stressing the redemptive and spiritual power of the poetic word. In particular, he did so in *Dead Souls*, which “allowed—and allows—its readers to raise the question of ‘Russia,’ ... far more than [does] *Eugene Onegin*.”¹⁰⁹ Many, however, see Gogol’s turn to seriousness as a betrayal of his comedic talent in favor of self-righteous sermonizing and a narcissistic fixation on his role as Russia’s prophet and savior.

Yet it is difficult to draw the line of demarcation charting this change in Gogol’s tone and poetics, perhaps because this line seems to fall somewhere inside the very text of *Dead Souls*, Part One. The First Part of the *poema* seems to bridge these two attitudes, as its tone, as well as the tone of its Author, shifts dramatically in the direction of Gogol’s spiritual and religious concerns and away from mere playful caricature. If Pushkin’s Author in *Onegin* is transformed over the course of the novel from a tongue-in-cheek presence into a serious lyrical voice reflecting on his own past and the loss of close friends and loved ones, the transformation of Gogol’s Author in *Dead Souls* along a similar arc is not nearly as organic, but rather jarring. Where the transformation of Pushkin’s Author conveys maturation, in Gogol’s case the change

¹⁰⁹ Todd, *Fiction and Society* 166.

suggests a complete reincarnation – a change of role and perspective from a comic impersonal observer of surface and texture to a tragic moralist and prophet who aims to expose the decaying soul of his hero, and of his reader. The contrast between the humorous down-to-earth voice that narrates the beginning of *Dead Souls* and the almost Godlike, elevated and prophetic tenor of the authorial voice dominating its final chapters is striking, leading some critics to suggest that *Dead Souls* relies on a multi-narrator structure, wherein several distinct narrative voices and perspectives are represented and the authorial digressions have several different functions.¹¹⁰

Gogol's earlier work shows a hint of the tonal shifting that would become so pronounced in *Dead Souls*. For instance, in the 1835 novella "Notes of a Madman" (Записки сумасшедшего) or the short story "The Sorochintsy Fair" (Сорочинская ярмарка), first published in 1832 and revised in 1836, the closing paragraph is lyrical and reflective, contrasting with the humorous and whimsical tone of the preceding narrative. In the 1835 "Old-world Landowners" (Старосветские помещики) and "The Quarrel of Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich" (Повесть о том, как поссорился Иван Иванович с Иваном Никифоровичем), a similar momentary shift of tone is embodied in the figure of the poet who makes an unexpected, fleeting appearance in the story. But in contrast to the Author in *Dead Souls*, this earlier author image is "the image of a traveler who visits the scene, but who belongs to a different world, far distant from the world of his characters...from which he is free to withdraw."¹¹¹ In the earlier stories, the sad, lyrical authorial voice appears for a single fleeting moment in the narrative and is associated with a seemingly random, transitory presence. In *Dead Souls*, however, this marginal presence gains force, spreads through the narrative and finally comes to occupy its central

¹¹⁰ See for example G. A. Gukovsky, *Realizm Gogolia* (Moscow: GIKhL, 1959), Donald Fanger, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol* (Harvard University Press, 1979), Leon Stilman, *Gogol* (Tenafly, NJ: Hermitage Publishers, 1990).

¹¹¹ Stilman 200.

perspective. The lyrical voice is thus transferred from a passing traveler in the earlier stories to the increasingly prevailing “I” of the Author in *Dead Souls*, from a small narrative opening onto “a different world” to a full expansion in the *poema*’s final chapters.

In his 1847 essay “Author’s Confession,” which he originally planned to entitle “The story of my authorship” (Повесть моего авторства), Gogol responds to criticism and accusations that followed the publication of his controversial book *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* by revealing the motives and moods that affected his shift from humorous to serious and didactic writing. In particular, about Part One of *Dead Souls* he writes that the work remains “a mystery, because it holds in itself a part of the transitional state of my own soul,” suggesting that the uneven tone and focus of the work are autobiographically motivated and reflect an important change in Gogol the author (“Авторская исповедь,” 8:446). Such a change is closely connected to the changing role of language and the word, which Gogol envisions in relation to his art, as well as the change in his vision of art itself.

It is a matter of widespread critical consensus that *Dead Souls* is a work that approaches seriously the question of language and the word. Victor Erlich, for instance, calls language “the only active protagonist, the only dynamic force” in the *poema*, where the main concern is the depiction of the Russian soul’s deadly inertia. A. de Jonge similarly suggests that the Russian language is “the only positive hero in the book,” while William Mills Todd complicates the question, wondering whether “language could be the villain of the piece as well as its hero.”¹¹² In my view, the complexity of Todd’s suggestion rests on the split discernible within the figure of Gogol’s anonymous Author who himself identifies with two modes of language and over the course of the narrative comes to prefer one sharply to the other. The younger, more naïve Author is interested in details and surface, letting his language grow into self-contained

¹¹² All quoted in Todd 169 and 251.

imaginary realities, as shown in the famous Homeric similes which recur in the text of the *poema*. The more serious Author, who appears as a much larger, meta-poetic presence toward the end of *Dead Souls*, is concerned more with the language of the interior – that is, with the power of the word to expose the hidden corrosion of the soul, thus pointing the way toward salvation.

This latter function of the word, as Gogol envisions it, represents the more serious view of authorship which he adopted around the year 1841 and which also informs the statements made in such works as “The Portrait” (the revised 1842 version of the story), the dramatized epilogue to his play *The Inspector General*, entitled “After the Play” (Театральный разъезд), published in 1842, *Selected Passages from Correspondence With Friends* (1847) and its follow-up “The Author’s Confession” (written in 1847 but never published during the author’s lifetime). The recurrent theme in these works is the author’s role in depicting a portrait of humanity, the kind of portrait in which a reader would recognize himself, subsequently undergoing a moral transformation. Gogol stresses that such portraits should be produced not by “copying” exterior reality, but by grasping an “inner meaning” (внутренняя мысль) and then “creating” a true portrait on the basis of that deeper understanding (3:136). In “The Portrait,” the mediocre artist Chartkov shows exactly the lack of such a penetrating vision when he tries to paint a portrait of a young girl:

Если бы он был знаток человеческой природы, он прочел бы на [ее личике] в одну минуту начало ребяческой страсти к балам, начало тоски и жалоб на длинноту времени до обеда и после обеда, желанья побегать в новом платье на гуляньях, тяжелые следы прилежания к разным искусствам, внушаемого матерью для возвышения души и чувств. Но художник видел в этом нежном личике одну только заманчивую для кисти почти фарфоровую прозрачность тела..., тонкую светлую шейку и аристократическую легкость стана. (3:102)

If he had known human nature, he would have read [on her face] in a single moment the beginnings of childlike passion for balls, the beginnings of sadness and complaints about the length of time before and after dinner, the desire to run around at gatherings in a new dress, the heavy marks of passionless diligence in studying the arts imposed by her mother for the elevation of the soul and feelings. But the artist saw in this tender face only the porcelain-like transparency of the body, so attractive to the brush, ... the delicate and light neck and the aristocratic lightness of posture.

All that is hidden in the soul of the girl remains invisible to Chartkov (but visible to Gogol's narrator), while all that is attractive as pure surface is what captures his artistic eye. This relationship between surface and interior is one of the most significant contrasts explored in *Dead Souls* and filtered through Gogol's interest in language as his primary artistic medium. In *Dead Souls*, there are words that capture and accumulate surface, that grab onto a single material detail—such as the shape of a face that reminds one of a pumpkin—and magnify it to such an extent that a new series of images spring into reality taking the reader on a detour into the Author's imagination. Such attention to surface is associated in the work with one of the modes of the authorial image: the younger Author whose “fresh” unspoiled attention to exterior is the subject of an extended lament in the opening of Chapter Six. Although the jaded voice of the older Author cries out for the loss of his youth and “freshness” at the end of this digression, traces of this younger curious and imaginative self are preserved in the rest of the narrative: we see them in the narrator's attention to the texture of words and in the otherworldly visions that come alive in his extended similes. This less serious Author exists in the narrative, making observations about surface and detail and launching into imaginative sub-narratives, alongside the more mature Author. As the narrative progresses, the mature Author grows more present and vocal about his mission to penetrate and expose the hidden core of humanity with the power of his word.

The two modes of authorship in the novel thus correspond to two modes of the word: the

playful self-generating word of the surface (which includes the long digressions and Homeric similes of the younger Author) and the serious incisive word of the interior. Neither of these incarnations of authorship or the word are “copying” in the sense of Chartkov's mere painting of surfaces: Gogol's surface-painting is a verbal play that creates a reality of the imagination using the initial surface detail as a mere jumping off point. Such, for instance, is the effect in one of the extended similes which first compares a face to a pumpkin and then paints a vision of a mythical Russia where pumpkins are made into balalaikas played by a young handsome fellow flirting with young maidens whose bosoms and necks are attractively white. Chartkov's unimaginative copying, then, is opposed to both the ethical (older) Author's penetrating word and the merely humorous younger Author's distant verbal realities. In *Dead Souls*, copying in the realm of language is severely ridiculed. The primary target is the ladies of the town of N, whose language is imitative and vague: it reuses stock phrases from novels translated from French or employs dizzying circumlocutions to evade any correspondence with solid reality. The ladies attempt to beautify this reality and the Russian language resorting to locutions verging on the absurd:

Никогда не говорили они: «я высморкалась», «я вспотела», «я плюнула», а говорили: «я облегчила себе нос», «я обошлась посредством платка». Ни в каком случае нельзя было сказать: «этот стакан или эта тарелка воняет». И даже нельзя было сказать ничего такого, что бы подало намек на это, а говорили вместо того: «этот стакан нехорошо ведет себя» или что-нибудь вроде этого. (6:160)

They never said, “I blew my nose,” “I’m sweaty,” “I spat,” but instead said, “I unburdened my nose,” or “I managed by means of a handkerchief.” It was absolutely prohibited to say, “This glass or this plate stinks.” And it was even prohibited to say anything that would so much as hint at that. Instead they said, “This glass is behaving badly,” or something of that sort.

The language of the ladies thus completely conceals anything related to the body and suppresses a large portion of sensory information, opting instead for a constricted and artificial system of

verbal deception. The disguising function of the ladies' language is one aspect of Russian society's dysfunctional relationship with the word. Chichikov, using his many linguistic guises as he travels across the Russian provinces, demonstrates the wide range of language masks a Russian uses to address representatives of various strata of society. By comparison, a Frenchman or a German is almost too naïve, for he will use "the same voice" and "the same language" whether addressing a wealthy landowner or a mere tobacco salesman (6:50). The attitude to language as a kind of garment that its owner can exchange at will each time projecting a new persona onto the world is exactly the kind of misalignment of core and exterior that the Author (and Gogol) represents in his hero Chichikov, aiming to expose a similar inner decay in his reader and in all of Russia's upper society. Chichikov is the exemplary deceiver, while his readers and the townspeople of N are the deceived, mindlessly accepting appearances and taking "a different frock" for "a different person" (человек в другом кафтане кажется им другим человеком, 6:73).

If the Author tries hard to expose the deceptive language of Chichikov and the townspeople, he is also determined to counteract such corrosive uses of language with the lyrical power of his own word. The power of his word in the *poema* is tied together with the images of journey and the road. As Donald Fanger notes, the Author in *Dead Souls* is "a creature of the road," his lyrical outpourings becoming the most intense during the scenes of travel, while during static episodes of town life this lyrical persona lies concealed.¹¹³ Movement and flight and the expansion outward are the characteristics the Author himself attributes to his future project: Gogol's planned continuation of *Dead Souls* in Parts Two and Three, which were not completed, was conceived as a map of Russia's road to redemption, whose vehicle was to be the

¹¹³ Donald Fanger, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979) 171.

powerful lyrical word of the true poet.¹¹⁴ But as the narrative begins to expand, becoming “more spacious” (шире и просторнее), it seems that the Author’s self also begins to expand, the drama of his authorship and his fear of his readers and his critics taking over the narrative in a verbal deluge of alternating self-justification and self-mockery (6:19). Are the final passages of *Dead Souls*, then, about “our sad Russia” and the wide spaces open for its salvation or about the Author’s inflated self that aches to control the reader and his interpretation of the work?

How does the Author, from a similarly diffused and peripheral presence in the opening of the work, become transformed into its central figure at the end? The distinction between center and periphery, as between surface and interior, is important for a novel as spatially motivated as *Dead Souls*. After all, the *poema* is about the provinces, but as the townspeople of N are exposed as shallow readers and inert souls, the narrator suddenly stresses that N is very close to both capitals, thus destroying the opposition he had so elaborately constructed. A similar structure can be observed on the level of narrative. The peripheral characters seem to carry a special significance for the novel, one related to the transformation of the Author’s self in the course of the narrative. In the opening passage of *Dead Souls*, the hero is introduced with minimal description, while a random passerby on the street is for a moment made the narrative center of focus: a “young man,” whose clothing is described with painstaking detail, for some reason captures the narrator’s attention. “The young man turned around, looked at the carriage, held on to his hat which the wind nearly blew off his head, and went on his way” (пошел своей дорогой, 6:8). This seemingly unmotivated narrative detail is part of a larger structure in *Dead Souls*, which often suddenly shifts the narrative focus away from the main plot to capture a moment in the life of a random neighbor or passerby. Such moments seem to speak to the

¹¹⁴ See Robert Maguire’s analysis of the redemptive power of word in *Dead Souls* in *Exploring Gogol* (Stanford University Press, 1994) 215-255.

younger surface-painting Author's interest in detail and momentary flights of imagination, but they also grant moments of unexpected lyricism and humanity to these smaller citizens of the plot.

Yet in the case of the "young man" in the opening passage, I believe a link can be extended to precisely the stripping away from the Author's self of its younger, more naïve version. An absent-minded idealistic youth is a recurrent "random" character in *Dead Souls*; it is the figure of a dreamer linked to the opening digression of Chapter Six. Here, the Author mourns the loss of his youth yet points out his blindness in youth to vulgar banality (пошлость), therefore his inability at that time to undertake his grand mission of moral guidance to the reader:

Прежде, давно, в лета моей юности, в лета невозвратно мелькнувшего моего детства, мне было весело подъезжать в первый раз к незнакомому месту: [...] ничто не ускользало от свежего, тонкого вниманья, и, высунувши нос из походной телеги своей, я глядел и на невиданный дотоле покррой какого-нибудь сюртука, и на деревянные ящики с гвоздями, с серой, [...], с изюмом и мылом, [...] глядел и на шедшего в стороне пехотного офицера, занесенного бог знает из какой губернии, на уездную скуку, и на купца, мелькнувшего в сибирке на беговых дрожках, и уносился мысленно за ними в бедную жизнь их. [...] Подъезжая к деревне какого-нибудь помещика, я любопытно смотрел на высокую, узкую деревянную колокольню или широкую, темную деревянную старую церковь. Заманчиво мелькали мне издали, сквозь древесную зелень, красная крыша и белые трубы помещичьего дома, и я ждал нетерпеливо, пока разойдутся на обе стороны заступавшие его сады и он покажется весь с своею, тогда, увы! вовсе не пошлою наружностью, и по нем старался я угадать, кто таков сам помещик [...] Теперь равнодушно подъезжаю ко всякой незнакомой деревне и равнодушно гляжу на ее пошлую наружность; моему охлажденному взору неприятно, мне не смешно, и то, что пробудило бы в прежние годы живое движенье в лице, смех и немолчные речи, то скользит теперь мимо, и безучастное молчание хранят мои недвижимые уста. О моя юность! о моя свежесть! (6:110-111, my emphasis)

Before, long ago, in the years of my youth, in the years of my childhood that flashed by irretrievably, I felt joyful when riding up to an unfamiliar place for the first time [...] nothing slipped past my fresh, keen attention, and, sticking my nose out from the carriage, I would stare intently at the never-yet-seen style of some frock coat, and at the wooden boxes with their nails, sulfur, raisins or soap, [...] at a passing infantry officer brought there from God knows what province, at

the provincial dullness, and at the merchant wearing a caftan who flashed by in his droshky, and in my thoughts I would follow them into their poor lives. [...] Riding up to the village of some landowner, I would look with curiosity at the tall and narrow wooden bell tower or the wide and dark old wooden church. The red roof and the white chimneys of the landowner's house would flicker tantalizingly in my sight from afar through the green of the trees, and I would wait impatiently for the gardens shielding the house to move aside and reveal it in all its—alas, then not at all vulgar—appearance, and by looking at it I would try to figure out what kind of man this landowner was [...] Now I approach any new village with indifference and I look indifferently at its vulgar appearance; my chilled gaze feels forlorn, I am not cheerful, and that which in former years would have awakened lively movement in my face, would have stirred up laughter and animated speech now glides past, and my immobile lips keep their apathetic silence. O my youth! O my freshness!

In this passage, the emphasis on the contrast between “then” and “now” distances the Author from his younger self. The set-up evoked here is similar to that of the opening of *Dead Souls*: a carriage arrives in an unknown town; the older Author follows random passersby with his gaze. The Author's lament for his youth in this passage, and for his former “keen attention” to details like the make of someone's frock, reminds us of the seemingly irrelevant “young man” of the opening pages, whose clothing is described in detail and who continues “on his way” as if to exit the narrative forever. Yet the Author's lingering attention to this young man may signal his reluctance to part with his youth and his open and receptive mind of that time. It is as if without this inquisitive and idealistic part of himself, the Author cannot sustain his poetic powers, turning into a mere cynical, indifferent observer of human vulgarity. When, in the final passages of the novel, the Author suddenly becomes central to the narrative, pulling the reader deep into his perspective of Russia as well as into his own spiritual angst as a misunderstood writer, it is as if the young man of the periphery has returned, grown and invaded the center in the same way as the provinces are collapsed into the capital on Gogol's map of Russia. The young man's inconspicuous “own way” (своя дорога) expands in the narrative's closing into the mythical

road toward Russia's salvation paved with Author's lyrical word.

The narrative thus pulls its edges toward the center, then expands this center into a vast vision of Russia and of Gogol's authorship. The Author's goal of exposing interior vices by painting an authentic portrait of his reader is paralleled by the narrative motion of turning the interior out, showing that a *kaftan* is pure surface and that a provincial town is a mere reverse side of the corrupt fabric of the capital. For Gogol, who described his method of character portrayal as collecting "all the rags down to the smallest pin" (все тряпье до малейшей булавки) to achieve for them "a full embodiment into flesh," the distinction between observing Russia up close with one's boots stuck in its mud and imagining it from "a beautiful faraway" had an autobiographical dimension ("Авторская исповедь," 8:453). Regarding writing *Dead Souls* while living abroad, Gogol explains in "Author's Confession" that leaving Russia was essential to his project of recreating it: the absent object comes alive in the artist's imagination, he claims, only when it is distanced and seen in its "full mass" (увидать всю массу, 8:449). The negotiation of these two modes of narrative focus, the vast removed vision and the close imaginative attention to surface, creates the very character of *Dead Souls*, where the inconspicuous younger Author, almost a passerby on the outskirts of the story, acquires a booming Godlike voice and an all-engulfing vision of Russia's road to absolution. Gogol's conception of authorship shuttles anxiously between these extremes of humility and self-inflation. The missionary overtones that increasingly dominate the Author's discourse, if initially suggested by an outside voice (Pushkin's), were perhaps overinterpreted and overdramatized by Gogol to the point of loss of center and focus, resulting in a destabilized authorial image in *Dead Souls*.

Toward the Figured Author: from language to figure

The fact that in *Dead Souls* and *Eugene Onegin* the author is allowed to step into the work speaks to these works' transitional character: both were in the process of creating themselves as part of a new unknown form. In "After the Play," Gogol created an authorial stand-in for himself in order to explain his vision for *The Inspector General*. Similarly, the authorial comments in *Dead Souls* are there in large part to control and shape the reader's reaction to the work. It was important for both Pushkin and Gogol to be inside the work and to be recognized as the author in order to explain the unusual, new nature of the work and its direction; hence the strong overlap in the biographies of the actual authors and their author-characters. Furthermore, it was important that their stand-ins be wordy and immersed in verbal material and artifacts of language in order to reflect both authors' views of themselves as masters and molders of language. Both authors, and Pushkin in particular, created at a time when the Russian language was undeveloped, barely expressive and barely aware of itself as a creative power. Both felt they had to look at the Russian language directly, recognize its flaws and take it into new creative territories.

Both Pushkin's and Gogol's author images can be viewed as split within themselves. Both undergo a change: from humor and irony to mature lyricism in Pushkin's case or didactic spirituality in Gogol's. In both *Onegin* and *Dead Souls*, the author image progresses toward the biographical author and gradually acquires a voice informed by personal adversity. While the starting authorial image is that of a humorous narrator relegated to the character plane, the later image is more somber and autobiographical. Thus, toward the end of *Dead Souls*, Gogol's Author practically becomes transformed into Gogol's autobiographical "I" of "Author's Confession" and "After the Play."

Pushkin's Author is a striking example of a complex consciousness that can hold within itself multiple voices and registers of language. This character can recreate these various voices and juxtapose them, producing a kind of puppet show of linguistic identities. Such complex verbal ventriloquism is a commentary on the chaos of images, words, styles that presents itself to the author as boundless and shapeless material for creation. In *Onegin*, the Author's ability to reproduce both his own and the other's language (*svoe i chuzhoe slovo*, to quote Bocharov) looks forward to Dostoevsky's creation of the dialogic consciousness for his characters. Although a distant embryo of Dostoevsky's much fuller polyphonic structure, *Eugene Onegin* has an added dimension of a character (as opposed to author, as in the case of Dostoevsky) being a master and creator of such a proto-polyphonic structure, of a character being conscious of the voices: Raskolnikov, for instance, does not have that extra layer of creativity that would enable him to notice, classify and recreate the voices. In other words, Raskolnikov is not an author, in the sense that Pushkin's Author is. In *Onegin's* Author, Pushkin created a complex polyphonic (or perhaps *polypoetic*) consciousness contained within a single character that demonstrated, through mastery of linguistic nuance, his awareness of language's otherness. Gogol's Author is also aware of the permutations of the word, yet somehow his consciousness fails to integrate these voices, instead noticing them, mimicking them, but ultimately shifting his attention away from language to moral and religious concerns. Such an intense awareness of language as a foreign or estranged phenomenon will not be reproduced in Russian literature until the time of Tolstoy, and later Nabokov. For the remaining figured authors of this study, with the exception of Nabokov, language is not such a chaotic and defamiliarizing experience. Other modes of self-consciousness haunted Chekhov, and Bulgakov almost a century later, when the central choices and questions of authorship would shift from "How to speak?" to "Must one speak?" or even to

“How to keep from speaking?” Nabokov, who explicitly looks back to Pushkin’s *Onegin* on the pages of *The Gift*, weaves these distinct threads together: to his experimentation with figured authors, both the alienation of language and the displaced status of the author were highly relevant.

Chapter Two. Chekhov: I, the Listener

Я — страница твоему перу.
 Всё приму. Я белая страница.
 Я — хранитель твоему добру:
 Возращу и возвращу сторицей.

Я — деревня, чёрная земля.
 Ты мне — луч и дождевая влага.
 Ты — Господь и Господин, а я —
 Чернозём — и белая бумага!

I am the page for your pen.
 I shall accept everything. I am a white page.
 I am the keeper of your good:
 I shall grow it and return it a hundredfold.

I am the countryside, the black earth.
 You are to me the ray of sun and the moisture of rain.
 You are the Lord and Master, and I—
 I am the black soil—and the white paper!

Marina Tsvetaeva, 1918

We have seen that Pushkin's authorial figure in *Eugene Onegin* is born of the poet's interaction with, and more importantly, his departure from the established poetic framework of romanticism. Both *Onegin* and *Dead Souls* are transitional works that explore the space between romanticism and the budding realist tradition in Russian literature. I will argue that Chekhov's figured author similarly arises from a confrontation with tradition: in this case, with the established tradition of literary realism in the late nineteenth century. In particular, Chekhov confronts the increasing dogmatism and asceticism of Tolstoy's work. P. U. Moeller sees in Chekhov's work of the 1890s a transition to themes that would soon preoccupy the symbolist

movement –pure beauty unburdened by social messages and moralizing.¹¹⁵ Additionally, Radislav Lapushin notes an essential quality of Chekhov’s poetics he terms “inbetweenness” – that is, that Chekhov’s word “permanently fluctuates between the literal meaning and the symbolic.”¹¹⁶ In other words, Chekhov’s art contains a tension between the mimetic prose of Russian realism and figurative language that anticipates the Silver Age of Russian poetry.

Like Pushkin and Gogol, then, Chekhov stands at a point of departure from an established tradition. This suggests that the self-conscious authorial game that is the focus of my exploration signifies uncertainty and experimentation, coinciding with periods of literary and cultural dissent. This is even more true for the later authors addressed in this study: Bulgakov’s and Nabokov’s literary worlds were created, respectively, amid the severe cultural, linguistic and political breakdown and restructuring of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and of 1930s Berlin (inside which the Russian émigré circle formed its own self-questioning and self-crafting cultural beehive).

“And *you* I know well”: Recognizing the Famous Listener

First published in 1895 in the journal “Russian Thought” (Русская мысль), Chekhov’s short story “Ariadna” is unique among his works. Chekhov is famously detached and objective in his fiction, but in “Ariadna” for the first and only time he steps into the narrative as one of the characters.¹¹⁷ Chekhov’s preference for objective narration seemed to preclude this kind of personalized authorial intrusions. In an oft-cited letter to the writer Lidiia Avilova, Chekhov

¹¹⁵ Peter Ulf Moeller, *Postlude to the Kreutzer Sonata*, John Kendal, trans. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988) 255-258.

¹¹⁶ Radislav Lapushin, *Dew on the Grass: The Poetics of Inbetweenness in Chekhov*, Middlebury studies in Russian language and literature, v. 32 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010) 20.

¹¹⁷ Donald Rayfield points this out in *Understanding Chekhov: A Critical Study of Chekhov’s Prose and Drama* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999) 125.

wrote ardently about the importance of “staying cold,” of using an unemotional authorial voice when depicting human suffering in his stories. The more detached the narrative voice, he insisted, the greater the artistic effect of the work on the reader.¹¹⁸ The author must be merely an observer, whereas showing his emotional investment in the characters’ fate would compromise some deep artistic truth of the text. Thus, Chekhov’s art, unlike that of the late Tolstoy, for instance, developed around the idea of authorial non-intrusion, either limiting the narrative voice to mere external observation or dissolving it completely in the consciousness of the character. Chudakov identifies the absence of an authoritative narrator as one of the main features of Chekhov’s poetics, comparing his narratives to an open road that “after another road sign suddenly stops,” and the reader is left alone to find his way.¹¹⁹ In other words, Chekhov’s narrator gives us only an idea, a hint of what goes on in the human soul, never fully exposing or explaining his characters’ feelings for us. Given this tendency to create a sense of authorial absence, it is the more surprising to find an instance of self-figuration in Chekhov’s work, which prompts us to ponder its meaning and unique function in the context of his late art.

The structure of “Ariadna” as a story-within-a-story points to Chekhov’s interest in the distancing of the framing narrative voice from the inset narrating voices of the characters and in using this distance to draw attention to the characters in new ways. “Ariadna” is a framed narrative: in its frame, a first-person narrator recalls an encounter with one Ivan Ilyich Shamokhin on board a ship traveling from Odessa to Sevastopol. During the encounter, Shamokhin tells the narrator a story about his unhappy involvement with the title heroine, which tale constitutes the inserted narrative. The narrator’s perception of Shamokhin and of his story is

¹¹⁸ A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v 30 t.* (Moskva: Nauka, 1974-1983) 5:26. (All quotations from Chekhov’s text are from this edition, unless otherwise noted. All further references to this edition will be given in the text, with the first number indicating the volume and the second, the page).

¹¹⁹ A. P. Chudakov, *Poetika Chekhova* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971) 273-275.

perhaps the most striking and important reality of the text: the narrator's presence and his listening to Shamokhin cast a rich light onto the character of Shamokhin, exposing the deeper workings of Chekhov's poetics. The figure of the narrator-turned-listener (and his relationship to Shamokhin) is the central phenomenon examined in this chapter. The narrator's status as Chekhov's stand-in and the way he interacts with Shamokhin in this story together convey a strong message about Chekhov's artistic method.

On an immediate level, the reader of "Ariadna" is able to identify this figure as a surrogate for Chekhov based on the double recognition of him by the story's main characters. In the opening frame, Shamokhin's words of introduction addressed to the narrator imply that the latter is a recognizable celebrity: "Let me introduce myself...Ivan Ilyich Shamokhin, a Moscow landowner of sorts...And *you* I know well" (9:108). In the closing frame, the narrator is introduced to Ariadna herself, who thanks him "for the pleasure [his] writing had given her," now more specifically establishing the narrator as a famous author (9:132). Such a blurring of the figures of author, narrator, and listener allows us to transpose Chekhov's own identity onto this nameless character. With Shamokhin's and Ariadna's statements of recognition, the two parts of the frame encircle Shamokhin's first-person narrative and provide a mediated perspective on his character. But they perform another important function as well: they escalate the effect of the reader's recognition of the author in the narrative. This effect, distilled in the closing frame by Ariadna's mention of the narrator's renown as a writer, immediately calls the reader back to the beginning of the story to verify his suspicion that he is in fact, for the first time, observing Chekhov the observer within the text.

In addition, a biographical detail links the setting of "Ariadna" to Chekhov's own experience a year prior to writing the story: in 1894, Chekhov took a steamship from Sevastopol

to Odessa, a trip in the reverse direction from that of the narrator and the protagonists of “Ariadna.”¹²⁰ This detail solidifies the link between Chekhov and the nameless listener in the story, while slightly muddying it by reversing the direction of the narrator’s journey: it is as if the text is Chekhov’s mirror in which his own image is reversed.¹²¹ To me this speaks of Chekhov’s impulse to set himself up for recognition in this character yet make this recognition somewhat difficult. Michael C. Finke argues that Chekhov wants to be both hidden and revealed in his narratives.¹²² However, I think that the need to be revealed is pronounced most strongly in “Ariadna” in particular, due to the story’s role in Chekhov’s career as the peak of his polemic with (and rejection of) Tolstoy’s use of narrative authority.

Along with his status as a famous author, the listener-narrator of “Ariadna” resembles Chekhov and is different from the characters in most of his work, because he provides almost no information about himself. Thus, we do not learn his name or anything about the circumstances of his travel, his background or his personal views. Generally, Chekhov’s first-person narrators give themselves away, in a sense, by providing much of their biographical information as well as spouting opinionated remarks (I have in mind the narrators of “A Boring Story” or “The House with an Attic,” for instance). In this way, these narrators open themselves up to the reader’s scrutiny and judgment. Chekhov, by contrast, notoriously private and fond of anonymity, published his stories pseudonymously for years before reluctantly revealing his real name to his audience in 1886; he strongly resisted his readers’ and critics’ attempts to locate him or his *raisonneur* in any one of his characters, claimed to suffer from “autobiographophobia,” and

¹²⁰ See Notes to “Ariadna” in *PSS*, 9: 469-479.

¹²¹ I thank Rebecca Stanton for this insight.

¹²² Michael C. Finke, *Seeing Chekhov: Life and Art* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

insisted that no photograph or biography of the author be included in the first volume of his collected works.¹²³ The faceless, nameless, and story-less listener-narrator of “Ariadna,” thus, is perhaps the only fictional vessel to which Chekhov could entrust any connection with himself. The narrator’s interest in listening, observation and his tersely disagreeing voice constitute his entire portrait in the story. His only characteristic is the unbending calmness with which he faces the strong opinions expressed by Shamokhin at the end of his story. Never an advocate of generalizing thought, Chekhov can thus be recognized in the story also in the narrator’s subdued yet firm and unswayable demeanor. While he is all ears to Shamokhin’s tale, the authority of his listening is conveyed most vividly by the single symbolic action of turning his back, literally, on Shamokhin’s eventual diatribe against women. As he turns to the wall and falls asleep, the narrator-listener curtails Shamokhin’s story and thus takes away his narrative authority. “I didn’t hear anything else [of Shamokhin’s story], since I fell asleep,” the narrator tells us (9:132). The narration then shifts to the next day of the trip and presents the narrator’s own perspective on both Ariadna and Shamokhin, thus showing the narrator’s re-appropriation of narrative control in the story.

The nameless narrator is the sole figured author of Chekhov’s entire oeuvre,¹²⁴ and his dual status as both author and listener with respect to “Ariadna” illustrates the crucial role

¹²³ Finke 2.

¹²⁴ The 1888 story “The Lights” (Огни) features a similarly nondescript narrator-listener who refuses to judge or extract meaning from the stories and dialogues he witnesses and notoriously ends his account with a helpless remark, “You can’t figure out anything in this world!” (Ничего не разберешь на этом свете). This refusal to judge and create meaning for the reader, as well as the fact that the characters identify the listener as a doctor, represents another, albeit weaker, case of Chekhovian self-figuration. This story, however, was the only larger work of this period excluded by Chekhov from publication in his collected works; I will thus consider it less representative than “Ariadna” of the importance Chekhov assigned to his figured author. Moreover, the listener in “Ogni” is confused and disempowered by the stories he hears, while the listener in “Ariadna” is a powerful and independent interpreter of Shamokhin, which demonstrates the significance of the authorial figuration in “Ariadna” and not in “The Lights,” a story Chekhov himself admitted to be a failure. (See notes to “The Lights” in *PSS*, 7:645-650).

Chekhov assigns to listeners and the activity of listening in his art. In this sense, despite being Chekhov's only story featuring an authorial stand-in, "Ariadna" is representative of his works. In effect, the author-listener of this story caps and re-channels an entire tradition of listeners who steadily gained prominence in Chekhov's short stories starting in the mid-1880s. Chekhovian listeners are instrumental to his narrative conception, primarily because they demonstrate the role of the audience in shaping or inciting stories, or, as Cathy Popkin remarks, "in his textual inscriptions of a responding audience, [Chekhov] reminds us who has the final word [on what is worth telling], and who thus bears the responsibility for recognizing and embracing significant activity, narrative or otherwise."¹²⁵ In other words, listeners are important to Chekhov because they give us clues as to what is meaningful and valuable in the narrative.

Listeners are featured prominently in Chekhov's early stories: consider, for example, the grieving father's yearning for a compassionate listener of his sorrow in the 1886 "Sorrow" (Tocka) or the bureaucrat who is so tortured by having to listen to an amateur authoress's oppressive reading of her play that he murders her in the 1887 "The Drama." There, Chekhov already shows us that the listener has a powerful and necessary presence in all verbal art. This leads us finally to the uncompromising, objective presence of his author-listener in "Ariadna," followed by an even more complex exploration of listening in the 1898 short story triptych known as The Little Trilogy ("The Man in a Case," "Gooseberries," and "About Love").

Why the Listener? Storytelling and the Framed Narrative

Framed narrative stories, "Ariadna" among them, are a recurrent model for Chekhov. In his short stories, he often looks at the practice of storytelling and the interaction between the

¹²⁵ Cathy Popkin, *The Pragmatics of Insignificance: Chekhov, Zoshchenko, Gogol* (Stanford University Press, 1993) 49.

teller and the listener of a particular story. Charles Isenberg observes that Chekhov uses the frame narration technique, in particular in “The Little Trilogy,” to draw attention to the dynamics of storytelling. “In its overall design Chekhov’s story cycle serves...as an implicit description or indictment of storytelling as another form of *futliarnost*’,” Isenberg writes, referring to the title of the story “*Chelovek v futliare*” (The Man in a Case) and to its eponymous character’s obsessive habit of shielding himself from the world.¹²⁶ According to Isenberg, Chekhov’s main focus in frame narration stories is not so much on the subject matter explored in the inserted narrative (e.g. the actual “man in a case” Belikov), but rather on the telling itself and on exposing “the variousness of our psychic ‘cases’ and shells” that is encoded in the way we tell stories.¹²⁷ In this sense, the narrator’s presence in “Ariadna” serves to reveal Shamokhin as a limited and controlling speaker.

Chekhov sees something important in the process of telling a story, as well as in the human need to tell a story to another human being. As regards the critical inquiry into Chekhov’s interest in storytelling and frame narration, most commentators have focused on the storyteller, claiming that, by juxtaposing insert and frame, Chekhov reveals some truth about the teller’s character. Thus John Freedman insists that the voice of the storyteller Burkin in “The Man in a Case” is markedly different from that of Chekhov’s impassive narrator and that Burkin’s observations about the subject of his story “serve...to undermine the reader’s confidence in Burkin’s authority as an observer,” thereby exposing Burkin as the true subject and

¹²⁶ Charles Isenberg, *Telling Silence: Russian Frame Narratives of Renunciation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) 135.

¹²⁷ Isenberg 135.

enigma of Chekhov's story, the real "man in a case."¹²⁸ In this model, the teller seems encased by his own story, leaving the listener the power to either affirm or undo this self-entrapment.

While the figure of the storyteller sheds important light on the functions and operation of Chekhov's frame narratives, I suggest that Chekhov's representation of listeners serves to unlock an enigma that corresponds to his exploration of storytelling. The figure of the listener in Chekhov's frame narratives often motivates or otherwise influences the telling of a story. At the same time, the listener is someone who consumes stories told by another and whom the teller tries to influence, convert, remake in his own image. In this way, the presence of a listener and the nature of his or her interaction with the teller raise important questions about the psychological mechanisms that engender storytelling in Chekhov's frame narratives, as well as about the narrative authority involved in telling stories. The nature of the listener's resistance or unavailability to the teller forms the dynamic texture of Chekhov's frame narratives and reveals the essence of the poetic program behind his self-figuration in "Ariadna."

In this chapter, my focus is on "Ariadna" as well as on two of Chekhov's other stories—the 1886 "Sorrow" and the 1891 "Peasant Women." In all three stories, listeners play a prominent role. Looking at these stories together will show us an evolution of the listener function in Chekhov's prose to the point where the listener coincides with the figure of Chekhov himself. Moreover, these three stories are central to Chekhov's polemic with Tolstoy, especially with regard to the gender question. This is important because, in my view, Chekhov's unique self-figuration in "Ariadna" constitutes a protest against the precepts of Tolstoyanism of the 1880s and 1890s, in particular against Tolstoy's views on the function of art, gender relations, and sexuality.

¹²⁸ John Freedman, "Narrative Technique and the Art of Story-telling in Anton Chekhov's 'Little Trilogy,'" *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 1988) 1-18 (5).

The Case of "Sorrow"

How does the listener contribute to the development and flow of a story? How does the listener's presence serve as a form of commentary on Chekhov's (or his narrator's) presence in his stories? And finally, at what point does the listener's passive status translate into a position of authority or even authorship? To begin answering these questions, we must first turn to an earlier period in Chekhov's literary career. It is often noted that his short stories began to acquire a new seriousness and depth around the year 1886. Joseph L. Conrad identifies a particular theme that emerges prominently during this period as that of "tension resulting from a character's incompatibility with others or with his environment as a whole, i.e., his isolation from his fellow man."¹²⁹ Among the stories that reflect this new tension and new look at storytelling is the 1886 "Sorrow." The story's protagonist, Iona Potapov, is a cabby driving his passengers along the twilight streets of St. Petersburg during a heavy snowfall. Iona is a man desperately in need of a listener: his son's recent death fills his heart with misery that cannot be alleviated unless he tells someone about it. After being ignored and abused by a series of passengers who all refuse to listen, Iona finds a listener in his own horse.

Although technically not a frame narrative, "Sorrow" undergoes several attempts to become one. Each one of Iona's attempts to produce a narrative is aborted at its very outset by reluctant and even aggressive listeners until the story's very end, when the narrative finally unfolds yet is not reproduced for the reader, this time cut off by Chekhov himself. The final sentence simply tells us that Iona tells his entire story to the horse.

¹²⁹ Joseph L. Conrad, "Unresolved Tension in Chekhov's Stories, 1886-1888," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1972) 55-64 (55).

By giving the reader a mere foretaste of the inserted narrative and never allowing it to materialize fully, Chekhov shows his intent to concentrate solely on the “frame,” as it were: that is, on Iona’s overwhelming desire to tell a story and on his search for the ideal listener. Thus the inserted narrative is shown to be of secondary importance compared to the conditions surrounding the telling of a story, much as in “The Man in a Case” the storyteller Burkin is shown to be a more interesting figure for “encasement” than his protagonist Belikov. In this sense, the earlier story “Sorrow” seems to be a short schematic version of its distant successor “The Man in a Case.” “Sorrow” shows us, much more clearly and convincingly than his later stories, Chekhov’s investment in the “frame,” or circumstances, of telling a story. This story, with its inserted narrative in embryonic form, prefigures “Ariadna” and “The Little Trilogy” and provides a strong focus on the role of the frame and of the listener that illuminates Chekhov’s interest in examining storytelling as an event unto itself.

Although Iona’s story in “Sorrow” can be viewed as an unrealized narrative when compared to Chekhov’s other framed narratives, the very fact of storytelling that takes place at the end represents the main event in Chekhov’s story, especially if we agree with Yuri Lotman’s definition of event as a “crossing of the prohibiting border” (пересечение запрещающей границы).¹³⁰ From the silence of his uneasy slumber at the outset of the story to his struggle to win his listeners’ attention, Iona repeatedly tries to cross over into the realm of speaking and being heard, until finally he encounters non-resistance and succeeds. But his final listener is mute and fully dependent on Iona for survival; Iona is allowed to speak, but is he heard? Lotman’s border separating the semantic fields of silence and speech is crossed, yet the event has an illusory quality to it. Conrad terms the story’s finale a “zero ending,” yet admits that the

¹³⁰ Yuri Lotman, *Struktura khudozhestvennogo teksta*, (Moscow, 1970) 288.

ending is nevertheless “a neat *tour de force*, for Iona does find communion and therefore relief from frustration.”¹³¹ This climax, as well as the satisfaction and emotional release the reader is able to take away from “Sorrow,” are contingent upon Iona’s having found a patient listener whose presence allows his story to be told. The search for a listener is the story’s main motivation. And for Iona, who is continually prodded, nudged, and ordered to move forward by his unsympathetic passengers, this listener represents a long-awaited final destination.

The story is thus structured as a series of paradoxes: the telling of the story is the most important event of “Sorrow,” yet the story itself is not given to us, except in chaotic bits and pieces that precede the main storytelling. The story’s ending is both a zero and a “*tour de force*.” This paradoxical treatment of storytelling is further localized in the figure of the main listener who represents, both literally and figuratively, the story’s driving force: Iona’s horse. Iona finds his listener at the very end of the story, yet the mare (*kobyłka*) accompanies him throughout. For the duration of the story, she is invisible to him, unthinkable in the role of listener.

The horse’s gender is another paradoxical aspect of the story. Iona envisions women as ideal listeners: “The listener must groan (*okhat*’), sigh, wail... And speaking to women is even better. They are fools, but they cry after two words” (4:330). His horse is established as a female, a mare, and is referred to as such repeatedly in the story, and she is in fact Iona’s ideal listener. Yet her behavior is counter to what Iona expects of women—she is silent, passive, and in fact possesses no human language to express sympathy with Iona’s grief. Toward the end of the story, however, Iona comes to appreciate not the female’s difference, otherness in relation to him, but their common plight. Thus gender differences are first established, then erased. When he realizes that the horse is his only reliable listener, Iona addresses her affectionately: *brat-kobylochka* (brother-mare). This form paradoxically implies their common humanity and

¹³¹ Conrad 56.

brotherhood, while also not erasing the fact that Iona is speaking to a female animal. In this way, the female is acknowledged to be the hero's fellow human being, while her meekness and silence are the source of his salvation.

The opening image of "Sorrow" features Iona and his horse waiting for passengers. Both are covered in snow, practically merged into a single being enveloped in silence, stillness, whiteness. Although the narrator portrays the horse as similar and connected to Iona, Iona does not yet realize this. He feels alone with his sorrow and attempts to numb his feelings by slipping into a mindless slumbering state. The narrator, however, by uniting them in this scene, foreshadows the transformation of the mare's role in the story from an invisible inconsequential presence into an attentive listener, a figure of communion and the agent of Iona's (and the story's) catharsis.

"Sorrow" fades out on Iona's outpouring to his horse, and a sense of connection between the teller and his listener is finally established. The paradox of this outcome lies, of course, in the fact that Iona's listener is not human and is not actually listening to his story, but only appears to do so. Yet there is a kind of wistful longing for a possibility of their communion not only on the part of the inconsolable Iona, but also on that of Chekhov's narrator. In the first paragraph of the story, Chekhov devotes several sentences to the description of Iona's mare. He refers to her as *loshadenka*, a complex diminutive form that points to the mare's weakness and worthlessness as a driving force, but also conveys a note of sympathy for its plight as a hard laborer torn away from home and thrown into the cruel urban whirlpool (4:326).¹³² The narrator attributes to the horse a thoughtfulness and a melancholy that are distinctly human in nature:

¹³² This epithet, together with the earlier mentioned *brat-kobylochka*, moreover, illuminates the tension between the mare's "outer" value as a horse and her more personal value as a listener and a fellow sufferer. (I owe this observation to John Wright).

Она, по всей вероятности, погружена в мысль. Кого оторвали от плуга, от привычных серых картин и бросили сюда в этот омут, полный чудовищных огней, неугомонного треска и бегущих людей, тому нельзя не думать... (4:326, my emphasis).

She, most probably, is deep in thought. One who is torn away from the plough, from the familiar grey scenes, and who is thrown into this whirlpool, full of monstrous lights, constant noise and people running about, cannot keep from thinking...

A similar projection occurs toward the end of the story. When Iona, having failed to find a patient listener among his riders and no longer able to bear his pain in silence, thinks about going back to the garage in the hope of finding a listener there, the narrator continues: “And the little horse, as if [tochno] having understood his thoughts, begins to run faster” (4:329, my emphasis). In both cases, the narrator tentatively projects humanity onto the mare, using such qualifiers as “most probably,” “as if” to stress only the appearance of the animal’s human characteristics. Then, in the penultimate sentence of the story, after Iona has begun to tell his story to the mare, the narrator portrays her as a sentient, attentive listener: “The little horse chews, listens and breathes onto her master’s hands” (4:330, my emphasis). Here, the narrator is no longer stressing appearances, no longer hesitates to share Iona’s belief that the horse is indeed capable of listening and understanding human speech.

The narrator’s projection of human mental processes onto the horse, repeated three times in the space of a five-page story, gradually loses its make-believe quality and becomes a kind of truth both to the narrator and to Iona, who in the end “forgets himself [увлекается] and tells her everything” (4:330). This transformation serves to emphasize the narrator’s desire to believe in the fantastic possibility that in a world of human indifference, an animal can be capable of understanding and compassion. It seems that, just as Iona has crossed an important border into speech, the horse too has crossed a boundary: by virtue of the narrator’s will she has become

human. The eventfulness of “Sorrow” is, then, not questionable but rather dual. It exists separately for Iona and for the mare, involving a transformative, almost metaphysical, leap on the part of the narrator.

We can see that the mare, although the driving force behind Chekhov’s story and Iona’s quest, is also subject to idealization and projection on the part of both the storyteller and the narrator. By virtue of being voiceless, constantly present (and thus invisible to Iona), she is pliable to being construed in various ways by both, and her pivotal role in the narrative is, therefore, the result of this interpretational malleability. Her cathartic function in the story is determined by her passivity, which brings into focus the many paradoxes surrounding her status as a listener, as well as the paradoxical, self-negating construction of Chekhov’s story itself.

As I have noted, “Sorrow,” like Chekhov’s other frame narrative stories, is about storytelling, yet in contrast to these stories, it refuses to give us a fully developed inserted narrative, instead privileging and magnifying the frame. The story has a “zero ending” because, for Iona, telling his story to a horse is a gesture not of choice but of utter desperation and because “the reader is left with the burdensome knowledge that Iona is forever condemned to isolation.”¹³³ And yet, guided by the narrator, we see the mare transformed into the most compassionate of listeners who helps alleviate Iona’s pain. In this way, the contradictory features of Chekhov’s story are allowed to grow around its central figure of paradox: a horse turned listener. The interpretative potential encoded in this figure allows for the story’s outcome to be equally elastic: seen as either a zero-event, or an event of dual significance.

Iona’s mare is the prototypical Chekhovian listener in a sense, because she is the ultimate empty space, which focuses and reflects several trajectories of interpretation that enrich our

¹³³ Conrad 56.

reading of the story. It is necessary for Chekhov to create such a void in his narrative, a void into which sorrows and projections fall, intermingling and allowing the reader to use this space for his or her own interpretation. The listener thus is the void and the image of Chekhovian art itself, reflecting Chekhov's interest in creating distance, emptiness and the necessary space for interpretation, for the reader's independence and creativity.¹³⁴ The listener exists to leave the reader undecided, confused and thinking.

If the "Little Trilogy" represents the high and perhaps most complex point of Chekhov's experiments with frame narration, with its interwoven triadic listener-storyteller structure, in "Sorrow" we see the beginnings of this experimentation and the inception of Chekhov's interest in the listener figure as an element of the story's structure. We can further examine the structure and evolution of the listener function in Chekhov's frame narratives by looking at Chekhov's later short story, "Peasant Women," which precedes "Ariadna" by four years. As a departure from "Sorrow," these later stories contain continuous full-scale inserted narratives inside their respective frames. These stories feature listeners who perform decisive functions within Chekhov's artistic design. The listeners' respective relationships to the narratives they hear show the progressive empowerment of the listener to the point where, in "Ariadna," the listener's position begins to coincide with the function of authorship and production of stories. This empowerment, however, is contingent on the kind of blankness and passivity we have seen in Iona's mare in "Sorrow," a kind of receptiveness and suppression of self that characterizes many Chekhovian listeners, making them both the space of receiving the story and the agent of influence on the reader's perception of the inserted story and its teller.

¹³⁴ As Carol Flath suggests, "the general notion of a void permeates Chekhov's texts at all levels and can be seen as a master motif." See "Writing about Nothing: Chekhov's 'Ariadna' and the Narcissistic Narrator," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (April 1999) 223-239 (224).

The Case of “Peasant Women”

In “Peasant Women” (Бабы), first published in 1891, the most influential listeners are powerless, mistreated women who happen to hear a derogatory story about one woman and women in general. This close, self-identifying and compassionate relationship between the listener and the subject of the teller’s story prefigures “Ariadna” where Chekhov the listener refuses to participate in Shamokhin’s story, which denounces Ariadna and all women. In “Peasant Women,” an overnight lodger Matvei Savvich is prompted by his host, a well-to-do peasant Diudia Kapluntsev, to tell a self-righteous moralizing tale about a young woman Mashen’ka, whom Matvei had seduced and then abandoned to her eventual downfall and demise. As the story unfolds, Diudia repeatedly agrees with Matvei in blaming Mashen’ka for the events, while Diudia’s downtrodden daughters-in-law listen in mute rebellion. For example, when Matvei tells of watching Mashenka’s husband flog her with horse reins, one of Diudia’s daughters-in-law, Varvara, expresses subdued indignation. But Diudia promptly silences her:

—Взять вожжи, да тебя бы так. . . — проворчала Варвара, отходя. Извели нашу сестру, проклятые. . .

— Замолчи, ты! — крикнул на нее Дюдя. — Кобыла!

—I wish I could whip you with the reins like that...—Varvara grumbled, stepping aside.

—Shut up, you! — Diudia yelled at her. —You mare! (7:347)

As we can see from this exchange, both Mashenka and Varvara are treated or referred to in terms of horse imagery. Moreover, the women are emphatically silenced by the men—Mashenka’s story is appropriated by Matvei and Varvara is allowed to listen, but not speak. The figure of the silent mare in “Sorrow,” then, is an appropriate predecessor to Varvara and Sofya in “Peasant Women.” Like Iona’s mare, the women in “Peasant Women” play an important role in the story

precisely because they are silent, marginal and function as listeners. Cathy Popkin discusses the equine imagery in this story, linking it to the senseless flogging of a mare in Raskolnikov's dream in *Crime and Punishment*. The connection between the two scenes, she argues, "makes explicit the tacit association of Mashenka and the Kapluntsevs' work horses," an association which is also extended to other women in the story. The men's view of women as work horses in this story is another connection to "Sorrow," where Iona at first cannot see his mare as anything but a driving commodity, but in the end comes to relate to her as a fellow suffering creature.¹³⁵

"Peasant Women," like "Ariadna," is a frame narrative. But here, the primary narrator is not embodied; it is simply a voice that tells us of Matvei's arrival and lets Matvei tell his story in his own voice. Unlike Matvei, this outer narrator is impassive and objective, simply reporting the events to us, without drawing conclusions.

The listening audience in this story is dual and, in its reaction to Matvei's story, split along gender lines. Perhaps more important, the listeners' reaction is also split along the line separating the teller of the story from his subject of representation. The women identify with Mashen'ka and in a sense repeat or are compelled to repeat her actions. Like Mashen'ka, the younger woman Varvara is revealed to have extramarital affairs. Upon hearing Matvei's story, both women are inspired by the murder attributed to Mashen'ka in the story and briefly consider murdering Diudia and Varvara's husband Alyoshka. Despite this fact, the women are sympathetic characters in the story, portrayed as victims of the men and of the men's stories about women. Moreover, they are in fact the most significant and perceptive listeners in the

¹³⁵ Cathy Popkin, "Paying the Price: the Rhetoric of Reckoning in Cexov's 'Peasant Women'" in *Russian Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1994) 203-222 (209).

story, and in the end it is their perspective that is aligned with that of Chekhov's impersonal narrator.

The subtlety of Chekhov's allegiances in this story is truly remarkable. The narrative voice seems uninvolved and impassive. But there is an important way in which the construction of the story suggests a condemnation of both Diudia and Matvei as hypocritical tyrants and mocks their self-satisfied agreement about Mashen'ka's villainy, something that Matvei declares to be "clear as day" (ясно как пить дать) (7:347). What the reader comes to discover, however, is that the fact of Mashen'ka's guilt in the murder is far from being "clear as day." Rather, we realize that the song that is heard as the backdrop to Matvei's story and that is mentioned repeatedly by the narrator comments on the hypocrisy of Matvei's and Diudia's mutual "harmonizing" about Mashen'ka supposed crimes. The song is heard "from behind the church" and is sung by the priest's sons (*popovichi*), one of whom is eventually revealed to be Varvara's nighttime suitor (7:344). We see that, just like the *popovichi*, who are able to conceal their illicit behavior under the guise of their association with the church, Diudia and Matvei *sing the same tune* with regard to Mashen'ka. (Chekhov was aware of the Russian equivalent of this idiom, *spelis*¹³⁶). We learn in the first sentence that Diudia's house stands "exactly opposite the church," while Matvei's actions punctuating his entrance and exit in the story are as follows: "he prayed in the direction of the church" when arriving to Diudia's and "crossed himself" immediately before his carriage rolls out of Diudia's yard (7:352). In this way, Diudia the listener is shown to "sing" together with Matvei the storyteller and to participate in the production of the "magnificent sad song" that is Matvei's story about Mashenka (7:344). This kind of "harmonizing" between the teller and his listener is explicitly broken in the later

¹³⁶ For instance, he used it in his 1890 play *The Wood Demon* (Леший): Finally, you two came to an understanding! (Спелись-таки наконец!), see *PSS*, 12:201.

“Ariadna” where listener-Chekhov is shown as an uninterested listener who finally openly disagrees with the storyteller and chooses to stop listening.

In this sense, Shamokhin’s story about Ariadna is similar to that of Matvei –both men claim authorial control, omniscience and moral superiority in relation to the women they describe. Chekhov thwarts these authorial and moralizing ambitions through his use of the frame narrative and the listener figure, thus distancing the tellers and undermining their authority. Unlike Iona’s unrealized story in “Sorrow,” which is an act of pure liberation from an alien insurmountable force that invades him (*toska*, his sorrow), Matvei’s story in “Peasant Women” is a craft, an act of representation. Iona wants to state events in sequence, to describe without interpretation: “Need to tell how the son got sick, how he suffered, what he said before dying, how he died” (4:330). Matvei, on the other hand, wants to interpret behaviors, assign moral value to actions with the goal of representing himself as morally superior to Mashen’ka and all women: “There is a lot of evil and all kinds of filth in this world coming from the female sex. Even the holy spirits, not just us sinners, fell into temptation” (7:344). His story in the end, however, reveals the opposite of what it intended: that Matvei, rather than Mashen’ka, is the real criminal. This particular revelation is obvious to Chekhov’s reader and to the women, Varvara and Sofia, who are listening to Matvei’s story. It is not, however, obvious to Diudia, who fully agrees with Matvei’s representation of events.

Chekhov tells us that the women “stood at a distance and listened” as Matvei was telling his story to Diudia (7:342). They thus represent a secondary audience whose perception of the story is distanced from that of Diudia, its primary audience. Just like Chekhov’s narrator, the women are rebelling against the men’s hypocrisy in quiet, understated ways. While the narrator reveals his attitude toward the two men by subtly weaving the song motif into the story, the

women quietly discuss the idea of killing the men and then hush it up and resolve to forget it before falling asleep. Thus, the listeners in “Peasant Women” are shown to be active in two different ways. First, in having a voice fit to participate in the creation (“singing”) of the story, as in Diudia’s case. And second, as in the case of Varvara and Sofia, in displaying a critical discernment worthy of Chekhov himself—that is, in occupying a space *outside* Diudia and Matvei’s teller/listener circle. Like the women, the reader is angered by Matvei’s sanctimonious judgment (especially when, in the final scene, we witness his cruelty toward the little boy he has adopted) and by Diudia’s complicity. The reader’s own experience thus is modeled by the women listeners in the story; the women’s listening is separated from Diudia’s listening which is lumped together with Matvei’s telling.

The Case of “Ariadna”

Chekhov’s impersonal narrator shows faith in the mare and in the women listeners in the two stories I have discussed. Behind this impersonal narrator, Chekhov’s authorial presence is deliberately muted. The author seems silent and removed. Yet suddenly his own voice is embodied in the listener in “Ariadna.” Here, the impersonal narrative voice of the earlier stories has been replaced with the figured author, a character existing inside the story yet occupying a peripheral space with respect to the main narrative action and in whom we can recognize Chekhov. This character paradoxically combines the functions of narrator and listener, of author and audience; he brings into focus Chekhov’s interest in the hidden power of what seems passive, marginal, and insignificant. The hidden power of the listener in this case lies in his ultimate status as the author.

In “Ariadna,” Chekhov’s figured author listens to an embittered expatriate Shamokhin deliver a story about his love affair with a woman named Ariadna, a romance that apparently has turned Shamokhin into a staunch misogynist. Here, a similar pattern to that of “Peasant Women” unfolds with regard to gender and storytelling. Shamokhin’s story is a condemnation of women and in particular of his lover Ariadna, whom he comes to detest. His story is about the disintegration of his love for Ariadna, who, he claims, is sly and evil (the Russian *lukavstvo*, which he purports to be Ariadna’s primary characteristic, contains both meanings), like all modern educated women (9:126). In “Sorrow,” Iona tells his story to a female horse and envisions women as ideal listeners. By contrast, Shamokhin, like Matvei in “Peasant Women,” seeks specifically a male listener in order to procure the listener’s agreement with his story in which he berates women. In his listener, he wants to see a male and a Russian, a combination that would allow him to generalize about women on both his and his listener’s behalf, using a collective “we” to voice his dissatisfactions:

Да, когда русские сходятся, то говорят только о высоких материях и женщинах. [...] О женщинах же мы говорим так часто потому, мне кажется, что мы неудовлетворены. Мы слишком идеально смотрим на женщин. [...]. [Мы]... в конце концов убеждаемся, что женщины лживы, мелочны, суетны, несправедливы, неразвиты, жестоки, - одним словом, не только не выше, но даже неизмеримо ниже нас, мужчин.

Yes, when Russians meet, they speak only of lofty matters and women. [...]. We speak about women so often, it seems to me, because we are dissatisfied. We idealize women too much. [...]. [We]... eventually learn that women are deceitful, petty, vain, unjust, uncivilized, cruel; in a word, not only not above, but immeasurably below us, men (9:108, my emphasis).

By insisting on this totalizing *we*, Shamokhin wants to “own” his listener, to convert him to his way of thinking, claiming that he, Shamokhin, and the listener are one and the same. His nameless listener, however, who also happens to be the story’s narrator, is unconvinced and retains a reserved non-participation in Shamokhin’s generalizing. He is disinterested and bored

by Shamokhin, recognizing in him a certain type of person. Instead, he provides us with his own detached observations of Shamokhin: “It was clear that...he wanted to speak more about himself than about women, and that I would surely have to listen to some long story resembling a confession” (9:108). And, after having listened to Shamokhin’s story, he challenges the latter’s assumptions:

Я спросил: зачем обобщать, зачем по одной Ариадне судить обо всех женщинах? [...]. Но Шамохин едва слушал меня и недоверчиво улыбался. Это был уже страстный, убежденный женоненавистник, и переубедить его было невозможно.

I asked: why generalize, why judge all women based only on Ariadna? [...]. But Shamokhin hardly listened to me and smiled distrustfully. He was already a passionate, resolute misogynist, and it would be impossible to change his mind (9:131).

The narrator thus gives us his own perception of Shamokhin as well as of Shamokhin’s motivations for storytelling. Compared to the mare in “Sorrow,” then, whose listener status stems from her muteness, emptiness (“whiteness”), and pliability to interpretation, the listener in “Ariadna” speaks directly to us, the reader, and is invested with the power of authorial voice.

Yet the narrator-listener is relatively passive throughout most of the story: he is approached by Shamokhin, agrees to hear his story despite rebelling internally (and later chooses to reproduce it faithfully for the reader), and is mostly silent. This behavior unites him with the passive presence of other, significantly female, listeners in Chekhov’s stories. Like Iona’s mare and the women in “Peasant Women,” he is present in the story in seemingly quiet and marginal ways. Moreover, Chekhov suggests a similarity between his authorial stand-in and Ariadna herself, placing himself again in a feminine role of either a receptive listener or a silent figure open to the male storyteller’s interpretation.

As he does with Ariadna, Shamokhin immediately assumes knowledge of the narrator's identity and feelings, in a way attempting to narrate *him*. When Shamokhin recognizes the narrator, he claims to know him well, without actually knowing much about him aside from name and reputation. He also attributes his own feelings to the narrator by including him in the totalizing *we* of all Russian men and their supposed opinions about women. Such claims to knowledge illuminate well Shamokhin's tendencies as a storyteller: in his story, he makes claims about young Ariadna's inner feelings in an omniscient authorial voice, sometimes even resorting to free indirect discourse, as in the following example: "My love, my admiration touched Ariadna, moved her (умиляли ее), and she desperately wanted to be as charmed as I was, and to return my love. After all, it is so poetic!" (9:111, my emphasis). Here, Shamokhin ascribes certain emotions to Ariadna, eventually slipping into her voice, as if to mock what he perceives to be her motivation for reciprocating his feelings.

The certainty of Shamokhin's claims of knowing Ariadna and the listener-narrator recalls Matvei's certainty in "Peasant Women" about Mashen'ka's thoughts and actions surrounding the death of her husband – "the thing was as clear as day" (дело было ясно, как пить дать). As Moeller suggests, the subject of this story is "the difference between verbal and true morality," and the same can be applied to Shamokhin's desire to tell his story about Ariadna.¹³⁷ Chekhov shows Shamokhin and Matvei in the process of creating, "authoring" their stories, and it is the nature of their particular authorial mode that he criticizes. This criticism of a certain way of telling a story is characteristic of Chekhov's thought in the 1890s when he came to question Tolstoy as an artist and in particular "the boldness with which [Tolstoy] treats things about

¹³⁷ Moeller 244.

which he knows nothing.”¹³⁸ As Chudakov observes, Chekhov only goes as far as a certain limit in discussing the psychic core of individuals, never invading it: “In Chekhov’s artistic world, when it comes to solving [problems of the human psyche], there is always a kind of off-limits sphere (запредельная область).” When Chekhov’s narrative voice approaches these spheres, his language becomes poetic, suggesting that only the poetic word can begin to recreate the aura of these sacred spaces, unlike Tolstoy and Dostoevsky who aim to explain human interiority to the fullest, probing it to its very depths and using accessible everyday language to do so.¹³⁹ Shamokhin’s professed knowledge of Ariadna’s interiority thus demonstrates his view of authorship to be decidedly un-Chekhovian, and instead perhaps closer to the Tolstoyan model.

In “Ariadna,” Chekhov places his stand-in in a silent, seemingly passive, “feminine” space—that is, the space he created for his listener in his earlier stories, “Sorrow” and “Peasant Women.” In this way he opposes himself to Shamokhin, whom he subtly but powerfully ridicules for attempting to be an omniscient author in relation to Ariadna. Shamokhin prefaces his story with the phrase, “I feel like telling you of my last romance (последний роман),” where *roman* (also meaning “novel” in Russian) can refer both to his romance with Ariadna and to his ambitions of authorship. Indeed, Shamokhin clothes the beginning of his story in a multitude of romantic and novelistic clichés, opening with the stock phrase “the action takes place” (действие происходит), further suggesting his interest in being an author rather than a lover, a *romanist* rather than a *geroi-romantik* (9:109). The word *poslednii* (last) adds further ambiguity: is Shamokhin about to tell the narrator about his “latest romance”? His “latest novel”? Or his “final romance/novel”? This ambiguity suggests a wide rift between Shamokhin’s view of himself as

¹³⁸ From Chekhov’s 1890 letter to A. N. Plescheev. Quoted in Thomas Winner, *Chekhov and his Prose* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966) 61.

¹³⁹ *Poetika Chekhova* 271-274.

perhaps a prolific author who has just completed his “latest novel” with others yet to come and Chekhov’s view of Shamokhin as a doomed author (and lover), one who has failed at a relatively young age in both love and art and is telling his “final” story.

Yet despite Shamokhin’s attempts to present Ariadna as a character in his “novel”—a character to whose innermost feelings he has omniscient access— Chekhov’s narrator stresses her live presence in the frame narrative, side by side with Shamokhin himself. Shamokhin’s story about Ariadna, told in her absence, is framed by his listener’s own direct perspective on Ariadna, as he encounters her in person and interacts with her. The narrator-listener’s impressions of Ariadna are brief and, in contrast to Shamokhin’s narrative, present only an external picture of her. The narrator notes her beauty, her capricious tone when speaking to Shamokhin, and her firm handshake and the admiration she expresses for the narrator’s writing upon meeting him. While these details alone are insufficient either to corroborate or to negate Shamokhin’s account of Ariadna’s duplicitous character, it is characteristic that in this brief portrait of Ariadna the narrator includes Shamokhin’s interference. As Ariadna praises the author’s work, Shamokhin immediately whispers in his ear not to believe her, insisting that she has never read any of it. This intrusion is representative of Shamokhin’s desire to have exclusive rights to the portrayal of Ariadna, his conviction that no one else can provide a true picture of her character. A simple observation of her behavior, he seems to suggest, is not enough; I must explain and reveal her to you before you make up your own mind. Moreover, Shamokhin denies Ariadna the status of reader; Chekhov’s respect for the integrity of the audience (reader and listener) stands in stark contrast to this attitude.

More importantly, the inclusion of Shamokhin’s interjection is representative of Chekhov’s own poetics: rather than making claims about Ariadna or about Shamokhin in this

instance, he gives the reader the actions and words of each, letting us decide. The placement of Shamokhin's intrusion at the very end of this particular episode, however, acts almost as a punch line, a final stroke in the portrait not of Ariadna, but of Shamokhin. In this instance, he precisely invades and attempts to influence the mental space and decision-making of another person, and another author.

The juxtaposition of these two Ariadnas, the one observed by the narrator and the one in Shamokhin's story, implies a degree of absurdity and arrogance in the kind of novelizing attempted by Shamokhin: applying the workings of free indirect discourse to a living person who happens to be just a few feet away from her self-appointed omniscient narrator and his audience. As we have seen, Shamokhin's narrating voice is shown to be authoritarian and unjust with respect to his represented subject Ariadna, as well as to women in general. Chekhov exposes Shamokhin's authorial failings similarly to the way the *popovichi's* song in the frame of "Peasant Women" exposes Matvei's tale as a crafty vehicle for misrepresentation of women and their moral character. By suggesting that he himself, or rather his stand-in, occupies a "blank" space similar to the women in these stories, Chekhov stresses a new important value for authorship: the need to remain objective, open and subdued in a way that nurtures and fertilizes the reader's thought rather than dictates it. Unlike the authors of realist fiction, however, Chekhov calls attention to his objective methods by resorting to a metafictional device: his figured author in "Ariadna."

Chekhov and Tolstoy: author-listener v. author-teller

I propose that Chekhov's sole case of self-figuration in "Ariadna" points to his need to affirm as if in person his main artistic principle: namely, his resistance to generalization and to

extreme, single-pole thinking. Chekhov embodies these objectionable qualities in the figure of the self-appointed “author” Shamokhin, whom he treats with an ironic distance. As Chudakov points out, “the only dogmatic thing about Chekhov is his condemnation of dogmatism.”¹⁴⁰ For Chekhov, the moment to reveal himself as a narrative presence in “Ariadna,” thus stamping his work with authorial figuration, is precipitated by his growing disagreement with Tolstoy in the 1890s. More specifically, in my view, Chekhov’s impulse to “sign” his work in this way comes in the wake of the uproar created by the circulation and publication of Tolstoy’s controversial 1889 novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, to which “Ariadna” is a widely recognized response.¹⁴¹

Many critics have written about the extent of Tolstoy’s influence on Chekhov and about the artistic and personal relationship between the two.¹⁴² Chekhov’s art of the 1880s shows the influence of Tolstoy’s moral ideology; however, after the year 1890, when Chekhov undertook his trip to the penal colony on the island of Sakhalin, he becomes more critical of Tolstoy.¹⁴³ In a letter to A. N. Pleshcheev dated February 15, 1890 (before his trip to Sakhalin), Chekhov praises *The Kreutzer Sonata*, in particular “the seriousness of its intent and the beauty of its execution.” In the same letter, he criticizes Tolstoy for the “boldness with which he treats things about which he knows nothing, or which he does not want to understand out of stubbornness [...such as] his statements [...] about women’s abhorrence of the sexual act.” Following his trip to Sakhalin, however, Chekhov writes to his publisher Suvorin: “Before my trip *The Kreutzer*

¹⁴⁰ *Poetika Chekhova* 262.

¹⁴¹ Peter Ulf Moeller, for instance, identifies “Ariadna” as the most famous of the many literary responses to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as well as a parody of it. See his *Postlude to the Kreutzer Sonata*. See also M. L. Semanova, “‘Kreutzerova Sonata’ L. N. Tolstogo i ‘Ariadna’ A. P. Chekhova” in L. D. Opul’skaia et al. (ed.), *Chekhov i Lev Tolstoi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980).

¹⁴² See, for example, *Chekhov i Lev Tolstoi* and Thomas Winner, *Chekhov and his Prose* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966) chapter 4.

¹⁴³ Winner 57. See also A. P. Chudakov, “Tolstovskii epizod v poetike Chekhova,” in *Chekhov i Lev Tolstoi* 167-198.

Sonata was a great event for me, but now it seems to me to be a ridiculous and senseless work.”¹⁴⁴ Two attitudes, indeed two Chekhovs, are apparent in these reactions—first an admirer and then a vehement critic of the same towering literary figure. Yet the pre-Sakhalin Chekhov had already voiced two important points on which he disagreed with Tolstoy: his ideas about women (and their sexuality) and the certainty and boldness of his proclamations.

Indeed, in terms of Chekhov’s attitude toward Tolstoy, the gulf separating the 1886 “Sorrow” and the 1895 “Ariadna” seems vast, and after 1890 Chekhov’s criticism only escalates. Tolstoy’s story “Kholstomer,” published just one year before “Sorrow,” in which the human world is defamiliarized through the perspective of a horse, seems to be a clear influence and inspiration behind “Sorrow,” which similarly sets up a contrast between a “humane” animal and the brutal human world.¹⁴⁵ In his 1891 letter to Suvorin, Chekhov reacts to reading Tolstoy’s “Afterword to the *Kreutzer Sonata*” with outrage:

You may kill me, but this is more stupid and stuffy than [Gogol’s] “Letters to the Governor’s Wife,” which I despise. Damn the philosophy of the great men of this world! All great sages are as despotic as generals [...] because they are certain of impunity. [...] To hell with the great men’s philosophy! All of it, with its idiotic (юродивыми) afterwords and letters to the governor’s wife, is not worth one little mare from “Kholstomer”! (4:270)

Between “Kholstomer” and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, between “Sorrow” and “Ariadna,” Chekhov’s opinion of Tolstoy’s work and thought drastically changes. Tolstoy’s title character Kholstomer is a male horse, but a gelding, and often referred to in the story by the feminine noun *loshad’* (horse). This gender fluidity, as well as Kholstomer’s meekness and suffering in the story, illuminate the connection between Kholstomer and Chekhov’s mare in “Sorrow,” yet also show the beginnings of difference between the two authors’ treatment of the gender question in their

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Winner 61.

¹⁴⁵ Incidentally, Tolstoy considered “Sorrow” to be one of Chekhov’s best works.

late careers. We know that Kholstomer has a voice and a central role in Tolstoy's story; at least grammatically, this character narrates from the perspective of a male. In his letter to Suvorin, Chekhov acknowledges his admiration of "Kholstomer" yet chooses to side with a marginal character, a mare, against Tolstoy and other "great men." In "Sorrow," Chekhov subtly focuses on a female, a mare that has no voice and seemingly no prominence in the story's plot. He turns this silent figure into the main carrier of meaning and eventfulness in the story and the agent of catharsis for its central character. In "Peasant Women," the women listeners, marginal in relation to the men and their story, question the men's story together with Chekhov. Moreover, the women are briefly shown covertly plotting to murder the men and escape (an episode excised from the story by Tolstoy's publishing house *Posrednik* after its editors chose the story to be reprinted as part of their edifying literature series for peasants).¹⁴⁶ Chekhov's narrator-listener in "Ariadna," as we have seen, is similarly marginal and relatively passive throughout the story. Thus Chekhov places this figure within the "feminine" space he created for the listeners in his earlier stories.

To Tolstoy's male voices, then, Chekhov opposes female silence, at the same time infusing this marginal position with creative, perceptive, or transformative powers. Moreover, he juxtaposes Tolstoy the author and Chekhov the author in distinctly gender-coded terms. In a letter to Suvorin written in 1894 (when "Ariadna" was likely in its conception stages), Chekhov describes moving past Tolstoy's influence thus: "Tolstoy has already drifted away from me, he is no longer in my soul and he has left me (вышел из меня) with the words, 'Behold, I leave your

¹⁴⁶ See notes to "Peasant Women" in *PSS*, 7:684-688.

house empty.’ I no longer have a lodger (свободен от постоя).”¹⁴⁷ Chekhov applies the sexualized feminine images of emptiness and receptivity to himself, while describing Tolstoy in masculine terms of mobility, intrusion, and withdrawal. Like the mare in “Sorrow,” Chekhov here is “blank,” emptied, and “free” to attract and generate new meaning. I suggest that Chekhov’s similarly silent and “feminine” stand-in in “Ariadna” is an eloquent echo of Tolstoy’s listener figure in *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

M. L. Semanova notes a great number of structural and thematic similarities between the two works, suggesting Chekhov’s intense interest in *The Kreutzer Sonata* and its influence on his thought.¹⁴⁸ P. U. Moeller agrees and further argues that “Ariadna” is an ironic response to Tolstoy’s controversial novella, specifically to the debate it sparked in Russian literature and thought of the 1890s regarding questions of sexual morality and in particular female sexuality. Some of the most important similarities these critics note in the two works concern their structure as framed narratives, the interaction between the frame narrator and the hero (who is also the inner narrator), and finally the attitude to women and sexuality voiced by this hero throughout his story. In each of the works, a nameless narrator acts primarily as a listener, while the hero he introduces is primarily a storyteller. But despite this similarity of the frame setup, I propose that in “Ariadna” Chekhov re-encodes the teller-listener dynamic in an important way that suggests his larger artistic and philosophical disagreements with Tolstoy and constitutes an important stage in the evolution of Chekhovian listeners.

Chekhov’s updated teller-listener model shows the listener as a figure for the author, reversing Tolstoy’s model in *The Kreutzer Sonata* where the main storyteller Pozdnyshev speaks

¹⁴⁷ PSS, Letters, 5:283-4.

¹⁴⁸ M. L. Semanova, “‘Kreutzerova Sonata’ L. N. Tolstogo i ‘Ariadna’ A. P. Chekhova,” in L. D. Opulskaia et al. (ed.), *Chekhov i Lev Tolstoi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980) 225-254.

in a voice easily recognizable as Tolstoy's own, especially if we view the novella in conjunction with its infamous Afterword which Chekhov so reviled. Critics have often claimed that the hero Pozdnyshev acts as Tolstoy's mouthpiece in *The Kreutzer Sonata*.¹⁴⁹ For example, Tolstoy's epigraph to the novella taken from the Gospel of Matthew ("And I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart") is explicitly repeated and affirmed by Pozdnyshev in the course of his story and forms the basis for his current views on sex and marriage. It is significant that Tolstoy uses the same biblical excerpt as an epigraph to his short story "The Devil," written in the same year as *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and, as Irina Reyfman argues, he alludes to the same passage in his 1859 novella *Family Happiness*. There, "in a twisted reinterpretation of the New Testament commandment," the heroine Masha "becomes sinful after she is looked at with lust by a man other than her husband," which "eventually translates into her own ability to look at a man other than her husband with lust."¹⁵⁰ Thus Masha is an object of a man's lustful gaze, which awakens her own sexuality and precipitates her "fall" and, ironically, the de-sexualization of her marriage. All three narratives ("The Devil," *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and *Family Happiness*) focus on the dangers of sexuality, in particular female sexuality. Clearly, then, in Pozdnyshev Tolstoy finds a voice that most directly represents his own philosophical concerns—concerns that frequently emerge in his oeuvre.

Pozdnyshev seems to endorse the same message as does Tolstoy the author. In his Afterword, which he appends to the novella "in order to explain in clear and simple terms" the moral beliefs underlying the work, Tolstoy explicitly puts forth his five-point moral philosophy

¹⁴⁹ See Moeller, also Charles Isenberg, "Tolstoy's Fallen Man" in *Telling Silence: The Russian Framed Narratives of Renunciation*.

¹⁵⁰ See Irina Reyfman, "Female Voice and Male Gaze in Leo Tolstoy's Family Happiness" in *Mapping the Feminine: Russian Women and Cultural Difference*, Hilde Hoogenboom, Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, and Irina Reyfman, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2008) 29-50 (32).

which basically repeats Pozdnyshev's main convictions, including advocating sexual abstinence and a strongly negative attitude toward "the false science called medicine."¹⁵¹ Additionally, Tolstoy's uncompromising, all-knowing tone in the Afterword—recalling the rhythmic structure and the absolute language of the Book of Genesis (the repetitions of "That's first," "That's second," "And I believe this is not good," et cetera)¹⁵²—can also be recognized in Pozdnyshev's claims to absolute and privileged knowledge: "You are talking about what is considered to be, and I am talking about what *is*."¹⁵³

While Pozdnyshev's voice is close to Tolstoy's, Isenberg further suggests that Pozdnyshev's listener in turn is Tolstoy's "model reader."¹⁵⁴ This nameless figure seems to be completely focused on Pozdnyshev throughout the narrative, intensely absorbed and progressively converted to his views, indeed intoxicated by his "imposing and pleasant" voice as well as by the tea Pozdnyshev offers him, which incidentally turns out to be "as strong as beer."¹⁵⁵ To Pozdnyshev's repeated inquiries as to whether his listener is tired, he replies "No, but you are," showing his complete devotion to Pozdnyshev's story. This listener appears to have no interests, no life, no function, indeed no signs of a physical body—he is emphatically never tired or sleepy—outside of listening to Pozdnyshev. His only purpose in Tolstoy's narrative is to absorb Pozdnyshev's (and Tolstoy's) views. Just as Tolstoy had once "lodged" in Chekhov's soul, so does Pozdnyshev take complete possession of his listener whose silent, submissive presence tells us of Tolstoy's expectations of his reader.

¹⁵¹ L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, 90 vols. (Moscow: 1928-1958) 27:80.

¹⁵² I am grateful to Irina Reyfman for this observation regarding the Afterword and Genesis 1, which she proposed in her graduate seminar "Practical Stylistics" in the Spring of 2008 at Columbia University.

¹⁵³ Tolstoy *PSS* 27:14.

¹⁵⁴ Isenberg 107.

¹⁵⁵ Tolstoy *PSS* 27:16.

In “Ariadna,” the behavior of the listener seems similar on the surface, but by the end of the story we see a crucial difference. By contrast to Tolstoy, Chekhov shows us that a passive and understated appearance often contains a core of strength and integrity. Thus what is at first portrayed as worthless and weak, like the mare in “Sorrow” or the women in “Peasant Women,” is revealed in the end as the source of ultimate meaning, creativity, and insight in the story. If we compare both tellers and both listeners in *Sonata* and “Ariadna,” we will see how Chekhov brings this idea to the fore.

Shamokhin’s views and the manner of their exposition are comparable to Pozdnyshev’s—actually, Semanova demonstrates that Shamokhin “uses” and quotes details of Pozdnyshev’s arguments on the gender question.¹⁵⁶ Yet Chekhov’s listener, while silent for most of the story he hears, in the end shows remarkable independence. Unlike Tolstoy’s listener, he has a body and a mind of his own. He is tired and turns away from Shamokhin to go to sleep, thus affirming his embodied physical, not just rhetorical, presence in the story.¹⁵⁷ His silence means something other than the silence of Tolstoy’s listener. Having patiently listened to Shamokhin’s story, the listener is not taken in by it emotionally, but rather uses his powers as an observer to form an independent opinion of Shamokhin as “a resolute woman-hater whom it would be impossible to bring back around (переубедить)” (9:131). Furthermore, Semanova points out a single sentence in “Ariadna” that eloquently demonstrates the listener’s calm, rational self-distancing from Shamokhin’s story: “Shamokhin, moved by his own story, and I

¹⁵⁶ See Semanova 251. However, despite the connection noted between them, Shamokhin does not possess Pozdnyshev’s redeeming quality, namely his final coming around (переворот) to the realization that his wife is not a beast but “a human being”—a detail Chekhov praised and which recalls the finale of his own story “Sorrow” where Iona comes to treat and relate to his mare as if she were a human being.

¹⁵⁷ Cathy Popkin notes that Chekhov develops “a whole sleep-or-story economy” in his framed narratives emphasizing the importance of the audience’s reception for determining the worthiness (“tellability”) of stories. “Good stories [...] are more worthwhile than sleep.” See Popkin, *Pragmatics of Insignificance: Chekhov, Zoshchenko, Gogol* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 47 and 228.

descended the stairs” (9:130). Chekhov’s listener clearly separates himself from the teller. In this sense, the figure of the teller Shamokhin who aspires to be an omniscient author can be taken for a representation of Tolstoy himself and his authorial program. At the same time, the listener who refuses to listen to him at the end exercises power unimaginable to the listener in Tolstoy’s novella. It is also significant that in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, it is Pozdnyshev who turns away from his listener at the end of the story. Pozdnyshev thus asserts his power over his listener, nearly reducing him to tears, and retains the final word, literally: “‘Yes, forgive me (простите),’ he repeated the very word with which he ended his story.” In this way, Tolstoy’s narrative ends with Pozdnyshev’s final word.¹⁵⁸ In “Ariadna,” Chekhov’s listener does not grant Shamokhin this kind of power, reserving it for himself.

To use Chudakov’s terms, in constructing his story about Ariadna and women in general, Shamokhin displays, perhaps in caricatured form, many principles underlying Tolstoy’s authorship: his “monodirected persuading force” (однонаправленная убеждающая сила), “explanatory psychologism” (объясняющий психологизм), “philosophical conclusions,” and an elevated (надзвездная) position of knowledge and judgment.¹⁵⁹ Tolstoy’s impulse to indulge in endless theoretical and moral expositions on human nature, society, and art led him to append additional treatises to his own works (as in the case of the Afterword to *The Kreutzer Sonata*), as well as to those of others (his widely circulated explanatory Afterword to Chekhov’s story “The Darling” [Душечка] comes to mind). This desire to clarify and analyze was something Chekhov as an artist, especially in his later period, could not tolerate. By contrast, he preferred to let the silence speak for itself, abandoning his reader to wade alone through the ineffable and

¹⁵⁸ Tolstoy *PSS* 27:78.

¹⁵⁹ A. P. Chudakov, “Tolstovskii epizod v poetike Chekhova” in *Chekhov i Lev Tolstoi*, pp. 168, 175, 178.

inexplicable waters of the human psyche. His authorial stand-in in “Ariadna,” then, turns away from Shamokhin in the same way as Chekhov the independent *listener* and observer turned away from the incessant *teller* and moralizer Tolstoy.

Just as the listener in *The Kreutzer Sonata* is intoxicated by Pozdnyshev’s intensity and charisma, so Chekhov admitted in his letters that Tolstoy had once had a “hypnotic” influence on him.¹⁶⁰ Looking at the two works together, then, we see Chekhov not only turning away from Tolstoy in “Ariadna,” but also in a sense abandoning his former self—that is, making a transition from being a submissive listener to an independent one. In line with this, some critics have proposed autobiographical connections between Chekhov and Shamokhin. Carol Flath, for example, establishes parallels between Shamokhin and Tolstoy’s Levin in *Anna Karenina* while also stressing that Shamokhin’s story has much in common with Chekhov’s own past.¹⁶¹ Indeed, some details of the romance between Ariadna and Shamokhin have strong autobiographical parallels to Chekhov’s affair with Lika Mizinova.¹⁶² Flath discusses Shamokhin’s fear of female sexuality as the cause for his inability to propose marriage to Ariadna, which in turn leads to the displacement of his frustration onto her and onto women in general. Flath further suggests the physical proximity between Shamokhin and Chekhov’s stand-in in the same cabin (“it turned out we shared a cabin”) to be the basis for their common passive and destructive treatment of women—Shamokhin’s inability to propose marriage to Ariadna and Chekhov’s abandonment of Mizinova. As Rayfield contends, moreover, Shamokhin “reiterates what Chekhov had thought

¹⁶⁰ Chekhov PSS, Letters, 5:283.

¹⁶¹ See Flath, “Writing about Nothing: Chekhov’s ‘Ariadna’ and the Narcissistic Narrator,” 237-239.

¹⁶² For a detailed discussion of the autobiographical sources for “Ariadna,” see E. A. Polotskaia, “K istochnikam rasskaza ‘Ariadna,’” *Izvestiia Akademii Nauk SSSR. Serii literatury i iazyka*, Vyp. 1, tom 31 (January–February 1972) 142–61.

about woman twelve years earlier,” referring to the younger Chekhov’s plans to write a thesis on sexual dominance (половой авторитет), which he outlined in a letter to his brother.¹⁶³

Shamokhin is passive, and by his inaction and hesitation in proposing marriage to Ariadna in response to her feelings, Flath claims, he “evades responsibility” and pushes Ariadna to promiscuity and ruin. According to Flath, this psychological passivity is “an integral part of [Chekhov’s] narrative stance.”¹⁶⁴ What I propose instead, however, is that Chekhov’s objective “passive” narrative stance is actually full of power and represents maturation past his former views and behaviors. Unlike the passivity of Shamokhin or even of the eligible bachelor Chekhov in their relationships with women, Chekhov’s narrative detachment demonstrates and nurtures independence of thought. By turning away from Shamokhin in their shared steamboat cabin, Chekhov leaves behind not only Tolstoyanism but also, importantly, himself as the formerly passive, “hypnotized” disciple of Tolstoy. In the end, Chekhov equalizes Shamokhin and Ariadna by showing their behavior in the outer frame of the story unfiltered by Shamokhin’s narration. When the narrator meets and directly observes Ariadna after hearing Shamokhin’s story, two details he reports about her behavior contradict each other. Her firm handshake seems to show sincerity, while her capricious tone in addressing Shamokhin suggests the opposite. Similarly, Shamokhin’s interrupting directive not to believe her praise for the narrator’s work could be taken as a gesture of either caring or jealousy (from a failed lover and author). In this scene, the narrator, unlike Shamokhin earlier, does not attempt to draw conclusions about Ariadna’s or Shamokhin’s characters. Instead, he allows the reader to observe their actions and behaviors without authorial judgments or explanations attached to them. By freeing the reader

¹⁶³ Rayfield 125. For the full letter, see *PSS*, Letters, 1:63-66.

¹⁶⁴ Flath 238-239.

from Shamokhin's story about Ariadna, Chekhov allows more than one perspective on the heroine. The reader can now choose to view her apart from the "male text" about her.¹⁶⁵

Both "Peasant Women" and "Ariadna" stage a conflict between two types of authors: the author-teller and the author-listener. These two models of authorship can be applied to what Chekhov saw as his confrontation with the dogmatism of Tolstoy. The late Tolstoy, in Chekhov's view, was the kind of author who *tells*, that is, provides an unambiguous moral lesson. Chekhov exaggerates and parodies this kind of telling in characters such as Matvei in "Peasant Women" and Shamokhin in "Ariadna." By contrast, the listeners he inserts in these stories model the new kind of authorship Chekhov wants to promote in his art. While Shamokhin attempts to write a "novel" (*roman*) about Ariadna, and Matvei and Diudia together create a "magnificent sad song" about Mashen'ka, the ethics of these creative endeavors are questioned by the presence of listeners. The listeners in these stories stage their own quiet rebellions against the tellers—the women in "Peasant Women" contemplate murder, and Chekhov's stand-in in "Ariadna" figuratively murders Shamokhin's authorial pretensions by turning away and cutting off Shamokhin's story.

Tolstoy in his dogmatism denies the reader the search for truth, instead promoting the results of his own search. He denies the journey and the questioning, while Chekhov emphasizes them, preferring questions to ready solutions. Whereas Tolstoy shows the teller (Pozdnyshev) as a model for spiritual resurrection, Chekhov shows the listener as a model for critical

¹⁶⁵ Isenberg 28. Isenberg talks about the "frame narrative of renunciation" as a recurring literary model in Russian literature in which it is always a male narrator who tells the love story, while the heroine's unfiltered voice is never given. See Isenberg, p. 144. Paradoxically, while Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* is an example to the contrary (wherein a female heroine narrates the story of her troubled marriage), Tolstoy manages, as Reyfman shows, to reappropriate the female narrative position to his own goals of revealing the dangers of female sexuality. Thus, despite difference in method, the attitude strongly recalls Shamokhin's: Tolstoy uses the female narrative perspective, and makes it plausible, in order "to validate his view of woman as an irrational and lustful creature." See Reyfman, "Female Voice and Male Gaze," 49.

discernment, compassion, and independence of thought. The listener is a key requirement for Chekhov's art, tying together questions of objectivity, eventfulness, active or passive engagement, and counteracting dominant modes of telling, while enabling silent or silenced voices to tell their stories.

Chekhov's figured author arises as a listener among many other listeners employed in his stories. This authorial figure is a turning point in the Chekhovian tradition of listener characters. Chekhov makes an appearance in this story because it is an explicit polemic with Tolstoy, one that shaped many of Chekhov's quests with regard to art, literature, and ideas. In this instance, Chekhov needs to step in and be revealed, he violates the rules of his own artistic universe precisely to endorse them: to turn away publically from Tolstoy's "moral finger," just as Chekhov the listener turns to the wall and tunes out Shamokhin's rant. It is for this reason that the listener's status in this work is emphasized as that of a famous author—"Ariadna" is Chekhov's statement about authorship, in which he allows his own surrogate to appear in sharp relief against the aspiring "author" Shamokhin, a composite caricature of Tolstoy and his followers, including Chekhov himself. Just as Pushkin used the figure of the Author to turn away from and parody the established romantic tradition in *Onegin*, Chekhov also uses his authorial figuration to question and leave behind a literary sensibility he had outgrown.

Chapter Three. Bulgakov: I, the Reader

Придет ли старое время?

Настоящее таково, что я стараюсь жить, не замечая его... не видеть, не слышать!

Недавно, в поездке в Москву и Саратов, мне пришлось все видеть воочию и больше я не хотел бы видеть.

Я видел, как серые толпы с гиканьем и гнусной руганью бьют стекла в поездах, видел, как бьют людей. Видел разрушенные и обгоревшие дома в Москве... тупые и зверские лица...

Видел толпы, которые осаждали подъезды захваченных, запертых банков, голодные хвосты у лавок, затравленных и жалких офицеров, видел газетные листки, где пишут, в сущности, об одном: о крови, которая льется и на юге, и на западе, и на востоке, и о тюрьмах.

Все воочию видел и понял окончательно, что произошло.

Will the past return?

The present is such that I try to live not noticing it...not seeing, not hearing!

Recently, when I went to Moscow and Saratov, I got to see everything with my own eyes and I don't want to see any more.

I saw gray crowds, shouting and swearing, break train windows, I saw people being beaten. I saw destroyed and burnt houses in Moscow...stupid and brutish faces...

I saw crowds storm the doors of locked nationalized banks, hungry lines in front of stores, bullied and pitiful officers, saw newspaper pages, all about essentially the same thing: about blood being spilled in the South and in the West and in the East, about prisons.

I saw everything with my own eyes and realized fully what had happened.¹⁶⁶

Author-witness: a new aspect of the figured author

When we look at the previous figured authors in this study, in particular those of Pushkin in *Eugene Onegin* and Chekhov in "Ariadna," we can see that in those cases the authorial figuration reflects a desire to move beyond a tradition that has already peaked and become, in a sense, overripe. Pushkin and Chekhov place surrogates for themselves in their works to point in a new creative direction, to expose and subvert the authoritarianism and automatism of the existing tradition. I will argue that in the works of Bulgakov and Nabokov the situation is the

¹⁶⁶ From Bulgakov's letter to his sister Nadezhda Zemskaia of December 31, 1917 in Mikhail Bulgakov, *Dnevnik. Pis'ma 1914-1940*, ed. V. Losev (Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel, 1997) 9-10.

opposite, a mirror image of the artistic crises faced by Pushkin and Chekhov. The two later authors look backward, not forward. They lament the old tradition. In this way, Bulgakov and Nabokov react to their own historical moment that is bringing destruction and fragmentation on the old culture. They construct their art around the idea of lost culture and lost home. Their figured authors point to the loss and attempt to rebuild what is lost. However, there is an important distinction between the two authors. Edythe Haber notes that where Nabokov's art recreated the idyllic past of his Russian childhood, for Bulgakov “it was precisely the coming of dreaded history—its clash with the old world and threat to the old image of the self,” the historical rupture created by the Revolution and Civil War—that inspired his serious writing.¹⁶⁷ Instead of idyll, Bulgakov depicts the chaos that obliterated the past, focusing on the individual's struggle with the forces of destruction.

In this chapter, I introduce a new dimension of the concept of the figured author, namely the author-witness. The witness of course is a figure that stands in some relation to the main action, without directly participating in it, thus sharing many characteristics with the figured author as I defined it in the Introduction to this study. I will discuss the witness in the context of Bulgakov's work. This interest in witnessing destruction and loss reflects Bulgakov's historical reality—the First World War, the Bolshevik revolution, the Civil War and the subsequent formation of the Soviet state, with all the attendant tragedies and crises of these events: the extreme poverty in the Moscow of the early 1920s, the Soviet bureaucracy, and the Stalinist repressions. In addition to these historical changes, Bulgakov's witness motif acquired a religious or mystical dimension, in part because for him holding on to religion in a newly atheist society was another aspect of preserving the past that had been lost in the revolution. Bulgakov, the eldest son of a theology professor, structured his most ambitious and complex work, the

¹⁶⁷ Edythe Haber, *Mikhail Bulgakov: The Early Years* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 19.

novel *The Master and Margarita* (Мастер и Маргарита), around a retelling of the story of the passion and death of Christ.¹⁶⁸ Throughout his work, Bulgakov returns to the themes of individual suffering and the dissolution of cultural constants. He is interested in portraying events that are so unbelievable and affecting that they require a witness to attest to their truth. In this chapter, I discuss Bulgakov's approach to figured authorship. I examine in particular the 1927 short story "Morphine" (Морфий) and the unusual authorial figuration in this story, which highlights the importance of the witness and the increasingly fragile status of authorship in the Soviet Russia of Bulgakov's time. I look at this story in the context of Bulgakov's other work, especially his short story cycle *Notes of a Young Doctor* (Записки юного врача) and his late masterpiece *The Master and Margarita*.

"Morphine" explores the beginning of a new historical era, one marked by radical and catastrophic changes. In a letter to his sister, written in December of 1917 (and quoted as the epigraph to this chapter), Bulgakov explicitly talks about witnessing destruction and about not wanting to see any more. The emphasis on seeing and eyewitnessing (видеть воочию) horrific suffering and destruction stems from the realization of apocalyptic changes that have just occurred. The reverberations of this massive chaos can be discerned in "Morphine" where the hero Poliakov travels to Moscow for psychiatric treatment precisely at the time when Bulgakov's letter was written -- the end of 1917. But instead of the revolution, we observe the setting of a psychiatric hospital, which suggests the deep psychological trauma of these historical events.

¹⁶⁸ The fact that the Master's novel focuses on the perspective of Pilate rather than that of Ieshua fits with my interest in narrative structures that pay attention to figures standing in relation to action: even though Pilate is himself shown to suffer from migraines and insomnia, his suffering increases dramatically as he grows to realize the inevitability of Ieshua's execution. Thus, it is Pilate's experience of another's suffering and death that is of primary interest to the Master (and Bulgakov). Similarly, the figured author of this study is characterized by diminished participation, by contemplating the predicament of another and one's relation to it.

The association between doctors, in particular psychiatrists, and the new political order first appears in “Morphine” and is developed later in *The Master and Margarita*.

Many of Bulgakov's works feature a protagonist who is close to the autobiographical author.¹⁶⁹ For example, in his early works that depict the events of the Civil War, the same incident keeps recurring, which seems to point to attempts at a symbolic recasting of a biographical event. The protagonist witnesses the murder of an innocent person (usually a Jew), finds himself unable to interfere, and eventually flees. This event is depicted with some variations in the 1922 “On the Night of the Second” (В ночь на третье число), “The Red Crown” (Красная корона), and “The Unusual Adventures of a Doctor” (Необыкновенные приключения доктора), as well as in his novel *The White Guard* (Белая гвардия). Further, in the 1926 “I Killed” (Я убил), the incident recurs again, yet this time the protagonist, Doctor Yashvin, is so outraged by the brutality he witnesses that he kills the torturer, a Petlyura army general who had enlisted Yashvin as a military physician. Although Yashvin does not prevent the torture and killings he witnesses, he actively punishes evil in the story, which cannot be said of Bulgakov's earlier protagonist-witnesses who are frozen by their inaction and subsequently are overcome with guilt for their failure to intervene. These repeated narrations of an incident, that appears to stem from Bulgakov's own experience, signify attempts to process and re-imagine a situation of agonizing inaction and guilt from the perspective of the witness.

¹⁶⁹ Haber devotes her book to the study of the evolution of the authorial personae across Bulgakov's texts, and Boris Gasparov observes the close connection between Bulgakov's symbolic and biographical worlds. See Haber, *Mikhail Bulgakov: The Early Years* and Boris Gasparov, “Novyi zavet v proizvedeniakh M. A. Bulgakova” in *Literaturnye leitmotivy: ocherki russkoi literatury XX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994) 120. For additional sources noting the connection, see also Ellendea Proffer, *Bulgakov: Life and Work* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984) and A. Colin Wright, *Mikhail Bulgakov: Life and Interpretations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

Witnessing, weakness, and inaction are the recurring characteristics of the central heroes of Bulgakov's early prose and are linked symbolically to the new era ushered in by the Bolshevik revolution. The autobiographical heroes who witness and flee violence are mostly concentrated in Bulgakov's stories from the early 1920s. Haber demonstrates how the non-violent and non-intrusive authorial persona and the fragmentary genres of these early works (“notes” and “diaries”) mirror the historical break with the old culture. She writes:

The authorial persona, whose principles and temperament belong very much to the old world, is placed within an alien and hostile environment created by the Civil War and its aftermath. While the hero's traditional moral and cultural values emerge as unquestionably superior to the violence and nihilism surrounding him, he himself is weak and, powerless to fight for his principles, takes fright and flees.¹⁷⁰

The autobiographical hero who witnesses violence but is unable to stop it feels powerless and guilty, trapped by his “old world” nonviolent morality. This is the conflict at the core of the displaced Bulgakovian self, reflecting the plight of an author whom Soviet critics had labeled a “yesterday's man” and a “former writer,” before his literary career even had a chance to develop.¹⁷¹ The old values of the educated intelligentsia become irrelevant in the new destructive times, and, as Haber notes, this is reflected in Bulgakov's early work in the recurring narrative structure of murderer-victim-witness. The witness represents the pacifist intellectual of the past, and the murder stands for the violent chaos of the present. For the witness, the encounter results in flight and subsequent guilt. The inner conflict of the powerless intellectual brought on by this painful witnessing is one Bulgakov wrestles with throughout his work. In her study, Haber concludes that the author finally resolves this psychic trauma by making his hero a writer in his later works, thus turning what seemed like weakness into an essential attribute of the

¹⁷⁰ Haber 44.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Lesley Milne, *Mikhail Bulgakov: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) 1.

hero: solitude, sensitivity, alienation guarantee the artist's success.¹⁷² The complicated authorial figuration in “Morphine,” I suggest, represents the most open and conscious embracing of weakness and suffering as a trait characteristic of the artist. The story's two protagonists represent a victim and a witness and their accounts converge to produce a new, complex portrait of the author, which looks forward to the Master, as well as to both Pilate and Ieshua, in *The Master and Margarita*.

Like Chekhov's “Ariadna,” “Morphine” is a framed tale. In the story, Dr. Bomgard reads the diary of his friend Dr. Poliakov who had just committed suicide. Bomgard tells us about reading and re-reading his friend's diary, eventually deciding to publish it.¹⁷³ The frame of the story focuses on Bomgard's experience of reading, while the inserted narrative emphasizes writing as a way of coping with suffering: “[the diary is] my only friend in the world,” writes Poliakov about his lonely struggle with morphine addiction.¹⁷⁴ The two parts interlock to convey Bulgakov's views about medicine and art (and the fate of authorship in particular). “Morphine” sets up a relationship between reading, writing, suffering and witnessing suffering that builds on motifs in Bulgakov's earlier writing and bears strong thematic and narrative connections to his final work, *The Master and Margarita*. In this analysis of “Morphine,” I will discuss how suffering and witnessing the suffering of another (which correspond to Poliakov's writing and

¹⁷² See Haber 228-238.

¹⁷³ Curiously, the 2008 Russian screen adaptation of “Morphine” violates this design, making Bomgard even more marginal than he is in Bulgakov's story. In the film, the frame narrated from Bomgard's perspective is merged with the story of Poliakov (who is the only narrator). A random character named Bomgard appears for a split second in one scene. He never interacts with Poliakov and appears to have no connection to him. Thus whereas in Bulgakov's story both doctors narrate from a first-person perspective with Bomgard's narrative occurring in the frame and thus being less central than Poliakov's, the film makes Poliakov's perspective the only one in the story. Bomgard is presented only externally, as a mere passerby in Poliakov's story.

¹⁷⁴ M. A. Bulgakov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982) 1:117. (All quotations from Bulgakov's text are from this edition, unless otherwise noted. All further references to this edition will be given in the text, with the first number indicating the volume and the second, the page).

Bomgard's reading, respectively) inform Bulgakov's use of the figured author in this story and what this means for his other work.

Self, Other and the Figured Author: Poliakov and Bomgard

As Gasparov shows, Bulgakov's fictional world is not only linked closely to the author's biography, but develops as a coherent whole in which the same images, motifs and symbolic relationships unfold, culminating in their fullest development in *The Master and Margarita* (on which Bulgakov continuously worked from 1928 until his death in 1940).¹⁷⁵ The short story “Morphine” has an unusual place in Bulgakov's biography, as well as in the development of his artistic system. First of all, its publication in 1927 marks the final publication of Bulgakov's work in Russia during his lifetime. After this story, Bulgakov's hopes for publication were stifled, finally leading him to desperate measures such as writing several letters to the Soviet government in which he likens his plight as an unpublished writer to that of someone who has been “buried alive” and, quite courageously, requests either to be given work as a consultant at the Moscow Art Theater or allowed to emigrate.¹⁷⁶ As the final one of his works Bulgakov saw published, then, “Morphine” can be said to have been the author's “last breath” before being lowered into the ground of artistic oblivion (until the gradual recovery of his works began in the mid-1950s). Appropriately enough, the story was born of an earlier unfinished project that Bulgakov considered important, a novel called “The Ailment” (Недуг). The themes of ailing and suffering, as well as those of treatment and healing, run through Bulgakov's biography and art. In his later writings, they are transformed into themes of spiritual, rather than physical,

¹⁷⁵ Gasparov 83.

¹⁷⁶ See the full text of the letter in English translation in Milne 268-274.

healing, mirroring his two occupations as doctor and author. The predominating characters in much of his early writing are doctors, while those of his later, unpublished, works are authors (and often patients). “Morphine” stands in the middle of a transformation in Bulgakov's work, portraying a moment in which the doctor-protagonist faces the author-protagonist and cedes to him the central role in Bulgakov's work.

“Morphine” was first published in 1927 in the medical journal *The Medical Worker* as part of a cycle of stories *Notes of a Young Doctor*, which had been serialized in the same journal since 1925.¹⁷⁷ The stories follow a young zemstvo doctor to his first post upon graduating from medical school. The protagonist, narrating the stories in the first-person, is a sympathetic figure who (mostly) successfully battles death and disease in his operating room, all the while struggling with his own inexperience and fear of failure. “Morphine” was the ninth and last story in this sequence to be published; and even though it follows the same protagonist as in the previous stories, who has now been transferred from his lonely and remote zemstvo post to a well-staffed large hospital in a provincial town, much about this final story is different. For one, the tone of “Morphine” is serious. The lighthearted self-irony of the earlier stories is mostly gone, replaced by psychic trauma and somber retrospective reflection.¹⁷⁸ Secondly, together with another story “I Killed,” published directly before it in *The Medical Worker* and similarly completely lacking the humor of the other medical stories, “Morphine” is a framed narrative in which a second doctor's voice narrates the main events. Additionally, while the doctor-narrator's

¹⁷⁷ The only exception is the first story of the cycle, called “The Steel Throat” (Стальное горло) which was published in another journal, *The Red Panorama* (Красная панорама).

¹⁷⁸ The stories “Starry Rash” (Звездная сыпь) and “I Killed,” while also published as part of the medical cycle, also have a serious tone. Furthermore, “I Killed,” while its first-person narrator is also a doctor, seems to fall outside of the common established frame of the other eight medical stories—it does not have the same cast of characters and the same location and narrative continuity that the rest of the stories share. Ellendea Proffer suggests that thematically this story belongs with Bulgakov's Civil War stories rather than his medical stories. See Ellendea Proffer's commentary in Bulgakov, 1:419.

circumstances and identity show continuity with the previous stories, in “Morphine” this formerly nameless figure suddenly acquires a name—Vladimir Mikhailovich Bomgard. (At the same time, the geographical locations are renamed and dates are shifted in relation to the earlier stories). Bulgakov finally names his hero, yet simultaneously makes him peripheral to the story. Thus Bomgard, formerly the narrative center of the medical stories, now becomes a secondary narrative presence in relation to its central hero, Dr. Poliakov. Unlike the previous stories of the cycle where Bomgard is always performing surgery and curing illness, in “Morphine” he does not treat anyone. His only patient is Poliakov, whose death by suicide renders Bomgard's medical expertise obsolete. The only recovery effected by Bomgard is a figurative one: by reading and publishing Poliakov's diary, he immortalizes his memory. Thus Bomgard emerges in “Morphine” from active medicine into a passive role as a reader, which in turn helps him effect resurrection.

So who is the figured author in “Morphine”? Although I claim that Bomgard is the emblematic figured author of this work, the question is complex. We know that Bulgakov often endows the protagonists of his work with multiple elements of his own biography. For this reason, for example, several critics have mined *Notes of a Young Doctor* for information about Bulgakov's own life as a zemstvo doctor and included many of the facts from *Notes* in biographical essays about him.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the hero of *Notes* (that is, Bomgard), despite the work's highly poetic and symbolic character, is probably the least fictionalized of Bulgakov's

¹⁷⁹ Ellendea Proffer calls these stories “deeply autobiographical” and rearranges Bulgakov's original order in her edition to reflect their internal chronology. See her notes in Bulgakov, *SS*, 1:419. Wright actually cites *Notes* as a biographical source in the opening section of his book, thus collapsing Bulgakov together with his doctor-narrator. By contrast, Milne and Etkind treat the work as primarily fictional and symbolic, although Milne acknowledges its autobiographical basis. See Efim Etkind, “Sumerechnyi mir doktora Bomgarda,” *Vremia i my*, No. 81 (1984) 120-132.

authorial personae.¹⁸⁰ Yuri Vilenskii's documentary account of Bulgakov's medical career is an excellent testimony to this.¹⁸¹ However, the presence of the second doctor in “Morphine” complicates the situation. Dr. Poliakov's morphine addiction has a real and similarly dramatic precedent in Bulgakov's own life: his exhausting battle with morphine dependency lasted nearly a year.¹⁸² Both doctors, then, have biographical connections to the author. Not only are they doubles of each other, but also each other's complementary opposites: one primarily a writer, the other a reader; one is a patient, the other a doctor; one ends his life, the other looks hopefully to the future—publishing his friend's diary to bring solace to others in similar anguish. As to the figured author, even though both doctors bear biographical traits of Bulgakov, it is Bomgard who occupies the more marginal space in the narrative in relation to Poliakov, just as Chekhov's stand-in in “Ariadna” lets Shamokhin take center stage and Pushkin's Author only briefly

¹⁸⁰ See Milne, 125 and Proffer's introduction in Bulgakov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1:13. The only other character that comes close to the young doctor in terms of autobiographicity is the narrator of *Notes on the Cuff*, who tells us, in diary form, of his adventures as a military doctor in Vladikavkaz until his arrival in Moscow to establish a writing career (all events from Bulgakov's life). Nadine Natov writes of these works, “Special devices designed to separate Bulgakov as author from his narrators do not always veil the basic parallelism between them,” *Mikhail Bulgakov* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986) 22.

¹⁸¹ Y. G. Vilenskii, *Doktor Bulgakov* (Kiev: Zdorovia, 1991). See pp. 72-82 for documentary evidence of Bulgakov's work in the village of Nikol'skoe near the town of Sychevka. In *Notes*, Bulgakov slightly alters facts, dates and numbers, at the same time preserving the larger facts and realities of this period in his life. Thus, he changes the name Sychevka to Grachevka in “Towel with a Rooster,” Nikol'skoe becomes Muryevo in most of *Notes* and Gorelovo in “Morphine.” In the stories, the narrator refers to the exhausting work of daily attending to an enormous number of patients. In “The Vanished Eye,” he claims to have seen 15,613 patients over the course of his year at Muryevo. In the Sychevka zemstvo certificate issued to Bulgakov at the end of his yearlong term at Nikol'skoe, the number of patients seen by him is listed as 15,361 (Vilenskii 82). The changes are thus insignificant enough that they seem to suggest mere playful rearrangement of figures and letters, often not at all covering up the real biographical information. Two changes however seem to be significant to Bulgakov's artistic design in the stories: the shifting of the time frame forward by a year, thus reflecting the narrator's physical distance in the stories from the events of the revolution; and his emphasis on the loneliness of the hero (in fact, Bulgakov arrived at Nikol'skoe with his wife and had friends during his time there).

¹⁸² While working in Nikol'skoe in 1917, Bulgakov developed a morphine dependency after injecting it to calm a reaction to an anti-diphtheria serum (which he had to take after close contact with a diphtheria patient, the incident described in “The Steel Throat”). The addiction lasted until his return to Kiev in 1918, when Bulgakov finally was able to overcome it with the help of his wife and his stepfather, doctor I. P. Voskresenkii. See the account of Bulgakov's wife Tatiana Lappa, quoted in Vilenskii 89, 96-97 and in M. Chudakova, *Zhizneopisanie Mikhaila Bulgakova* (Moscow: Kniga, 1988) 62.

appears strolling next to Eugene in *Onegin*. In other words, Poliakov's status in "Morphine" is closer to that of the central hero, while Bomgard's position in the frame indicates his status as the figured author. That the contrast is not as pronounced as in previous cases speaks to the story's interest in the boundaries of self and in the human bond established through witnessing. Merging Poliakov and Bomgard in "Morphine" functions also as a localized version of a larger feature of Bulgakov's late poetics: establishing and then merging opposite categories.¹⁸³ In "Morphine" this merging of the two figures, the hero and reader of the diary, acquires an important meaning. It reveals art to be more compassionate than medicine, because while medicine draws sharp boundaries between doctors and patients, art abolishes them, uniting reader and hero, witness and victim.

The relationship between Bomgard and Poliakov in the story has invited a number of critical interpretations. Haber proposes a reading of Poliakov as Bulgakov's younger weaker self and Bomgard as the author's stronger present self (similarly to the way Monika Greenleaf conceives of Lensky and Onegin as stages in the author-narrator's maturation). By showing compassion to Poliakov, a figure similar to the fleeing protagonists of Bulgakov's earlier works, Bomgard demonstrates the author's new stance with regard to weakness and fallibility which would inform his later art.¹⁸⁴ Marianne Gourg explicitly identifies Poliakov with Bulgakov (referring to the hero as "Poliakov-Bulgakov" throughout her analysis) and sees Bomgard as a double of Poliakov.¹⁸⁵ Nadine Natov suggests distribution of Bulgakov's biographical persona

¹⁸³ Thus Gasparov notes, for example, the "paradoxical combination of omnipotence and weakness, creative force and retreat from action in a decisive moment" that characterize Bulgakov's protagonists, terming this paradox "the combination of the roles of Christ and Pilate"). See Gasparov 97-98.

¹⁸⁴ Haber 129-33.

¹⁸⁵ Marianne Gourg, "The story 'Morphine': an Attempt at Analysis in the Context of Mikhail Bulgakov's Creative Biography," in *Bulgakov: The Novelist-Playwright*, Lesley Milne, Ed. (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1996) 130-136. See p. 133.

between the two characters, but does not specify how balanced this distribution is.¹⁸⁶ Thus critics disagree about which of the two characters is closer to an autobiographical representation of Bulgakov, but they agree nevertheless that Poliakov and Bomgard are linked to each other, and to Bulgakov, in an important way. Gourg observes that even the names of the two doctors, when combined, anagrammatically mirror Bulgakov's own name. While this is a recurrent trick in many of Bulgakov's works,¹⁸⁷ it is noteworthy that in this case the anagram works only based on both names taken together, rather than a single one. This perception supports the idea that both characters can be viewed as authorial figurations and as complementary parts of the same whole.

Along with the similarity and complementarity, however, there is also a crucial difference between the two. Critics have often noted the “sensational” character of “Morphine” due to its detailed descriptions of drug addiction and death by suicide. Bulgakov incorporated his own experiences of witnessing and suffering into his portrayal of Poliakov and Bomgard in a complex way. Milne writes:

Both [addiction and suicide] are traumatic experiences from Bulgakov's biography. In 1915 he was in the room when a close friend, the best man at his wedding, shot himself; the young medical student [Bulgakov] was sole witness to his death. While in Nikol'skoe Bulgakov temporarily became dependent upon morphine after using it on himself to kill pain from an anti-diphtheria serum, injected after he had been exposed to the infection while sucking clear the blocked throat of a child on whom he was performing a tracheotomy.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Natov 25.

¹⁸⁷ Both Gasparov and Haber note the anagrammatic likeness of the name Mikhail Bakaleinikov, the hero of the story “On the Night of the Third,” to Bulgakov’s own name. (See Gasparov 87, Haber 63). Haber also suggests that the name Abram, the protagonist of the 1923 story “The Raid” (Hajer), contains Bulgakov's initials, M. A. B. (Haber 67). Gasparov notes that Bulgakov often plays with partial likeness of character names; he proposes that this is one manifestation of Bulgakov's interest in the theme of the apocryphal text in his work. See Gasparov 90-94.

¹⁸⁸ Milne 137.

It is interesting that in “Morphine” both traumatic experiences, the suicide and the drug dependence, are combined in Poliakov, while Bomgard is the witness both to the death (directly) and to the addiction (through reading). While the protagonist of *Notes* (i.e. Bomgard) is often recognized as the most directly autobiographical of Bulgakov's fictional self-portraits, the portrayal of Poliakov merges Bulgakov's own painful experience (his morphine addiction) with the suicide of his friend. In this way, Poliakov's suffering is an interesting combination of the suffering of the self and another. “Morphine” itself is structured as a personal reflection informed by the tragic fate of another. The story’s structure as a diary-within-a-diary explores the nature of compassion, which is the main impulse at the core of authorship and the poetic word as it is shown in “Morphine.”

Reader grants immortality: text as a trope

In addition to the figure of the witness, texts are another important motif for Bulgakov, one that is especially central to “Morphine.” Witnessing and reading coincide in the figured author of “Morphine” and communicate Bulgakov's particular image of authorship informed by the state of Soviet literature in his time. Bulgakov's most quoted line is “Manuscripts don't burn” from *The Master and Margarita*. In the novel, this aphorism is related to the idea that there is an immortal, indestructible quality to artistic creation. The Master burns his novel about Christ and Pontius Pilate after he is attacked and suppressed by Soviet censors and literary critics. But Woland, a supernatural satanic figure visiting Soviet Moscow, conjures up the manuscript despite its seeming destruction. A handwritten manuscript that depicts an unbelievable or undesirable truth is one of the most recurrent images in Bulgakov's writing. For example, in “The Unusual Adventures of a Doctor” and “Notes on the Cuff” (Необыкновенные

приключения доктора, Записки на манжетах), both published in 1922, the protagonists' personal ordeals as, respectively, a doctor during the Civil War and a struggling writer in the poverty-stricken Moscow of the 1920s are reproduced in diary form. In the 1925 novella *Heart of a Dog* (Собачье сердце, confiscated by the OGPU together with Bulgakov's diary and not published in his lifetime), it is Doctor Bormental's diary that documents a dog's gradual transformation into a human being as a result of a science experiment gone awry (an unbelievable event that also carries religious subtexts of transfiguration, incarnation and the creation of man).¹⁸⁹ In “Morphine,” Doctor Poliakov's diary documents his morphine addiction and constitutes the story's main plot and structural center. In *The Master and Margarita*, the Master's indestructible manuscript attests to the suffering of Christ (and Pilate) whose historical existence is explicitly denied by the Soviet authorities that persecute the Master. Along with other various examples of letters and notes reproduced in the body of his works, Bulgakov pays unusual attention to handwritten texts and the depth and truth of human experiences that they carry.

Bulgakov's focus on the handwritten “human document”¹⁹⁰ complements his fascination with so-called “infernal” texts—official documents, mostly printed, that reflect the oppressive bureaucratic reality of the new Soviet state, including scathing newspaper articles and literary reviews, denunciations and other texts endorsed by the state agenda that distort the truth, threaten arrest or execution. In *Heart of a Dog*, Professor Preobrazhensky famously instructs his protégé Bormental “never to read Soviet newspapers before dinner,” claiming those of his patients who

¹⁸⁹ On religious subtexts in *Heart of a Dog*, see Gasparov, pp 95-96. See also Diana L. Burgin, “Bulgakov's Early Tragedy of the Scientist-Creator: An Interpretation of *The Heart of a Dog*,” *SEEJ*, Vol. 22 (Winter, 1978) 494-508.

¹⁹⁰ Quoted from “Morphine,” 1:108.

never read newspapers to be in better health than those who do (3:142).¹⁹¹ Gasparov notes in this connection the recurrent motif of the “seal” (печать) in Bulgakov's work—the seal, or rather sealed paper, plays “a mysterious and fatal role” in the events that unfold.¹⁹² The paper with a seal denotes an official document, which often causes suffering or limits the protagonist's freedom. In “The Night of the Second,” for example, Dr. Bakaleinikov's mobilization by the Petlyura troops is so traumatic that he eventually flees, destroying and throwing to the winds his certificate of mobilization.

The confrontation between these two kinds of documents in Bulgakov's oeuvre—“human” (diaries, manuscripts) versus official texts—puts into perspective Bulgakov's interest in the process of uncovering the truth hidden under layers of falsity. As David Gillespie suggests in his study of the literary diaries of the Soviet period, “diaries serve as private rejoinders to the lie...; [t]he private diary therefore becomes a duel of discourses: open versus closed, inwardly free versus authoritarian.”¹⁹³ There is something about Bulgakov's historical and cultural moment, then, that allows texts to function as a split phenomenon: pointing both to truth and to

¹⁹¹ Even Bulgakov's own work lends itself to this duality: his hatred of writing newspaper feuilletons is well documented for it took valuable time away from his other work. A typical entry in his diary, for example, reads “Роман [из-]за [работы в] ‘Гудке,’ отнимающей лучшую часть дня, почти не подвигается” (Due to my work at “Gudok” which takes up the best part of the day, my novel is at a standstill), Mikhail Bulgakov, “Pod piatoi. Dnevnik.” in *Dnevnik. Pisma. 1914-1941* (Moscow: Sovremennyi Pisatel, 1997) Entry from July 25, 1923. Implicitly, newspaper texts devour artistic texts; print destroys the manuscript. Similarly, Bulgakov perceived his medical career as threatening to his literary one: “Страшат меня мои 32 года и брошенные на медицину годы... Ничем иным я быть не могу, я могу быть одним—писателем” (I am terrified by my 32 years and by the years wasted on medicine... I can't be anything else, I can only be a writer.), Mikhail Bulgakov, “Moi dnevnik,” November 6 (October 24), 1923. Of interest is also the following excerpt from Bulgakov's letter to his mother: “I am writing *Notes of a Zemstvo Doctor* in snatches at night. It might turn out to be a substantial thing. I am polishing *The Ailment*. But there's no time, no time! That is what is painful for me!” Here, Bulgakov emphasizes the significance of his nocturnal work on *Notes* and the novel that is later to turn into “Morphine,” but once again the literary manuscript is in danger of being consumed by his daytime preoccupation—writing newspaper texts. Quoted in Haber 43.

¹⁹² Gasparov 88.

¹⁹³ David Gillespie, “First Person Singular: the Literary Diary in the Twentieth-Century Russia,” *SEER*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (October 1999) 620-645 (625).

concealment of truth. Writing about the same period, Osip Mandelshtam suggests that another kind of handwritten document, the rough draft (черновик), possesses true immortality in a world where writers and poets are not allowed to be printed on official paper: “The safety of the rough draft is the statute assuring preservation of the power behind the literary work.”¹⁹⁴ This distinction between two kinds of texts and documents finds intense expression in Bulgakov's work where texts and textuality become emblematic of the perils and powers of authorship under an authoritarian regime. Texts, then, and by extension reading, are an important and recurrent theme for Bulgakov, one that is connected to the idea of hidden or suppressed truths regarding human suffering.

“Morphine”: from doctor to artist

“Morphine” is unusually saturated with allusions to texts and textuality, even for Bulgakov. It is a diary framed by another doctor's “notes” about reading this diary: Bomgard's signature and date at the end of the story affirm that the text is comprised of his personal notes, his own diary of sorts. Within Bomgard's framing narration, several letters are cited verbatim, complete with signatures and dates: the first letter from Poliakov to Bomgard asking for help, a note from Bomgard to the head doctor of his hospital, the head doctor's one-sentence response, and finally the second letter from Poliakov to Bomgard stating his decision to forgo medical treatment and to pass on his diary (“my medical history”) to Bomgard, complete with a suicide note (1:108). The letters and the diary constitute the body of the “human documents” in the story—they are handwritten and chronicle the tragic life story of one individual. The group of letters, beginning with Poliakov's appeal for help and ending with his suicide note, already documents

¹⁹⁴ Quoted on p. 134 in Clare Cavanagh, “The Death of the Book a la russe: The Acmeists under Stalin,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 55 (Spring 1996) 125-135.

the full arc of his suffering. The diary, which is reproduced following the letters, deepens the story introduced by the letters. The final entry of the diary shows Poliakov's decision to give it to Bomgard, thus linking the narrative back to the letters we read at the beginning of the story.

In contrast to these handwritten texts, the story alludes to another group of texts, which are coded as dangerous, false or harmful. These are the morphine prescriptions Poliakov writes for himself and which promote his agony and steadily lead to his death. Psychiatric textbooks are another source of danger: as Poliakov writes in his diary, the descriptions of patients' suffering in these textbooks falsify the experience of suffering. The textbooks' "dull, bureaucratic, meaningless words" (тусклые, казенные, ничего не говорящие слова) ultimately cover up "death—the dry, slow death" that colors Poliakov's psychic condition (1:118). The textbooks thus stand in opposition to Poliakov's diary which also attempts to describe a patient's suffering and which Poliakov himself considers an important "human" document that needs to be read by others, or at least by Bomgard. He refers to it alternatively as his "medical history" (история болезни) and his "only friend in the world," encapsulating the story's vacillation between privileging medical and "human" documents (1:117). The textbooks and the prescriptions can be labeled "medical" or "official" texts—they are described as bureaucratic and use standardized forms (prescription blanks) and language; they are also associated with print rather than handwriting and with the use of a foreign language, Latin, that allows for exclusive communication among doctors. The opposition (and connection) between the two groups of texts is vividly underscored by the fact that Poliakov's first letter to Bomgard is written on the back of a morphine prescription blank. Bomgard initially reads the text of the prescription and discovers the letter only after flipping the blank. With this revelation comes the shock ("I

flipped the paper, and my yawning ceased”) of uncovering the human document underneath the official one (1:103).

As Poliakov's diary progresses, we see a transformation in his identity, its breakdown (распад) into two states. Some entries are written in a state of drug-induced euphoria, others reflect the suffering of withdrawal. The euphoric voice expresses strength, confidence in mastery of his condition, courage: “Thanks to morphine for making me brave,” he writes about not fearing the violence in the streets of Moscow during the upheavals of 1917 (1:119). By contrast, the voice of withdrawal speaks of weakness, fear, inexpressible pain, and hopelessness: “Doctor Poliakov will no longer return to life,” “today I am a half-corpse” (1:116). These states of alternating confidence and despair parallel the two contrasting identities Poliakov comes to inhabit during his illness: still a practicing doctor, he is now also a patient suffering from a grave mental illness. As his condition worsens, his suffering and his identity as a patient become foregrounded. At the same time, his language and writing become more experimental and poetic. Thus, he begins the entry dated April 9, 1917 with the words “Spring is terrible” and goes on to describe the dark vision of the spring sunset he experienced after trying to substitute cocaine for morphine:

Весна гремит, черные птицы перелетают с обнаженных ветвей на ветви, а
вдали лес щетиной, ломаной и черной, тянется к небу, и за ним горит,
охватив четверть неба, первый весенний закат.

Spring rumbles, black birds fly from branch to naked branch, while faraway the
forest, like black and jagged bristle, is stretching toward the sky, and behind it,
covering a quarter of the sky, burns the first spring sunset. (1:116)

The poetic and metaphoric quality of his language here contrasts sharply with the early entries prior to the beginning of his illness, when Poliakov wrote primarily as a doctor.¹⁹⁵ On January 25, for example, the same activity of observing the sunset is rendered in the following way:

Какой ясный закат. Мигренин—соединение антипиргина кофеина и ас citric.

What a bright sunset. Migrenin—a combination antipyrine caffeine and ac citric.
(1:109)

The straightforward, prosaic description of the sunset here is followed by a combination of Russian and Latin words identifying a chemical solution for counteracting migraines. As a doctor and not yet a patient, Poliakov is unable to speak poetically, relying instead on medical jargon. Gradually, as he slips into addiction, he comes to view medicine and its practice in a more and more estranged way: on February 15, he calls medicine “a dubious science,” on February 25 and March 1 he affirms and then challenges his authority as a doctor (“This Anna Kirillovna is strange! As if I’m not a doctor, 1 and ½ syringe, 0.015 morph. Yes.” and in the next entry: “Doctor Poliakov, be careful! Nonsense,” 1:110-111). The internal struggle between the confident doctor and the patient losing control is evident in these self-thwarting statements.

Growing distant from his identity as a doctor and its attendant language, in his later entries Poliakov employs poetic and metaphoric language as well as experiments with prose genres. For example, his entry of November 19 describes his conversation with his assistant and

¹⁹⁵ That Poliakov acquires a poetic voice here becomes clear if we compare his description of spring to the blackness, burning and rumbling imagery associated with spring in the first stanza of Pasternak's 1912 “Февраль. Достать чернил и плакать” (February. To get some ink and cry): Февраль. Достать чернил и плакать!/ Писать о феврале навзрыд,/ Пока грохочущая слякоть/ Весною черною горит. (February. To get some ink and cry!/ To write about February sobbing violently,/ While the rumbling slush/ Burns in black spring). We don’t know whether or not Bulgakov was actually quoting Pasternak in this instance, but the two authors are often compared in their interest in the figure of the artist. For example, Justin Weir claims that both Bulgakov and Pasternak (as well as Nabokov) “conceived authorship anew” in their central novels, which focus on the figure of the author: *Doctor Zhivago* and *The Master and Margarita* (Nabokov’s *The Gift* is another example). Weir suggests that these authors had to reconstruct the tradition of the novel and the individual biography in Russian literature, following the cataclysmic events in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century that destroyed the cultural basis for these kinds of narratives. See Justin Weir, *The Author as Hero: Self and Tradition in Bulgakov, Pasternak, and Nabokov* (Northwestern University Press, 2002) x, xiv.

paramour Anna Kirillovna in the form of a play, with distinct speaking parts for both “roles.”

The May 18 entry is perhaps central to understanding the profound change that has occurred in Poliakov and in his language. In it, he explicitly challenges the language of the medical textbook as inadequate to express the mental state of the patient. Instead of the inexpressive formulation “a depressed state” (тоскливое состояние) offered by the textbook, Poliakov offers a poetic rendering of his suffering. He begins the entry with images of black nature that recall his earlier descriptions of spring:

Душная ночь. Будет гроза. Брюхо черное вдали за лесом растет и пучится.

A stuffy night. A thunderstorm is coming. The black belly far behind the forest is growing and bulging. (1:118)

A straightforward description of the upcoming storm and black clouds here turns into portentous metaphoric imagery of a black bulging and growing body, as if a giant black animal is about to give birth to other monstrous creatures. Such an image can be taken as an expression not only of Poliakov's psychic demons as he struggles with addiction, but also of the ominous political events of 1917, the year highlighted as the background to Poliakov's anguish, mental unraveling and death. Poliakov goes on to describe his mental state in an outpouring of metaphors and similes: “There is no man. [...] It is a corpse that moves, longs, suffers” (1:118). Poliakov is no longer “half a corpse,” but a corpse, his suffering and loss of self and identity complete. From metaphor, he turns to extended simile to express the same idea:

Так заживо погребенный [...] ловит последние ничтожные пузырьки воздуха в гробу и раздирает кожу на груди ногтями. Так еретик на костре стонет и шевелится, когда первые языки пламени лижут его ноги...

[This is] like a person buried alive [...] gasping in his coffin for the last pitiful bubbles of air and lacerating the skin on his chest with his nails. Like a heretic on fire groaning and moving when the first tongues of fire lick his feet... (1:118)

Poliakov concludes his poetic outpouring by identifying death—the “dry, slow death” of his psyche—as the ultimate meaning inexpressible in the language of medical textbooks. He talks about himself as of a moving corpse—a living body inside which death resides. In the first of his similes, by contrast, it is a living being that is contained by death: a person buried alive, trapped in a coffin. These opposing directions of spreading deadliness speak to the breakdown, the constant rupture between suffering and euphoria, weakness and confidence, poetry and science that underlies Poliakov's condition. His ultimate role in the story as an author, rather than a doctor, is apparent in this shift into poetic language and in particular in his use of the image of being buried alive. In the opening entries of his diary, Poliakov speaks several times of being “buried” under the snow together with his two assistants and of being lonely in “this snowy coffin” (1:110). There, the description has a touch of the literal, since Poliakov is writing during a snowy February. But in the extended similes of the May 18 entry, the image of being buried alive becomes completely symbolic and divorced from the literal: a poetic representation of the patient's psychic condition. The same image recurs in Bulgakov's famous 1930 letter to the Soviet government. There, Bulgakov writes about his “literary torments” at the hands of Soviet critics, of his work being consigned to the “graveyard” and that “to prevent [him] from writing is the same for [him] as being buried alive.”¹⁹⁶ Through his illness and suffering, then, Poliakov is transformed into a poet, mirroring the plight of authorship in Soviet Russia during Bulgakov's time.

The May 18 entry is also the point when Poliakov abandons his identification with doctors and confirms his status as a patient. Identifying himself as “a sick man” (заболевший), he issues a warning, a plea to doctors “to be more compassionate to their patients” (1:118). Just as competition exists in the story between the human document and the official document—

¹⁹⁶ Quoted in Milne 268, 272, 273.

between the diary and the textbook—so the figure of the patient is contrasted with the figure of the doctor. If we apply this duality to the torments described in Bulgakov's letter, the relationship between the patient and the doctor becomes mapped there onto the relationship between the artist and the Soviet critic (and state). “Morphine” is structured around a multitude of replacements—Poliakov replacing Bomgard at his old post, Poliakov replacing painful memories of his wife with the comfort of the drug (“instead of her—morphine,” as he puts it), Poliakov and Bomgard replacing one another as the narrators of the story (1:124). The ultimate replacement that occurs in the story, however, is the succession of the doctor by the artist, the triumph of the poetic narrative over the medical one. Milne suggests that in *Notes of a Young Doctor*, “the dense medical reality is... a fiction, a metaphor for a literary programme.”¹⁹⁷ But in “Morphine,” medicine, specifically psychiatry, is shown to be insufficient for understanding and healing psychic suffering; in other words, in this particular story medicine is divorced from the literary and poetic. “Morphine” makes it clear that it is poetic language that can express the truth of suffering, unlike the language of the medical textbook. Poetic in this sense becomes synonymous with “human.” It is no accident that Poliakov's first letter to Bomgard begins with the Latinized “dear collega” (милый collega), while his final letter to him opens “dear friend” (милый товарищ) (1:103, 108). It is when one is faced with death that the medical relationship yields to the human one. Like Poliakov’s diary, which turns from a mere *historia morbi* into his “friend, [his] faithful diary,” so Bomgard's humanity in the end eclipses his role as a doctor (1:121).

¹⁹⁷ Milne 128.

From reader to author

If Poliakov evolves into an artist in “Morphine,” then Bomgard is a reader. His status in the story as Bulgakov's figured author is important because his reading validates, confers acceptance on, and immortalizes Poliakov's suffering. Without Bomgard who reads and publishes the diary, Poliakov as artist would not exist, there would not be a poetic voice of individual suffering. However, Bomgard travels a rough road to understanding Poliakov and identifying with his poetic language. Just like Poliakov, Bomgard internally struggles, torn apart by conflicting self-images as a victorious doctor and a powerless victim. This conflict begins to emerge in the opening frame of “Morphine,” when Bomgard retrospectively narrates his experiences of the year 1917. On one hand, he reminisces about his time at Gorelovo when he “alone, with no support, fought disease relying on [his] own strength [своими силами], like one of Fenimore Cooper's heroes finding [his] way out of the most unusual of circumstances” (1:101). As a result of his Gorelovo experience, he goes on, “I have become a courageous person... I am not afraid” (1:101). At the same time, the language he uses to describe the circumstances of his relocation from Gorelovo is passive and undermines this invincible image: “The blizzard that began [in the winter of 1917] swept me up, like a scrap of a torn newspaper, and carried me from a remote village to a provincial town” (1:99, my emphasis). Bomgard portrays himself both as an active fighter against forces of destruction and as a powerless victim of such forces.

While Bomgard fights disease and death and consciously acknowledges his strengths in the medical sphere, the implication is that there are other forces against which the doctor is helpless. One such force is the blizzard of the revolution, associated in the story, as I have noted, with the “unforgettable” year 1917 and the setting of a Moscow psychiatric clinic. The other,

symbolically related, force is “psychic illnesses” which Bomgard had never treated (despite this realization, he dismisses the thought of reading his psychiatry manuals, 1:102). This foreshadows his encounter with Poliakov resulting in Bomgard's ultimate education regarding psychic illnesses through reading not a textbook written by a doctor, but a diary written by a patient. Acquiring the perspective of a patient becomes critical for both Poliakov and Bomgard and is related to the story's emphasis on art, as opposed to medicine.

Bomgard's first reaction to Poliakov's initial letter betrays his entrapment in his identity as a doctor. After receiving the letter with its plea for help, Bomgard is torn between obligation and annoyance. For its lack of direct explication of Poliakov's condition, for its cryptic tone, Bomgard qualifies the letter as “confused and somewhat artificial” (сумбурное, чуть-чуть фальшивое) (1:104). As his irritation grows, together with his unwillingness to travel into the cold night to reach Poliakov's remote post, his reaction to the style of the letter grows stronger: he calls it “absurd, hysterical” (нелепое, истерическое), “a letter that could give a migraine to the recipient” (1:105). Bomgard goes on, baffled by Poliakov's style and irately comparing the letter to a novel:

Что с ним такое? “Надежда блеснет...” в романах так пишут, а вовсе не в серьезных докторских письмах! Спать, спать... Не думать больше об этом. Завтра все станет ясно...

What is with him? “A flash of hope...” they write like this in novels, not in serious doctor letters! Sleep, sleep... No more thinking about this. Tomorrow all will become clear... (1:105)

Bomgard is appalled by the letter precisely because hysteria, poetry, pathos are so alien to medical communication. He views Poliakov primarily as a doctor and expects his words to fit this identity. In his desire for clarity, Bomgard directs his anger at the style of Poliakov's letter (as opposed to the nature of his request or the weather conditions outside, for example). As yet,

Bomgard is unfit to be a good reader of Poliakov's diary, because the poetic density of his friend's language gives him a headache, turns the doctor into a sick man. At this point, Bomgard is not prepared to suffer together with Poliakov, to witness and absorb his pain.

But as he is drifting off to sleep and his consciousness becomes diluted, Bomgard's humanity surfaces. In his thoughts, he sleepily acknowledges that his anger is unfounded and that the letter may be an expression of suffering and a need to connect with another. Bomgard thinks of his friend affectionately recalling the youthful, familiar form of his name: Serezha Poliakov. This thought sequence culminates in a dream in which Bomgard sees young Serezha in his school uniform leaning over a table on which a dead body lies. This is, of course, a reverse foreshadowing of what will happen the following day. It is Bomgard who will be leaning over Poliakov's dying body after his suicide attempt. In his dream state, Bomgard stops perceiving the boundary between himself and his friend, collapsing both into the image of a person witnessing another's death. It is the desire for human connection, memories of their school friendship and the identification with another's suffering that characterize Bomgard once the trappings of his doctor identity have receded in these final moments of wakefulness. As he nears sleep, he admits in his thoughts to understanding little about the physiology of the process, about the work of brain cells, questioning the knowledge of the author of his physiology textbook. As Bomgard drifts farther away from the certainties of his profession, in his experience we see a parallel to Bulgakov's symbolic treatment of text in the story: just as Bomgard turned over the prescription blank to reveal Poliakov's "novelistic" letter, so falling asleep reveals Bomgard's humanity beneath his flippant doctoral persona. The doctor can dismiss a text that does not fit the medical mold, ridiculing its otherness. But the human being in his most vulnerable, half-conscious state refuses to observe the boundaries between himself and

another. Bomgard's dream merges the past with the future and self with another to negate the medical imperative of categorization, clarity, separation.

The idea that through compassion, the self and the other, “I” and “he,” are united is central to the story. For this reason, in his diary Poliakov repeatedly tries to “warn” doctors of the ethical dangers of their authority. As he learns from his own transformation into a patient, doctors view and treat patients as “other” and inferior, and their discourse shows little understanding of the ailing mind's anguish. The crucial understanding that the other is also oneself or that the witness of suffering suffers along with the victim comes to Bomgard only after reading Poliakov's diary and feeling “pity and fear.” The pity is for another's plight, and the fear is of one's own vulnerability to the same human predicament.

This turn from the individual to universal humanity is important to understanding Bomgard's role in “Morphine.” When in the opening frame Bomgard writes a letter to his superior asking to be allowed to attend to Poliakov in Gorelovo during his crisis, his choice of words betrays the idea that one person's suffering is not just his own. Bomgard ends the letter with the words “The man is helpless” (человек беспомощен) (1:104). While he is talking here specifically about Poliakov, the Russian phrase can also be translated as “man is helpless,” extending Poliakov's condition to all of humanity. Significantly, it is at the end of this letter that we first learn Bomgard's name. Thus Bomgard's signature below the statement acknowledging the universality of human suffering and helplessness signals his emergence from namelessness into individuality. It is also telling that we learn this important information from a handwritten text – a letter. Additionally, we learn Bomgard's first name and patronymic from the head doctor's handwritten note responding to Bomgard's request to visit his friend.

Poliakov specifically chose Bomgard as his confidant and the heir to his written legacy out of all other doctors. In his diary, he reveals that he would only entrust his suffering to Bomgard “because he is not a psychiatrist, because he is young,” because he is “healthy, strong, but gentle [мягок]” (1:128). In Bomgard, by contrast to older, experienced psychiatrists, Poliakov hopes to find compassion (участливость, 1:128). The slightly unusual choice of the Russian word *uchastlivost* in this context (instead of the more typical *sostradanie* or *sochuvstvie* for “compassion”) is significant here. The word’s root is *-chast-* (part), thus a more literal translation would be “participation” rather than compassion. The word suggests Poliakov’s desire to make his friend a part of himself, which in turn mirrors Bulgakov’s complex authorial figuration in the story: Poliakov and Bomgard are each “a part” of his autobiographical persona. To Poliakov, Bomgard's softness and ability to “participate” in another is something that seasoned doctors lack. It is the same willingness to let another's world wash over and change oneself that a reader experiences when absorbing words written by another. Poliakov recognizes Bomgard, due to this softness and to his youth, as a potential healer of his trauma and eventually a compassionate reader of his diary. In Bomgard, Poliakov sees someone who is able to take another into himself and to understand how fluid are the borders separating human souls.

The relationship between Bomgard and Poliakov in the story reflects a number of relationships around which the narrative is structured: that between doctor and patient, writer and reader, doctor and artist, active fighter and passive victim, and the alternating states of withdrawal and euphoria. This dual relationship and the dual nature of the protagonist in this story (especially if taken together with the rest of *Notes*, thus letting us see the replacement of the hero that has occurred) suggests a larger interest of the story in the split self. Indeed, who is the young doctor whose notes we are reading – is it Bomgard or Poliakov? If we take the two

characters to be two parts of Bulgakov's authorial persona, as the anagrammatic names or their common circumstances suggest, we can see how interest in the self and in the duality of the self permeates the story. For one, the word “self” in its various forms (сам, себя, себе, собой) occurs a total of thirty-eight times in the story, which is itself only thirty pages long, thus averaging more than one occurrence per printed page. It is notable that out of those instances, the passive forms (себя, себе) occur a total of twenty-seven times. While such a correlation is not wholly unusual for first-person narratives, there is a markedly high number of self-destructive statements reflected in these constructions in “Morphine.”¹⁹⁸ The story is of course about suicide, which only adds to the constant grammatical recurrence of the active “I” doing something harmful to the passive “myself,” a construction that dominates Poliakov's diary.¹⁹⁹ Suicide and self-injury thus add to the overall pathology of the split self, which permeates the story, and Poliakov's diary in particular. As Svetlana Boym writes,

[T]he word suicide suggests precisely the impossibility of the oneness of the self, the split between self as subject and “self” as object, between victimizer and victim. Suicide is the moment of the subject's ultimate decentering; the subject turns upon itself...reestablishing the only possible oneness—the oneness of death.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ In Chekhov's “Ariadna,” for example, there is a similar correlation, but most of the passive себя/себе constructions are 1) idiomatic (сама по себе/by herself) 2) related to Ariadna (воображала себя/imagined herself), which is itself symptomatic of Shamokhin's narration; only a couple carry notions of self-injury from the perspective of the narrating “I” and even those are illusory (мне казалось, будто я, прикасаясь к ней, обжигал себе руки/ it seemed that by touching her I kept burning my hands).

¹⁹⁹ Examples include: Если б врач имел возможность на себе проверить многие лекарства (If only a doctor could test most medicine on himself); я сам себе впрыснул в бедро один сантиграмм (I injected one centigram into my own thigh); Я впрыскиваю себе морфий два раза в сутки (I inject myself with morphine twice a day); тут я вспомнил [...] рубашку, которую я изорвал на себе, умоляя, чтобы меня выпустили (then I recalled the shirt which I had torn on myself while begging to be released); И вот взял и сейчас уколол себя. (I just injected myself.); Этою глупою борьбою с морфием я только мучаю и ослабляю себя. (I only torture and weaken myself with this silly struggle with morphine.); Погубил я только себя. (It was only myself I ruined.)

²⁰⁰ Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 151.

It is no accident then that Bomgard's perspective prior to reading Poliakov's diary involves the problematic word "suicide." Despite Poliakov's cordial and personal tone in his final letter, Bomgard describes the letter and the diary with cold detachment: "Next to the suicidal man's letter there is a notebook, the standard kind, wrapped in black oilcloth" (1:108). Both Poliakov and his diary are depersonalized in this statement—the man a nameless suicide, the diary just a standard notebook. The pathological split within the self is threatening and uncomfortable to Bomgard, which is apparent in his use of the word "suicide" to distance himself from his friend. It is only in the act of reading that Bomgard begins to identify with Poliakov and finally grants him individuality and wholeness—"I finished reading these notes by Sergei Poliakov," he writes after the diary is reproduced in full (1:129).

The notion of self-destruction in "Morphine" suggests something beyond the physical harm Poliakov causes himself, such as injecting himself with morphine and shooting himself. In addition to encapsulating the story's interest in psychiatric illness and disintegration of selfhood, Poliakov's suicide also echoes Bulgakov's own crises as an author. For Bulgakov, self-censorship is an act similar to Poliakov's suicide and continuous self-injury, an impulse contextualized by the conditions of authorship in Soviet Russia.

In this connection, we should consider the peculiar relationship between an individual author and his text in Stalin's Russia, a reality that haunted Bulgakov throughout most of his writing career. The situation for authorship in Russia of the late 1920s and 1930s was indeed difficult to believe: for the independent artist, writing frequently turned deadly. In her monograph about the role of the poet's death in the creation of the cultural myth about him, Boym observes the differences in the ways Russia and the West construct the figure of the poet

in the twentieth century.²⁰¹ In the Russian context, she suggests, the connection between an author's biography and his art is stronger than in the West. The romantic myth of the poet whose life participates in his art (and in his artistic image) has not been deconstructed in Russia as thoroughly as it has in the West. Instead, she writes, Russian cultural mythology thrives on a mixture of "the European romantic conception of the unity of the poet's life and art" and Russian patriotic ethos which endows the poet with a civic mission. Boym continues, "Willingly or not, every Russian writer confronts this heroic tradition that privileges dead authors and literary martyrs and often 'kills' literary texts by subjugating them completely to political, biographical, social, and metaphysical concerns." This peculiar worship of the heroic poet, "the Poet with a capital P," Boym claims, has survived in Russian culture through modernism and the twentieth century to this day, long after the romantic connections between life and art have been completely severed in the West.²⁰² That Russian culture chooses to read the works penned by its "dead authors" precisely through the lens of the authors' tragic biographies represents a peculiar intersection of the physical and the symbolic. Indeed, the Russian poet's physical death becomes a metaphor for his struggle and spiritual freedom.

There is, however, another way in which poetic metaphor and death collide in Russian culture. As we have seen, Clare Cavanagh observes the unsettling effect of adapting the ideas of Western thinkers (such as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault) about the power of the word in postmodern society to the Russian reality of high Stalinism. Derrida, Barthes, and Foucault pondered the figurative death of the author and of the book in a new cultural era that, in its reliance on the amorphous notions of "writing" and "text," witnessed "the

²⁰¹ Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*.

²⁰² Boym 121.

passing of the autonomous, individual creators of the objects known... as ‘books.’” However, when applied to the fates of independent literary thought in Soviet Russia, these theories begin to lose their figurative nucleus, and the rhetorical “death” of the author and his creation materializes as literal certainty. Consequently, writes Cavanagh,

If the literal meaning... of phrases like “the death of the author” or “of the book” is the first meaning that comes to mind... it undoes our capacity to conceive of language as mere metaphoricity or of the world as pure interpretation.²⁰³

Cavanagh focuses particularly on the works of two authors who under Stalin endured a literary existence poised perpetually on the brink of physical death—Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova. Mandelstam’s daring “Stalin Epigram” (1933), declared by Pasternak to be “not a literary fact, but an act of suicide,”²⁰⁴ according to Cavanagh, “exists on the boundaries between language as metaphor and language as action, and thus incidentally illustrates the problems of speaking... of language as innately, exclusively metaphorical.”²⁰⁵ Within the context of Soviet literature and culture, then, a figurative death becomes a literal death and the figurative word is transformed into an instrument of material power. A text now possesses a very physical ability to murder its author. Although, unlike Mandelstam, Bulgakov did not perish or disappear in Soviet labor camps and occasionally even experienced “magical” episodes of Stalin’s benefaction, he was no stranger to being attacked and silenced.²⁰⁶ Throughout his writing career, his work was repeatedly and severely criticized in Soviet newspapers, censored and withheld

²⁰³ Cavanagh 127.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: The Poet and His Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 176.

²⁰⁵ Cavanagh 130.

²⁰⁶ See, for example, p. 115 in Gasparov for the account of the “miraculous” sanctioning of the play *Days of the Turbins* after Stalin found the play to his liking, and Bulgakov’s own interest in stylizing the event as a magical intervention into his fate by a higher power.

from publication leading him to suffer multiple nervous breakdowns, burn manuscripts of several of his works, and write several letters to the Soviet government asking to be allowed to leave the country. In a diary entry from 1924, he expressed fears of being imprisoned or sent to a labor camp for his literary “feats” (подвиги).²⁰⁷ In 1926, his apartment was searched and his manuscripts confiscated by agents of the OGPU who also questioned Bulgakov later that year.

While a text can kill or threaten arrest, given the extreme vulnerability of authors in this period, it can also grant immortality. This proved to be the case for many of Bulgakov's works that were submerged for decades during and after his lifetime, until they finally came to be available to and appreciated by Soviet readers long after his death in 1940. As Lesley Milne writes, immortality for Bulgakov “can only be granted by a reader” and this explains why in the final version of *The Master and Margarita*, the autobiographically marked Master is granted peace, but not “light.”²⁰⁸ According to Milne, Bulgakov withholds glory and recognition from the Master, leaving it to his reader to make the final pronouncement.²⁰⁹ The reader is the ultimate witness to both the Master's suffering at the hands of Soviet critics and authorities and

²⁰⁷ See Bulgakov, “Pod piatoi. Dnevnik,” the entry “On the night of December 27” (В ночь на 28-е декабря).

²⁰⁸ Lesley Milne, *Mikhail Bulgakov: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) 241.

²⁰⁹ Traditionally, critics have interpreted this denial of light as punishment for either the Master’s “de-mythologizing of Christ” or for his eventual surrender to despair and loss of interest in life and authorship (See Mechik-Blank, 140-141). Ksenia Mechik-Blank argues instead that the Master is not granted light because his novel represents a pact with the devil. Blank identifies Woland as a co-author of the Master’s novel, interested in denying the miracle of Christ’s resurrection. The fact that the Master’s focus in the novel is not on the resurrected Ieshua but on the suffering Pilate, she claims, is evidence that the Master has succumbed to Woland’s temptations. I would argue, however, that it is precisely this focus on Pilate as a sufferer and witness to suffering which allows Bulgakov to posit the reader (Ieshua) as the savior of the witness wracked with the guilt of inaction. The final union of Ieshua and Pilate thus captures Bulgakov’s personal longing for acceptance and absolution, by his reader and his God. It is the guilt of the passive witness that he wants to assuage with “peace.” As for “light,” I agree with Milne that granting it to the Master might reflect immodestly on Bulgakov. See Mechik-Blank, “Na rassvete shestnadsatogo chisla vesennego mesiatsa Nisana...: Apofatizm romana ‘Master i Margarita’” in *Mikhail Bulgakov na iskhode XX veka: materialy vos'mykh mezhdunarodnykh Bulgakovskikh chtenii v S.-Peterburge*, Ed. A.A. Ninov et al (Biblioteka Sankt-Peterburgskogo Bulgakovskogo Obshchestva. Series. Vol. 2., St. Petersburg: Russian Institute of the History of Arts, 1999) 134-44.

to the merits of his novel, which in turn bears witness to another concealed truth—the existence, suffering and death of Ieshua.

Just as Poliakov injures his body and rips out pages from his diary to hide his fall, so Bulgakov had to censor his original notes, based on his experience as a morphine addict, to “de-pathologize” the story and conform to the literary standard expected of a Soviet writer in 1927.²¹⁰ In his letter to the Soviet government written three years after “Morphine” was published, Bulgakov writes of feeling “destroyed” and “buried alive” as a banned author in Russia. At the same time, he himself is also transformed by these political conditions into a self-destructive author, a literary suicide. Almost incredulously he writes, “I personally with my own hands have thrown into the stove the draft of a novel about the devil, the draft of a comedy and the beginning of a new novel, ‘The Theatre.’ Nothing that I write has any hope.” Poliakov’s self-destructive illness unfolds simultaneously with the February and October revolutions of 1917. Bulgakov’s letter similarly posits the political circumstances in Russia as an explanation for his self-destructive authorship. “My literary portrait,” he writes, “is also a political portrait.”²¹¹ In “Morphine,” the human body and the “human” text are victims of pathological self-damage. The story and Bulgakov’s famous letter present us with the doubly painful vision of a human being harming his own body and an author excising his own text.

²¹⁰ Chudakova writes that Bulgakov cut about twenty pages from the original 1921 draft of Poliakov’s diary (as part of “The Ailment”) when he published the story as “Morphine” in 1927. The story needed cutting, she suggests, because it was a “powerful, burning document” of Bulgakov’s reaction to the events of the revolution and of his personal experience with addiction. Such a document could not exist in print in the Soviet Union in 1927. See Chudakova, 65. Efim Etkind suggests that Bulgakov chose a specialized medical journal for publishing his medical cycle precisely to bypass the censorship, which would most likely have banned the stories had he tried to publish them in a more mainstream venue. Even when the cycle was published in various official editions in 1963, 1966, and 1980, “Morphine” (along with “I Killed” and “Starry Rash”) was still omitted from publication, likely due to the story’s interest in pathology. See Etkind 122.

²¹¹ Quoted in Milne 272.

But while the letter sees no salvation for the Russian author—Bulgakov’s proposed solution is either emigration or a career change—the complex narrative structure of “Morphine” offers hope. If Bomgard and Poliakov represent two aspects of a split self, two figurations of Bulgakov’s autobiographical persona, then the interesting set-up of Bomgard’s reading the diary of his alter ego Poliakov transforms the dynamics of suicide and self-injury. In the end, the split self becomes miraculously reintegrated: the reader Bomgard has absorbed the legacy of the writer Poliakov and himself turned into a creator. When Bomgard resolves to publish the diary and thus immortalize Poliakov’s suffering, the destruction of the self is counteracted by an act of self-recovery and self-revitalization: Bomgard rediscovers his identity as the true doctor—one who is compassionate, humble, and poetically inclined. For this reason, his signature at the end of “Morphine” reads “Doctor Bomgard.” The signature highlights the new meaning of “doctor” which links “Morphine” to *The Master and Margarita*: like Ieshua in that novel, Bomgard is now a healer, effecting recovery and resurrection through spiritual connection and the Word.

The shift from Poliakov’s to Bomgard’s voice in the closing frame of the story represents a turn in the development of the self. While Poliakov initially replaces Bomgard in Gorelovo, it is Bomgard in the end who survives and grows, paying tribute to his dead friend. The dynamic, shifting structure of self is apparent here, one that reflects Bulgakov’s own personal, professional, artistic, and health-related struggles. With the death of Poliakov, the doctor component of Bomgard’s identity weakens – “I am not a psychiatrist,” he states in the closing frame of the story. From the medical perspective, he cannot evaluate the significance of Poliakov’s diary. But a new decisive voice comes to the fore instead—one motivated by his continued personal interest in Poliakov’s story. While his friend’s body “has long decayed” (истлело), his suffering is preserved on paper (1:129). Doctors can no longer cure him, but a

reader can grant him immortality, or as Gourg suggests, resurrect him by publishing his work.²¹² Bomgard's own language is both tentative and empowered in these final lines: “Can I publish these notes which were given to me? I can. I am publishing them. [Mory. Печатаю.] Doctor Bomgard” (1:129). Together, the question and the answer represent the transformation effected in Bomgard through his reading. In the opening frame, he presents himself as a passive fragment of matter thrown around by the historical blizzard. In the end, he questions his own power and responds in willful and terse declarative verbs, reminiscent of the potency and intentionality of God's Word at the beginning of Genesis: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). The published story “Morphine” that we readers hold in our hands is thus set up as the “light”—the product of Bomgard's declaration.

Whereas the young doctor of the earlier *Notes of a Young Doctor* was nameless, here once again individuality, authority, authorship are asserted through Bomgard's signature supporting an emphatic declaration. We see his new empowerment and enlightenment when he first begins to question himself and then takes a conscious leap of faith in his own judgment. More importantly, the new empathy for human weakness and suffering has opened him up to an interest in the poetic and the individual, which his new publishing endeavor promotes. The focus on physical healing has been replaced by a new concern about spreading compassion and knowledge about individual suffering through the medium of the word. While still a doctor, Bomgard now looks to a new kind of healing – effected through poetic, not medical, language.

In 1928 (one year after the publication of “Morphine”), Bulgakov will begin work on *The Master and Margarita*, which focuses on the figure of the artist who is himself a patient in a psychiatric hospital. In one way, Bomgard's witnessing of Poliakov's suffering becomes translated in the later novel into the Master's contemplation of Pilate's suffering and, in turn, in

²¹² Gourg 135.

Pilate's own empathy with the suffering of Ieshua. The model introduced in “Morphine” thus becomes multiply reflected in the narrative structure of Bulgakov's final novel.

Building on the contrast between medical and spiritual healing introduced in “Morphine,” in *The Master and Margarita*, the medical profession becomes increasingly demonized, as well as associated with the authoritarian structures of the new state. For example, we can see this in the portrayal of the psychiatrist Doctor Stravinsky whose condescending interrogation of Ivan Bezdomnyi, followed by a violent scene of forced ether injection into Bezdomnyi's arm, is strikingly similar to the methods of state officials (8:77-78).²¹³ The only true healer in the novel is the ultimate sufferer and philosopher Ieshua.

Author and Witness: “Morphine” and the Gospel of John

Gasparov notes the motif of the lonely Son in *Notes of a Young Doctor* as one of the elements of the New Testament theme in Bulgakov's work. The lonely hero lost without any support and struggling on his own in a world of chaos, as the young doctor is shown to be in *Notes*, can be tied, according to Gasparov, to an early experience in Bulgakov's own life: the death of his father. Gasparov establishes a parallel between the depiction of the young doctor's arrival at the new post in the first story of the cycle, “Towel with a Rooster,”—the physical pain and suffering he experiences after being driven for hours in the freezing night—and the portrait

²¹³ Dr. Stravinsky's initial description as “the man with a pointy beard” whose entrance makes Bezdomnyi's fellow poet Ryukhin “turn pale” recalls photographs of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the first director of the Bolshevik Secret Police (Cheka), notorious for his methods of torture and mass executions (8:74). Additionally, in Chapter XV Bulgakov depicts the scene of Nikanor Bosoi's interrogation by an unnamed agency, whose very anonymity in the text and the fear the interrogation instills in Bosoi unmistakably reveal it to be a branch of the Cheka. Both Stravinsky's interrogation of Bezdomnyi and the Cheka interrogation of Bosoi are characterized by affected compassion and understanding on the part of the interrogators: thus Bosoi's interrogator speaks to him “cordially” (задушевно), while Stravinsky interrogates Ivan “listening intently” and “looking intently into Ivan's eyes” (вслушиваясь внимательно, глядяваясь в глаза Ивана). The fear instilled in Bosoi and the violence applied to Bezdomnyi, however, eloquently expose the terrifying reality behind this affected intimacy. (8:164, 76, 78).

of Ieshua during his execution in *The Master and Margarita*.²¹⁴ But in “Morphine,” it is in Poliakov that we can recognize a Christ figure, while Bomgard acts as his witness and disciple. Given that the New Testament is such a strong source for Bulgakov's art, I will draw a parallel between “Morphine” and the Gospel of John, a parallel that informs my analysis of figured authorship. Like “Morphine,” the Gospel of John has a complex frame narrative structure and, as I will demonstrate, employs the figured author device to construct authorship as an eyewitness account converted into text. And like Bomgard, the Master, and Woland, the author of the gospel claims to communicate a truth increasingly concealed under layers of history and doubt: a truth based in witnessing another's suffering and death.

The Gospel of John, the most “literary” and poetic of the four Gospels, famously opens with the discourse on the Word as the ultimate origin and locus of divinity: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). In this account, the Word is dual: it is both God and something other than God, turning duality into a paradoxical unity and defying all rules of logic and reason. Like Bulgakov's mysterious merging of Poliakov and Bomgard into a single autobiographical figure, the Word in John occupies two positions at once. The intense metaphoricity of this particular gospel is another example of the Word's paradoxical dualism: metaphor creates new meaning by uniting, equalizing two disparate things. This is vividly expressed in the poetic profusion of Jesus's “I am” statements found in none of the other gospels: “I am the true vine,” “I am the way, the truth and the life,” “I am the door of the sheep,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the Lamb of God,” “I am the bread of life,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the resurrection and the life.” These self-definitions point to the figure of Jesus as the ultimate metaphor—he is always something other than himself, the Word

²¹⁴ Gasparov 83-85.

turned flesh. His suffering and dying *for others* only reinforces the metaphoricity and the paradoxical union of self and other that underlies the gospel.

Most scholars agree that the Gospel of John is a composite work, likely written, edited and redacted by the evangelist himself, as well as later by his disciples and other scribes.²¹⁵ It is possible that the gospel's closing frame and the opening discourse on the Word are part of later redactions formed around the original narrative. Nevertheless, I would like to discuss here the effect of the full text of the gospel in the form in which readers have experienced it for centuries. In this form, with its complex narrative structure, praise of the Word, and self-conscious meditations about its own authorship, the text would undoubtedly be attractive not only to adherents of the twentieth-century modernist aesthetic, but also to an author like Bulgakov whose upbringing was deeply informed by Christian discourse and who felt that he wrote in an apocalyptic time when selfhood and culture had become fractured, authors silenced, and old (religious) truths refuted or concealed.

One of the mysteries encountered by Johannine scholars is the figure of the "beloved disciple," who is mentioned for the first time in 13:23 and does not appear again until chapter 18, thereafter reappearing more frequently up to the end of the gospel. The identity of this disciple has been, and still is, intensely debated: scholars have at various times claimed him to be John of Zebedee (the purported author of the gospel), John Mark, Thomas, Lazarus, Matthias of the Acts, and Benjamin of Deuteronomy.²¹⁶ Smith and Brown both confirm that despite some lingering

²¹⁵ See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), Vol. 1, "Introduction," pp. xxiv, xxxii-xxxix, xciii. See also Bruce Metzger, Michael Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1993) 374-375.

²¹⁶ See D. Moody Smith, "John," in *Harper's Bible Commentary* (Harper & Row, 1988) 1044-1076; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 1, "Introduction," pp. xciv-xcvi; Floyd F. Wilson, "Who Was the Beloved Disciple?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Jun., 1949) 83-88; Eric L. Titus, "The Identity of the Beloved Disciple" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Dec., 1950) 323-328; Paul S. Minear, "The

contradictions, the identification of the beloved disciple with John of Zebedee has been traditionally held most plausible.²¹⁷ In addition to the consistent designation “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” this character is also often called “the other disciple.” There is thus a pronounced tension between the disciple’s “chosen” status and his being simply an anonymous “other.” I am interested in particular in the way that the text of the gospel suggests the beloved disciple to be its author combined with the fact that for most of the narrative this figure is absent or peripheral, as well as being referred to in the third person – as “he.” The beloved disciple is both a nameless, seemingly marginal character in the story and the purported author of the text. In this way, this figure is parallel to Bomgard of “Morphine” who is 1) treated in Poliakov's diary as a third-person character, 2) does not appear in the diary until the end when he gains prominence, 3) is chosen by Poliakov as his confidant and the only doctor he could trust (compare “the disciple whom Jesus loved”),²¹⁸ and 4) appears in the closing frame of the story as the ultimate authority with the intent to spread the word about Poliakov's suffering and death.

Now let us examine in more detail the ambiguous position of the beloved disciple—as a figure both of authority and of marginality in the narrative (like the figured author). When this figure first appears in the narrative, we immediately notice his special status with regard to Jesus and the other disciples. This scene occurs during the Last Supper after Jesus announces to his disciples that one of them will betray him:

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John: Some Clues and Conjectures” *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 19, Fasc. 2 (Apr., 1977) 105-123.

²¹⁷ Smith, “John,” p. 1076; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 1, p. xcvi.

²¹⁸ Significantly, Poliakov chooses Bomgard for his youth. In visual depictions of the Last Supper, the beloved disciple is often portrayed as a beardless youth lying closest to Jesus. See, for example, *The Last Supper* by Giotto (1320-25), Albrecht Durer (1496-1510) and (1511), Jacopo Bassano (1542), Lucas Cranach the Elder (1547), Juan de Juanes (1560), Valentin de Boulogne (1625-26), Nicolas Poussin (1640-49).

Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. (13:23-26)

Clearly, the beloved disciple is not only physically closer to Jesus than the other disciples (he is leaning on Jesus's bosom), he is also the intermediary between Jesus and the other disciples. This is why Peter asks for a clarification of Jesus's words not from Jesus directly but from the beloved disciple. In this sense, the beloved disciple acts as a messenger between the disciples and Jesus much in the same way that Jesus facilitates communication between God and humanity. In this scene, then, the beloved disciple acts as a version of Jesus. The authority of the beloved disciple here is comparable to Bomgard's status at the close of "Morphine" as the intermediary between Poliakov's legacy and us, the reader.

While the relationship between Jesus and the beloved disciple seems parallel to the relationship between God the father and Jesus, this duality once again becomes paradoxical when, at the crucifixion, Jesus introduces the beloved disciple to his mother:

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!
Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. (19:26-27)

In this scene, Jesus and the beloved disciple are analogous and interchangeable with respect to the mother. The dynamic seems to be that of either replacement or brotherhood, depending on one's interpretation. This supplants the earlier father-son relationship between the two, established in 13:23ff. Whereas in the first scene the two are related to one another vertically (father-son), here the suggestion is one of sameness or equal substitution.²¹⁹ Jesus's mother is

²¹⁹ In line with this, Brown suggests that the Gospel of John proposes "a view of salvation that is both vertical and horizontal." The vertical view sees the earthly and heavenly worlds as coexistent, while the horizontal view represents the historical connection between Jewish religious tradition and the coming of Jesus. See *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 1, pp. cxv-cxvi.

now the disciple's mother, and the disciple is her son. The replacement of Jesus by the disciple is stated twice. Once again, we can recognize a similarity between the construction of the figured author in the gospel and in Bulgakov's story in the tension between duality and sameness in the narrative structure of "Morphine." Bomgard and Poliakov are equal in the sense that they both narrate, both participate in Bulgakov's authorial figuration, and both at different periods serve as the sole doctor on post at Gorelovo. In this sense, they can be said to replace one another, just as the beloved disciple replaces Jesus in the role of Mary's son. But there is also a vertical father-son relationship between the two doctors: Poliakov "inherits" Bomgard's post at Gorelovo; conversely, Bomgard inherits Poliakov's legacy in the form of his diary, through which Bomgard is educated in compassion and receives his new calling as author or publisher. The dynamics of father/son, teacher/disciple and the interpenetration of self and other are combined in Bulgakov, echoing the paradox at the heart of John's gospel.

By far the most important role of the beloved disciple is of course his status as witness to the miracle of Jesus's resurrection. Following the crucifixion, the beloved disciple is summoned together with Peter to the place of Jesus's burial to witness the disappearance of his body. The text stresses that even though Peter was the first to enter the sepulcher, it was the beloved disciple who "did outrun Peter" and arrived first yet did not immediately go in (20:4).²²⁰ After Peter had gone in, "[t]hen went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed" (20:8). The text increasingly emphasizes the connection between witnessing, believing, and authoring. The gospel ends with intimations of the beloved disciple's immortality and of his authorship of the text:

Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which

²²⁰ It is important to note that in a parallel scene in Luke, it is Peter alone who runs to the sepulcher. As this example shows, the beloved disciple or any similar figure is absent in all three Synoptic gospels, even if they have scenes parallel to those in John where this figure appears, e.g. the Last Supper, the crucifixion or the sepulcher scene.

also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen (21:20-25).

In this conclusion, the beloved disciple's immortality is first suggested and then negated by the narrator of the Gospel. The identification of the author with the beloved disciple is similarly ambiguous. Brown notes that the "we" in the penultimate verse (21:24) distinguishes the perspective of the narrator (we) from that of the beloved disciple "whose testimony we believe" (my emphasis). However, the opening of that verse—"This is the disciple which testifieth of these things"—seems to hint at the opposite: that the present writer of the text is the beloved disciple whose testimony we are reading. The shift to the authorial "I" in the final verse also both suggests and conceals the author's identification with the beloved disciple: if "this is the disciple which testifies" is taken as "I am the disciple," the "I" at the end seems a natural progression. Nevertheless, this concluding and sole use of the authorial "I" clashes with the consistent use of the third-person in reference to the disciple. As Smith observes, the omission of the authorial "I" in the Gospel "is sometimes regarded as reflecting John's personal modesty, and he is said to present himself under the guise of the Beloved Disciple." However, Smith goes on, "the silence about incidents in which...John was present...is only with difficulty explained by the modesty of a man who could refer to himself as the Beloved Disciple. The identity of the author of the Fourth Gospel remains a mystery, perhaps deliberately concealed."²²¹ The figure of the beloved

²²¹ Smith, "John," 1045.

disciple thus negotiates the space between self and other, between the authorial “I” and the marginal “he,” mysteriously joining these seemingly incongruent positions.²²²

In this dissertation, I have written on several occasions about the narratological tension between the first and third person: the “I” of the author and the “he” of the hero. The first person in *Onegin*, *Dead Souls*, and “Ariadna” is attached primarily to the authorial voice: even though these authorial figures occupy only background space in relation to their respective heroes whose plots dominate the narrative, they still unmistakably retain the first-person position of authorial control. (As we have seen in Chapter 2, Shamokhin attempts to usurp this “I” and turn his lover Ariadna into a third-person narrated object, but Chekhov's stand-in thwarts this attempt in the end and reinstalls Shamokhin in his proper place as hero, not author). In Bulgakov we see a new dynamic emerge between the “I” and “he” or author and hero. Like the author of the Gospel who hints at his identification with the beloved disciple, and like Jesus who says, “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he” (8:28, my emphasis), Bulgakov creates a structure in which the “I” and “he” are interchangeable and united in the autobiographical self as two parts of the same whole. Between Poliakov and Bomgard, each is allotted his own narrative space in which he can speak from the first-person position and assess the other in the third person. Thus both take turns being the narrative subject and object: while Poliakov discusses Bomgard’s personal and professional qualities in his diary, Bomgard describes, judges, and appraises Poliakov and his legacy in the outer frame. Like Jesus in John’s Gospel, both are healers (doctors) and poets. (Jesus’s healing is primarily through words, and in

²²² I am inclined to agree with Martin L. Smith who sees the disciple's anonymity as a space into which the reader can project himself, thus experiencing a similarly close connection with Jesus. Writes Smith, “Perhaps the disciple is never named, never individualized, so that we can more easily accept that he bears witness to an intimacy that is meant for each one of us. The closeness that he enjoyed is a sign of the closeness that is mine and yours because we are in Christ and Christ is in us.” The beloved disciple, then, is a figure that exists to collapse the distinction between self and other, uniting all in their relationship with Christ. Martin L. Smith, “Lying Close to the Breast of Jesus,” in *A Season for the Spirit* (Tenth anniversary edition ed.) (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1991) 190.

Bulgakov the healing effected through poetic language soon supersedes medicine). Again like Jesus, both are sufferers: one as victim, the other as witness.

The author of the Gospel was, or relied on, an eyewitness to the unbelievable truth of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Through the author's text, the gospel, we the readers are also able to witness this truth. "Morphine" negotiates the same transition from eye to text to reader as the channel for the truth underlying the fabric of our humanity: that, whether witness or victim, we suffer as one. In John's Gospel, often called "the gospel of love," Jesus repeatedly establishes love as the ultimate glue that binds together God and humanity. Bulgakov's picture of the author as witness who takes in, remembers and immortalizes the pain of another similarly merges creator and creation into one: in "Morphine," author and hero are united through the bond of compassion.

As Cavanagh notes, metaphor ceases to apply to the Soviet reality of the 1920s and 1930s. Language and culture become literalized. As we have seen, Poliakov longs for the poetic power of simile and metaphor to express his suffering; the language of the medical textbook simply will not allow such depth of meaning. In *The Master and Margarita*, Woland and his entourage repeatedly expose the dangerous literal-mindedness of Soviet citizens. That Berlioz, a figure of high authority in the Moscow literary world, would deny the existence of Christ is incompatible with the way Bulgakov conceived of literature. By denying Christ, Soviet literature also denied the paradoxical truth of metaphor, its ability to merge dualities and to produce meaning beyond the material. Bulgakov revives and magnifies the paradox of metaphor by mending the broken connection between literature and the Word of the gospel. In "Morphine," he recreates the complex dualism of the Gospel of John. And in *The Master and*

Margarita, he stretches Word to the limits of metaphoricity—enabling materialist thought to encounter the supernatural.

Bulgakov transforms the relationship between hero and figured author, the active as opposed to the observing figure in the text, into the relationship between sufferer and witness. Through the act of witnessing, the witness also suffers. This explains the constant overlap between the two figures, especially in “Morphine” and *The Master and Margarita*. Through the very act of witnessing, the witness goes through an arc of experience: feeling at first powerless and then empowered to spread compassion through art and authorship. Bomgard’s reading in “Morphine” becomes synonymous with witnessing: through reading and taking in the suffering of another, Bomgard the doctor identifies with Poliakov the patient. Since suffering and being a patient are associated with poetic language in “Morphine,” Bomgard learns from Poliakov about the importance of art and speaking in the language of psychic pain rather than in inexpressive and ultimately mendacious medical language. The doctor, through witnessing and suffering, becomes the artist and, through words, enacts spiritual healing. And so at the end of “Morphine,” the reader Bomgard announces his intent to publish his friend’s diary. In this way, he endorses authorship and the healing power of the poetic word, while himself also acquiring the status of author or publisher. Through witnessing and sharing in the suffering of a patient, the doctor becomes the artist and a healer. Later, in *The Master and Margarita*, we see similar overlaps between witness and sufferer in Pontius Pilate,²²³ between sufferer and healer in Ieshua, and between patient and artist in the Master.

²²³ Although Pilate is ultimately responsible for Ieshua’s death, the novel focuses on Pilate primarily as a sufferer: his headaches and insomnia place him in line with Bulgakov’s patients, including Poliakov, the Master, and Bezdomnyi, and the guilt he suffers at the thought of Ieshua’s execution unites him with the powerless witness protagonists of Bulgakov’s early prose. This attitude toward Pilate conforms with Haber’s observations about

The role of the figured author in “Morphine” is that of a reader turned author. In person and through text, Bomgard witnesses the physical and psychic death of his friend and is himself transformed into an author. We may be reminded of the continuation of this reader-creator theme in the final pages of *The Master and Margarita*. There, it is God/Ieshua who is the final reader of Master’s novel. As Woland tells the Master, “He whom the character created by you longs to see... has read your novel” (8:379). The Master creates, but it is the Creator who, after reading his work, grants him eternal refuge. In “Morphine,” it is Bomgard who immortalizes Poliakov and represents with his closing language of intentionality and authority the higher realm of creation. The ladder of creation thus links the two works: a year after publishing “Morphine,” Bulgakov would go on to transform his authorial persona Bomgard into the Master who in turn will follow the summons of the ultimate Creator.

When I move to a discussion of Nabokov's authorial figuration in the next chapter, there will be a number of important parallels to Bulgakov's interest in witnessing, marginality and strong ties to the classical Russian literary tradition. Among many thematic and structural similarities in the work and thought of Bulgakov and Nabokov, David Bethea identifies the strong influence of Pushkin and of Gogol, an interest in metapoetic and metaphysical concerns often demonstrated in the telescoping or “magic box” narrative structure, idealization of childhood and of home, and the suggestion of exile as a mental and cultural construct rather than a geographical one.²²⁴ More generally, Kathleen Parthé tells us that at the time “virtually

Bulgakov’s growing “ethos of sympathy and noncondemnation,” which emerges first in “Morphine” and his play *Flight* (Бег) and finds its fullest expression in *The Master and Margarita*, specifically in Ieshua’s forgiveness of Pilate. See Haber 138.

²²⁴ David Bethea, “Bulgakov and Nabokov: Toward a Comparative Perspective” in *Zapiski russkoi akademicheskoi gruppy v SShA*, No. 24 (1991) 187-209.

everyone who wrote in Russian...was reacting in some way to the Revolution and the country it brought into being, [e]veryone was to one degree or another ‘border conscious,’” aware of the possibility and the consequences of traveling abroad. While Nabokov had been permanently exiled from Russia since 1919 and in his Russian prose of the Berlin period often recreated an idealized picture of the Russia of his childhood, Bulgakov was “locked in,” denied emigration after a number of appeals to the Soviet government. Both writers had gone through stages of wanting and then *not* wanting to cross the border: Bulgakov eventually grew increasingly agoraphobic, confining himself to his Moscow apartment, and Nabokov admitted to his preference for the Russia of his memories to actual Russia. These two authors stand apart from their immediate environments and imagine an unreachable world they both fear and desire. Indeed, in a larger sense such was the state of affairs in the Russian arts that, as Parthé writes, “the most interesting literature of this period defined itself against [the] hollow core [of Socialist Realism]; it is at the borders of the literary world that we will find what we need to fill in the blank pages.”²²⁵ This aura of marginality, of standing off center, combined with the two authors' interest in metapoetic narrative, is echoed in the profusion in their work of silent, impotent or inhibited authorial figurations.

²²⁵ Kathleen Parthé, “Vulnerable Writers and Indestructible Texts,” *SEEJ*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1994) 217-223 (221).

Chapter Four. Nabokov: I the Eye, and He the Silent Spectator

The Novelist Vladimirov: the Incidental and the Fundamental

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *The Gift* (Дар) holds a special place in his work and biography. Written during Nabokov's exile in Berlin and published serially in 1937-1938 in the Paris émigré journal *Contemporary Annals* (Современные записки), *The Gift* is both Nabokov's last novel written in Russian and the author's favorite of his Russian works. Critics also have acknowledged the novel's central place in Nabokov's career. Julian Connolly calls *The Gift* "the most metaliterary of all Nabokov's Russian-language novels," while Sergey Davydov refers to it as "one of the keys to the entire Russian period of Nabokov's art."²²⁶ Just two years after the novel's publication, Nabokov would flee Germany for the United States where he would transform himself into the author of primarily English-language prose. In this way, *The Gift* marks the border between Nabokov's two authorial identities: the Russian and the American one. Appropriately, metamorphosis and boundary crossing constitute two of the central themes in the novel, and it is in this context that I would like to begin my discussion of Nabokov's authorial self-figuration in *The Gift*.

Nabokov's fiction features many self-referential structures, variously camouflaged.²²⁷ All of them essentially encode various aspects of Nabokov's biographical persona within the fictional text. According to Pekka Tammi, the primary function of these devices in Nabokov's

²²⁶Julian Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fiction: Patterns of self and other* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) 196. Sergey Davydov, *Teksty-matreshki Vladimira Nabokova* (St. Petersburg: Kirtsideli, 2004) 130. Pekka Tammi notes that *The Gift* is also one of the most voluminous of Nabokov's projects, second in length only to *Ada* and the Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*. See Pekka Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics: A Narratological Analysis* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1985) 82 (note 48).

²²⁷ Tammi provides a detailed overview of this device in Nabokov's work, ranging from renderings of the author's physiognomy in the text to anagrammatic or direct references to Nabokov's name to allusions to his well-known passions for chess and lepidopterology to parodic reframing of these devices in his later work. See Tammi 320-343.

work is to “foreground the presence of an authorial *persona* behind the entire literary enterprise.”²²⁸ In this way, the author suggests to the reader that the reality of the characters in a work of fiction is subordinate to a reality of a higher order—that of the authorial consciousness. Donald Barton Johnson similarly argues for a “two-world model” of Nabokov’s fiction where “the world of the novelist is that of an author-persona who creates and occasionally intrudes upon the world of his characters.”²²⁹ In line with this reading, the figured author who is the subject of my study can be viewed as precisely such a revelation—a sign of the author’s mastery of the characters’ world and of this secondary world’s construction according to a higher compositional design. Vladimir Alexandrov takes these ideas even further, suggesting that Nabokov’s overarching interest in his fiction is not just in the process of authorship but above all in a metaphysical reality (the “otherworld”) that underlies everyday existence.²³⁰ In Alexandrov’s view, there are a chosen few characters in Nabokov’s novels—for example, Cincinnatus in *Invitation to a Beheading* or Fyodor in *The Gift*—who can sense a constant otherworldly presence in the quotidian reality surrounding them. Most other characters in Nabokov’s fiction remain blind to this higher realm. Significantly, it is the characters who are imaginatively gifted and engage in literary endeavors who are granted glimpses of the otherworld.

Nabokov’s dual reality can thus be seen either in a *metafictional* or a *metaphysical* light. In other words, the higher reality can be represented either by the authorial consciousness in relation to the consciousness of the characters or by a transcendental mystical consciousness

²²⁸ Tammi 235.

²²⁹ D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985)1.

²³⁰ Vladimir Alexandrov, *Nabokov’s Otherworld* (Princeton University Press, 1991). Alexandrov cites Vera Nabokov’s statement that her husband’s primary interest in his work was *potustoronnost’*, that is, “otherside-ness,” or the otherworldly aspect of life. See Alexandrov 3.

behind natural and everyday phenomena. What unites these two interpretations, however, is the idea of the threshold separating the two worlds. In *The Gift*, transcendence is explored on both the metafictional and metaphysical levels: Fyodor's transformation from a character in *The Gift* into its author as well as his preoccupation with the mystical fatidic forces of the otherworld and his interest in what lies beyond death's door. The novel also transcends itself: it is structured in a paradoxical way that allows it to exist as both a completed work and as the process of its own creation.²³¹ Thus the question of border crossing becomes paramount to the successful completion of the work and to Fyodor's emergence as its author.

Just as *The Gift* stands at a crucial moment for Nabokov's transition into the "otherworld" of English-language prose, so the image of Nabokov's figured author, the writer Vladimirov, is introduced at a crucial point in the novel: his appearance directly precedes Fyodor's important insight into the workings of fate in his life and his creation of *The Gift*. To be sure, there are several characters in *The Gift* who can be identified as a figure for Nabokov. The protagonist Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev shares many facts of Nabokov's biography (although Nabokov himself denies such identification, as we will see below). The poet Koncheyev, who appears in

²³¹ Stephen Blackwell says *The Gift* is "a major breakthrough in twentieth-century literary art," a novel "both structured and self-destructive, a formalist-like montage of subtexts, a self-conscious narration of self-begetting." Stephen Blackwell, *Zina's Paradox: The Figured Reader in Nabokov's Gift* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) 1, 10. Sergey Davydov likens the novel's structure to a Moebius strip, where "the external surface becomes the internal one" (Davydov 135). Yuri Levin suggests that *The Gift* is "wrapped in itself: it is both the content and the wrapping (as well as both the process of creating the content and of wrapping it)." See Yuri Levin, "Ob osobennostiakh povestvovatelnoi struktury i obraznogo stroia romana V. Nabokova Dar" in *Russian Literature*, Vol. IX (1982) 191-230 (203). Leona Toker suggests "a receding spiral" as a model for the novel's structure; which captures both its open-endedness and circularity. Leona Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989) 161. Nabokov himself favored the spiral model, as evidenced by his statement in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*: "The spiral is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious: it has been set free. [...] A colored spiral in a small ball of glass, this is how I see my own life." Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1960) 275. In line with this, Sarah Tiffany Waite suggests a linear progression, claiming that "Nabokov's spirality is not antithetical to linearity; rather it makes for a more meaningful linearity" (Waite 67). The originality of Waite's argument is in her suggestion that, despite its five-chapter structure, *The Gift* itself is the "sixth chapter"—recapitulating the novel's "progressive tripartite structure" in which the novel itself is the final of the three works completed and published by Fyodor (his book *Poems*, the biography *Life of Chernyshevski*, and the novel *The Gift*) (Waite 60). Sarah Tiffany Waite, "On the Linear Structure of Nabokov's Dar: Three Keys, Six Chapters" in *SEEJ*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring 1995) 54-72.

the novel episodically and is mostly silent, also shares some similarities with Nabokov (by his own admission).²³² The writer Shirin is an inverted double of Nabokov—his name parodies the name Sirin, Nabokov’s nom de plume at the time of writing *The Gift*.²³³ This character is a complete opposite of Vladimirov (and Koncheyev)—a farcical figure, he is said to be “blind like Milton, deaf like Beethoven, and a blockhead to boot” (*The Gift*, R357 E288). Despite this multiplicity of authorial or quasi-authorial figurations, however, it is the novelist Vladimirov who constitutes the most concentrated and recognizable portrait of Nabokov in the novel. The image of Vladimirov differs in important ways from other self-referential devices in Nabokov’s novel and fits most completely with my definition of the figured author. As we will see below, in the single condensed paragraph that describes Vladimirov, Nabokov has included enough biographical, bibliographical, and physiognomic details that were his own to guarantee a full recognition of himself in this character by his Russian émigré audience of the 1920s and 1930s. Such a contained, visually detailed, and strikingly recognizable portrait of the author stands completely apart from other self-referential structures in Nabokov’s fiction, which are considerably more diffuse and almost never fully embodied as figures in the narrative. Vladimirov’s representation and the scene in which he appears in the novel highlight and integrate the key dualities in the novel: the axes of self-other, author-character, everyday-otherworldly, and father-son. In the course of this chapter, I explore these themes in detail,

²³² See “Foreword” in Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*, trans. Michael Scammel and Dmitry Nabokov with Vladimir Nabokov (New York: Penguin Books, 1980) 8. I will cite the Russian text of *The Gift* from the following edition: Vladimir Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988), Volume Six (*Dar*). The quote cited above can be found on page 7 of this edition. All quotations from *The Gift* will be provided both from the Russian text and the English authorized translation and will be given in parentheses in the main text in this form: (R7 E8).

²³³ Like Shirin in relation to Sirin-Nabokov, a certain character named Pyshkin functions as a comical inversion of Pushkin, who is an important poetic authority in the novel. (Both characters appear in the same scene as Vladimirov – at the Émigré Writers’ Union meeting). In this way, Nabokov suggests a parallel between himself and his literary “father” Pushkin. Monika Greenleaf discusses this connection as it informs the theme of the father in *The Gift*. She suggests that the novel is Nabokov’s elegy to his own father, and to Pushkin. See Greenleaf, “Fathers, Sons and Impostors: Pushkin’s Trace in *The Gift*” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring 1994) 140-158.

specifically the ways in which they relate to the appearance of the figured author in *The Gift*. I also discuss Vladimirov's position as a silent spectator at the literary meeting as part of Nabokov's metaphoric emphasis on the theatrical in depicting both poetic inspiration and the otherworldly realm.

In his Foreword to the English translation of *The Gift*, Nabokov discusses the links between himself and the characters in the novel. He pre-empts the readers' recognition of him in the novel's protagonist, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev. He writes:

I had been living in Berlin since 1922, thus synchronously with the young man of the book; but neither this fact, nor my sharing some of his interests, such as literature and lepidoptera, should make one say "aha" and identify the designer with the design. I am not, and never was, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev [...]. In fact, it is rather in [the poet] Koncheyev, as well as in another incidental character, Vladimirov, that I distinguish odds and ends of myself as I was circa 1925 (*The Gift*, R7 E8).

However emphatic this statement, many critics have in fact called *The Gift* the most autobiographical of Nabokov's novels and have cited a number of important commonalities that reveal a close kinship between Fyodor and Nabokov.²³⁴ Nabokov's disassociation of himself from Fyodor in the Foreword is even more suspect in light of Fyodor's own resolution to write a novel based on his life in which he would "so shuffle, twist, mix, re chew and rebelch everything, add such spices of [his] own and impregnate things so much with [himself] that nothing remains of the autobiography but dust" (*The Gift*, R413 E331-332). That novel, of course, is *The Gift*. Thus Fyodor's intention to mask his autobiography, voiced at the end of *The Gift*, stands in stark

²³⁴ See, for example, pp 462-465 in Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton University Press, 1990); Levin 206; see also p. 284 in Simon Karlinsky, "Vladimir Nabokov's Novel *Dar* as a Work of Literary Criticism: A Structural Analysis" in *SEEJ*, Vol. VII, No. 3 (1963) 284-290.

parallel to Nabokov's statement in the Foreword to the novel, in which he denies any similarity between his own life and that of Fyodor.

Aside from his tricky assertion about Fyodor, Nabokov's self-identification with Koncheyev and Vladimirov are of primary interest to this study.²³⁵ Unlike Fyodor, who is the dominant voice and perceiving consciousness in the novel, these two characters exist in the margins of the narrative and never speak. (While Fyodor has two important conversations with Koncheyev, we later find out that he has imagined both of them). Moreover, Vladimirov is specifically identified as an "incidental" character, and it is the nature of this claim to Vladimirov's inconsequential status in the narrative that I would like to interrogate here.

Below is the paragraph containing the description of Vladimirov as Fyodor sees him at a Russian Writers' Union meeting in the final chapter of the novel:

"Интересно бы знать, -- подумал Федор Константинович, искоса взглянув на Владимирову, -- прочел ли он уже...?" Владимиров опустил свой стакан и посмотрел на Федора Константиновича, но не произнес ничего. Под пиджаком у него был спортивный свэтер с оранжево-черной каймой по вырезу, убыль волос по бокам лба преувеличивала его размеры, крупный нос был что называется с костью, неприятно блестели серовато-желтые зубы из-под слегка приподнятой губы, глаза смотрели умно и равнодушно, -- кажется, он учился в Оксфорде и гордился своим псевдо-британским пошибом. Он уже был автором двух романов, отличных по силе и скорости зеркального слога, раздражавшего Федора Константиновича потому, может быть, что он чувствовал некоторое с ним родство. Как собеседник, Владимиров был до странности непривлекателен. О нем говорили, что он насмешлив, высокомерен, холоден, неспособен к оттепели приятельских прений, -- но так говорили и о Кончееве, и о самом Федоре Константиновиче, и о всяком, чья мысль живет в собственном доме, а не в бараке, или кабаке.

I wonder, thought Fyodor, glancing sideways at Vladimirov, I wonder if he has read my book? Vladimirov put down his glass and looked at Fyodor, but said nothing. Beneath his jacket he was wearing an English sports sweater with a black-and-orange border along its triangular opening; the receding hair on either

²³⁵ Leona Toker claims that Nabokov distributed parts of his biographical persona among Fyodor, Koncheyev and Vladimirov, uniting them into a triangle, which mirrors other triangular structures in the novel. Toker 154.

side of his forehead exaggerated the latter's dimensions, his large nose was strongly boned, his greyish-yellow teeth glistened unpleasantly beneath his slightly raised lip and his eyes looked out with intelligence and indifference – he had studied, it seemed, at an English university and flaunted a pseudo-British manner. At twenty-nine he was already the author of two novels – outstanding for the force and swiftness of their mirror-like style – which irritated Fyodor perhaps for the very reason that he felt a certain affinity with him. As a conversationalist Vladimirov was singularly unattractive. One blamed him for being derisive, supercilious, cold, incapable of thawing to friendly discussions – but that was also said about Koncheyev and about Fyodor himself, and about anyone whose thoughts lived in their own private house and not in a barrack-room or a pub. (*The Gift*, R363 E292-3)

Several key motifs are encoded in this description. First, I would like to note the emphasis on looking but not speaking that characterizes Vladimirov in this scene (the only scene in which he appears in the novel). Vladimirov looks at Fyodor in response to Fyodor's mental question—he has access to Fyodor's thoughts because he is in a position of authorial superiority in relation to Fyodor. Vladimirov is silent because in this scene his status is that of a deity, the Creator, in relation to other characters—his consciousness is infinite and incommunicable in the language of the characters. In *Nabokov's Otherworld*, Alexandrov characterizes an artist's glimpses of the otherworld as mystical knowledge that cannot be communicated in words and invokes as an illustration Fyodor Tyutchev's 1833 poem "Silentium," a favorite of Nabokov's (and Fyodor's).²³⁶ Fyodor's encounter with Vladimirov is just such a glimpse of the eternal aesthetic realm.

Second, let us consider the "black-and-orange border" on Vladimirov's sweater. As I will argue in the rest of this chapter, the encounter between Fyodor and Vladimirov in this scene represents a boundary crossing for Fyodor: he is soon to metamorphose from the novel's character into its author. Following the encounter with Vladimirov, Fyodor finds his mackintosh and escapes the stuffy and boring writers' meeting. In the following scenes, he is described

²³⁶ Alexandrov 4-5; For Fyodor's admiration of Tyutchev, see his first imaginary conversation with Koncheyev (R88 E73).

sunbathing in Berlin's Grunewald park where he begins to conceive his next literary project – *The Gift*. In the next key scene, Fyodor has a dream about his deceased father in which the latter grants him the long-sought approval for his work. As the vision of Fyodor's novel becomes clearer in his mind, we approach the end of *The Gift* and realize that the authorial voice that concludes it, speaking from a vantage point fully external to the novel's plot, is in fact Fyodor's. The encounter with Vladimirov, who is a figure for Nabokov and hence the author of *The Gift*, thus portends Fyodor's transformation into the author and his eventual *coincidence* with Vladimirov, i.e. their becoming one. As Blackwell writes, *The Gift* was written “in one of the most border-conscious eras of history” and, specifically for Russian exiles in Europe, “boundaries constituted the single most unrelenting feature of reality.” But *The Gift* actually rejects boundaries and shows “how the great cultural products of any nation are in fact the result precisely of beneficial seepages across ephemeral national frontiers.”²³⁷ Fyodor's imaginative talent allows him the freedom to dissolve the boundaries between self and other, to see others clearly and empathetically and eventually to create entire worlds of human suffering and joy. The “black-and-orange border” on Vladimirov's sweater, then, is a carefully placed detail that confirms the novel's preoccupation with boundaries: between self and other, character and author, everyday life and the “otherworld.” This descriptive detail suggests a boundary about to be transcended: by Fyodor and by the novel itself, because it is structured to transcend itself in an infinite spiral.

Third, the explicitly “triangular opening” of Vladimirov's sports sweater (mentioned only in the English text) reinforces the triangular “affinity” (a more exact rendering of the Russian *rodstvo* is “kinship”) between Koncheyev, Vladimirov, and Fyodor, all of whom are mentioned in this passage and are characterized as having a reputation for aloofness. Importantly, in

²³⁷ Blackwell 141-143.

contrast to the condemning tone of the reported rumors about this behavior, Nabokov re-encodes the three authors' "cold" demeanor as a positive sign of their independence of thought (their "thoughts lived in their own private house and not in a barrack-room or a pub"). Thus in this scene, Nabokov makes a number of oblique suggestions about Vladimirov's connection to the otherworld and to boundary-crossing, as well as underscoring his "kinship" with Fyodor at the same time as both stand apart, are isolated, from the rest of the world.

The Vladimirov scene is set in 1929 (the plot of *The Gift* spans three years from 1926 to 1929). By that year, Nabokov, like Vladimirov, had published two novels: *Mary* (Машенька) in 1926 and *King, Queen, Knave* (Король, дама, валет) in 1928. To understand further how much in common Nabokov in fact has with Vladimirov, let us consider the following description of Vladimir Sirin (Nabokov's pen name throughout his literary career as an émigré in Berlin and Paris). Below is a documentary account by Nabokov's contemporary Andrei Sedykh, which he provided in a 1932 interview-article entitled "At V. V. Sirin's" (У В. В. Сирина):

Как выглядит автор «Защиты Луж ина»? Публика увидит молодого человека спортивного типа, очень нервного, порывистого. От Петербурга остались у него учтивые манеры и изысканная, слегка грациозная речь: Кембридж наложил спортивный отпечаток, Берлин – добротность и некоторую мешковатость костюма: в Париже редко кто носит такие макинтоши на пристегивающейся подкладке. [...] У Сирина – продолговатое, худое, породистое лицо, высокий лоб. Говорит быстро и с увлечением. Но какая-то целомудренность мешает ему рассказывать о самом себе.

What does the author of *The Defense* look like? The public will see a sportsman-like young man, a very nervous and impetuous one. St. Petersburg has left in him polite manners and a sophisticated way of speech with slightly rolling *r*'s; Cambridge gave him a sportive outlook; Berlin gave a stamp of health and a somewhat loose fit in his clothing: it is seldom that anyone in Paris wears such a macintosh with detachable lining. [...] Sirin has a rather long, thin, noble-featured face, and a high forehead. He speaks quickly and with enthusiasm. But some kind of reserve keeps him from telling about himself.²³⁸

²³⁸ Both the original and the translation are quoted from Tammi 321. Nina Berberova gives another, similar portrait of Nabokov in the 1930s: "He was then thin and erect, with long narrow hands, a neat tie, a flying gait, and that 'Petersburgian moist 'r'' which was familiar to me from childhood: on my grandmother's side every other person

In this description, we see a considerable overlap between the portrait of Sirin-Nabokov which was available to his émigré readership and the portrait of Vladimirov in *The Gift*: the athletic attire, the reserve, the high forehead and “noble-featured” face of Sirin all find their reflections in the details of Vladimirov’s portrait. Sirin’s Cambridge education is thinly veiled by Vladimirov’s Oxford one (specified in the Russian version only). As Pekka Tammi writes, Sirin’s “physiognomic traits and mode of clothing were known to any reader of the émigré press; so was his ‘British’ background; his age and the scope of his output; or even the Nabokovian ‘reserve’ mentioned by Sedykh. The connection is made still more precise for modern readers who are apt to relate Vladimirov’s conversational habits with the author’s proclaimed aversion to ‘heart-to-heart talks.’”²³⁹ Finally, the detail of Sirin’s conspicuous mackintosh further links Nabokov’s biographical persona to Fyodor who is said to wear one to the Writers’ Union meeting where he encounters Vladimirov.

Thus Nabokov, already a famous author in Berlin and Paris émigré circles (and hailed in 1933 as “the foremost of the [younger] generation of émigré writers”), deliberately sets himself up for intense recognition by the readers of *The Gift*.²⁴⁰ What emerges, then, counter to Nabokov’s statements in the Foreword to the English translation of *The Gift*, is a strong interrelation and “kinship” among Nabokov, Vladimirov, and Fyodor. Also striking is the very detailed autobiographical crafting of the character identified as merely “incidental” to the novel’s

has it.” She also speaks of Nabokov’s “manner of not recognizing people, of addressing Ivan Ivanovich... as ‘Ivan Petrovich’” which is consistent with the description of Vladimirov as an “unattractive conversationalist.” Nina Berberova, “Nabokov in the Thirties,” in *Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes*, Alfred Appel, ed. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970) 221, 226.

²³⁹ Tammi 321-22.

²⁴⁰ Quoted in Boyd, *Russian Years* (no page number, see illustrations following p. 446 and the caption to the photograph entitled «Два поколения русской литературы» [“Two Generations of Russian Literature”]) depicting the Berlin celebration of Bunin’s 1933 Nobel Prize victory.

design. But actually, Nabokov's effort to be recognized by his audience in this minor character suggests that the image of Vladimirov contains something essential to the core of the novel concealed behind an "incidental" facade.

One claim from Nabokov's Foreword, however, has gone undisputed. The true heroine of *The Gift*, he writes, is not Fyodor's beloved Zina Mertz but Russian literature itself. While Stephen Blackwell convincingly argues that Zina plays a significant role in the novel as Fyodor's reader who nurtures and helps shape his work, there is no question that Fyodor's relationship with the Russian literary tradition is central to the novel's plot and structure. The works of Pushkin and Gogol in particular occupy a prominent place in Nabokov's novel. These two vast thematic and stylistic strands—Pushkin and Gogol—converge most strikingly in the figure of the silent author Vladimirov.

In his pioneering analysis of *The Gift*, Simon Karlinsky identifies three interconnected levels of plot that underlie the novel's structure. The first plan describes three years in the life of the young author Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev in 1920s Berlin. This level of plot includes Fyodor's relationships with other Russian émigrés in Berlin as well as his budding romance with Zina, his landlord's stepdaughter. The second plan, superimposed on the first, is the story of Fyodor's artistic maturation—his evolution from a writer of poetry to his first attempts to write prose and to the publication of his controversial biography of the Russian 1860s radical Nikolai Chernyshevski, which constitutes the fourth chapter of the novel *The Gift*.²⁴¹ Fyodor's artistic

²⁴¹ I would like to clarify here the recurrence of the name Chernyshevski in the novel, which has important structural implications for Nabokov's text. Fyodor's close friends, Alexandra and Alexander Chernyshevski, live in Berlin and hold literary salons at their apartment. Alexander Chernyshevski is a tragic figure and his story echoes Fyodor's: Chernyshevski's son Yasha has committed suicide, and Fyodor sees in this tragedy an inverted parallel to his own situation, his loss of his father. It is Alexander Chernyshevski who gives Fyodor the idea to write a biography of his famous namesake Nikolai Chernyshevski. Although the suggestion at first seems ridiculous to Fyodor because Nikolai Chernyshevski's political and aesthetic views are extremely alien to Fyodor's own, Fyodor

growth culminates in his conception and writing of *The Gift* itself.²⁴² This level of the plot contains Fyodor's imaginary conversations with the poet Koncheyev as well as the imaginary and real reviews of his book of early poems and of *The Life of Chernyshevski*. Finally, the third plan of the novel, according to Karlinsky, is interlaced with the fictional plot, but is itself concerned primarily with literary criticism and consists of Fyodor's (and Nabokov's) opinions on Russian literature. "Not since *Eugene Onegin*," Karlinsky writes, "has a major Russian novel contained such a profusion of literary discussions, allusions and writers' characterizations."²⁴³

In fact, *The Gift* is an explicit response to *Eugene Onegin*. Besides the two works' unique blend of fiction and literary criticism, they also combine poetry and prose in unusual ways.²⁴⁴ While Pushkin's work is a novel in verse, Nabokov's is a prose text containing a large number of poetic texts written by Fyodor, which are visually embedded in the prose narrative and require some effort to be recognized as poetry. Nabokov's novel also famously closes with another embedded poem – patterned exactly after Pushkin's recognizable "*Onegin stanza*" and directly invoking Pushkin's Eugene as well as echoing the Author's farewell to the reader and

eventually views the idea for this project as a gift of fate. By writing about Chernyshevski, Fyodor comes to understand him and develop "a strange love" for this alien mind. This experience proves to be decisive for Fyodor's maturation as an author: by learning to empathize with the extreme "otherness" of Chernyshevski, Fyodor expands the limits of his authorial insight, which prepares him in the end to write his most ambitious work – *The Gift* itself. Alexander Chernyshevski thus functions as an important father figure to Fyodor – he provides him with the idea for one of his most important works, which helps him grow as an author. Moreover, Alexander Chernyshevski's April 1st prank on Fyodor, which opens the novel, is also significant in this respect: Chernyshevski lies to Fyodor that his poems were favorably reviewed in the local newspaper, which inspires Fyodor and leads him to compose imaginary reviews for his own works. Even though Fyodor is disappointed to learn the truth, these imagined reviews foreshadow the actual reviews of *Life of Chernyshevski*, which are reproduced in the final chapter of *The Gift*. The Chernyshevski motif thus functions as an important component of the self-other and father-son themes in the novel. (As I will show later in this chapter, the date of April 1st is also loaded with significance when it comes to discussing father figures, literary and otherwise, in *The Gift*).

²⁴² While scholars have disputed whether Fyodor is in fact the author of *The Gift*, most agree that this is the case. See Blackwell 7-10, Boyd 474, Davydov 127-137, Levin 204.

²⁴³ Karlinsky 285-287.

²⁴⁴ Sergey Davydov, "Weighing Nabokov's *Gift* on Pushkin's Scale" in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 418.

his heroes at the end of *Onegin*. In Chapter Two of *The Gift*, as Fyodor is preparing to write a biography of his father (a naturalist explorer who had vanished during an expedition), he finds inspiration in the lucid prose of Pushkin's 1836 ethnographic memoir "Journey to Arzrum" (Путешествие в Арзрум). Fyodor eventually loses faith in his project, however, and moves on to another, more successful, one: in Chapter Three he conceives of and completes *The Life of Chernyshevski*. Significantly, Chapter Two ends with Fyodor's move to a new apartment (where he will finally meet Zina): "The distance from the old residence to the new was about the same as, somewhere in Russia, that from Pushkin Avenue to Gogol Street" (*The Gift*, R168 E136).

The Gogol theme runs parallel to the Pushkin theme in Nabokov's novel. Gogol's influence is perhaps most obvious in the style and tone of Fyodor's *Life of Chernyshevski*, but it is also strongly felt throughout *The Gift*. The novel's opening paragraph is a parodic echo of Gogol's *Dead Souls*. Nabokov begins in the following way:

Облачным, но светлым днем, в исходе четвертого часа, первого апреля 192... года (иностраный критик заметил как-то, что хотя многие романы, все немецкие например, начинаются с даты, только русские авторы -- в силу оригинальной честности нашей литературы -- не договаривают единиц), у дома номер семь по Танненбергской улице, в западной части Берлина, остановился мебельный фургон, очень длинный и очень желтый, запряженный желтым-же трактором с гипертрофией задних колес и более чем откровенной анатомией.

One cloudy but luminous day, towards four in the afternoon on April the first, 192— (a foreign critic once remarked that while many novels, most German ones for example, begin with a date, it is only Russian authors who, in keeping with the honesty peculiar to our literature, omit the final digit) a moving van, very long and very yellow, hitched to a tractor that was also yellow, with hypertrophied rear wheels and a shamelessly exposed anatomy, pulled up in front of Number Seven Tannenberg Street, in the west part of Berlin. (*The Gift*, R13 E11, my emphasis)

Like Gogol's novel, *The Gift* opens with the arrival of a vehicle, scrupulously described, and the suggestion that someone has just moved to a new place (Chichikov in *Dead Souls*; Fyodor and two minor characters, the Lorentzes, in *The Gift*). The self-consciously literary play with the

nineteenth-century novelistic device of specifying yet partially concealing the date of the events described mimics Gogol's comparable disguising of the geographic setting of events: in *Dead Souls*, the story opens in the “provincial town of N.” April 1st, moreover, the date when Nabokov’s story begins, is another oblique reference to the author of *Dead Souls*: it is Gogol’s birthday. Nabokov’s opening paragraph thus points to *The Gift*’s self-conscious and parodic relationship with nineteenth-century Russian literature, more specifically establishing Gogol’s comedic talent as a strong undercurrent of Nabokov’s novel.

Nabokov was particularly fond of *Dead Souls* for its opening scene and its play with the incidental. In his biography of Gogol, he quotes and discusses this scene, admiring two details in particular: 1) the “futile” yet strangely poetic conversation between two peasants (*muzhiks*) who happen to witness the arrival of Chichikov’s britzka and proceed to discuss the strength of its wheels; and 2) the detailed description of the “young man,” a passerby who momentarily looks at the britzka and continues on his way. Nabokov comments:

The speculation of the two *muzhiks* is based on nothing tangible and leads to no material results; but philosophy and poetry are born that way. [...] Another special touch is exemplified by the chance passer-by—that young man portrayed with a sudden and wholly irrelevant wealth of detail: he comes as if he was going to stay in the book [...]. With any other writer of his day the next paragraph would have been bound to begin: “Ivan, for that was the young man’s name”... But no: a gust of wind interrupts his stare and he passes, never to be mentioned again.²⁴⁵

In *The Gift*’s opening paragraph, Nabokov pays homage to Gogol's poetry of the incidental: the wheels of the tractor hitched to the furniture truck are prominently featured; like the two Gogolian peasants, “two people” (the yet unidentified Lorentzes) stand at the building's entrance and observe the vehicle. The couple's clothing is described in painstaking detail. The man in particular wears an overcoat, “to which the wind imparted a ripple of life,” recalling the

²⁴⁵Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions Books, 1961) 76-77.

Gogolian wind which sends the chance passerby on his way, as well as the hapless hero of “The Overcoat” (*The Gift*, R13 E11).²⁴⁶

Nabokov’s admiration for Gogol’s attention to the seemingly irrelevant details of life finds its most striking development in the figure of Vladimirov. This character’s “incidental” standing in the novel is combined in a most disorienting way with a recognizable portrait of Nabokov, the higher authorial consciousness governing the novel’s fictional world. Through the image of Vladimirov, Nabokov connects the incidental with the authorial, imparting a new poetic significance to the random events of life. Moreover, for Nabokov, apparently insignificant occurrences also point to the hidden structure of the otherworld. As Brian Boyd writes about the opening sequence of *The Gift*, “The Lorentzes not only prove to be irrelevant to the course of Fyodor’s life, but Fyodor can seize on that very irrelevance as ‘proof’ of fate’s blundering eagerness to introduce him to Zina. Irrelevance becomes key evidence, inept accident the hallmark of masterly design.”²⁴⁷ To Nabokov, the incidental thus is proof of the foundation behind the structure of the world, of the authorial design behind fiction and the transcendental reality behind everyday life.

When Fyodor’s friend Alexander Chernyshevski lies on his deathbed in the final chapter of the novel, his thoughts turn to the otherworldly.²⁴⁸ Driven to mental illness by his son’s suicide, Chernyshevski is haunted by his son’s ghost until his death. Trying to imagine what

²⁴⁶ See also Boyd 465-466 for a related discussion of the opening scenes of *Dead Souls* and *The Gift* in which he makes similar claims.

²⁴⁷ Boyd 466.

²⁴⁸ It is also very likely that Fyodor in fact projects this interior monologue onto Chernyshevski, as he often does in the novel when observing others. This scene is tricky, however, since Fyodor was not present at Chernyshevski’s deathbed. This sort of ambiguity is omnipresent in *The Gift* as Fyodor’s narrative often blurs the distinction between self and other, the observer and the observed.

awaits him after death, he envisions the relationship between the earthly and the otherworldly existence in a metaphoric way:

Загробное окружает нас всегда, а вовсе не лежит в конце какого-то путешествия. В земном доме, вместо окна -- зеркало; дверь до поры до времени затворена; но воздух входит сквозь щели.

The other world surrounds us always and is not at the end of some pilgrimage. In our earthly house, windows are replaced by mirrors; the door, until a given time, is closed; but air comes in through the cracks (*The Gift*, R351 E283).

Here, the door represents death, that is, the border separating us from complete immersion in the otherworldly. But the air that “comes in through the cracks” of everyday existence hints at the constant invisible presence of the otherworld in our lives. The incidental characters in Gogol’s and Nabokov’s novels are surrounded by winds, which can be linked to the otherworldly air of Chernyshevski’s metaphor. Vladimirov is shown not outside in the wind, but inside a room at a literary meeting. Yet, significantly, he sits near “a wide window behind which the night gleamed wetly black” (*The Gift*, R362 E292). This window is not mirror-like, does not reflect back the interior of the room (which in itself is physically improbable in a brightly lit room at night-time), but shows the vast and gleaming darkness that lies beyond. Vladimirov thus is related to the incidental characters of *Dead Souls*, and his presence similarly points to a higher poetic realm that exists behind ordinary life.

In Nabokov’s short story “The Recruiting” (Набор), written in 1935 when he was also working on *The Gift*, the structure of the incidental-authorial (as we have seen it in Vladimirov) is laid bare. The story allows the reader to preview some of the devices used in *The Gift* and may illuminate the relationship between Nabokov’s author and character realms still further. “The Recruiting” opens with an omniscient narrator describing Vasilii Ivanovich, an elderly Russian émigré in Berlin, returning from a friend’s funeral. The following passage represents a

turning point in the story: here, the realistic mimetic narrative falls apart to reveal a metafictional one. As Vasiliy Ivanovich rests on a park bench, a stranger sits down next to him, and suddenly the narrative perspective shifts:

Рядом, на ту же в темно-синюю краску выкрашенную, горячую от солнца, гостеприимную и равнодушную скамейку, сел господин с русской газетой. Описать этого господина мне трудно, да и незачем, автопортрет редко бывает удачен, ибо в выражении глаз почти всегда остается напряженность: гипноз зеркала, без которого не обойтись. Почему я решил, что человека, с которым я сел рядом, зовут Василием Ивановичем? Да потому, что это сочетание имен, как кресло, а он был широк и мягок, с большим домашним лицом, и, положила руки на трость, сидел удобно, неподвижно...²⁴⁹

A man with the local Russian newspaper sat down on the same dark-blue, sun-warmed, hospitable, indifferent bench. It is difficult for me to describe this man; then again, it would be useless, since a self-portrait is seldom successful, because of a certain tension that always remains in the expression of the eyes—the hypnotic spell of the indispensable mirror. Why did I decide that the man next to whom I had sat down was named Vasiliy Ivanovich? Well, because that blend of name and patronymic is like an armchair, and he was broad and soft, with a large cozy face, and sat, with his hands resting on his cane, comfortably and motionlessly...²⁵⁰

The random passerby who happens to sit down next to the protagonist is suddenly revealed as the author's “representative” in the story. The narrator at first refers to this character in the third person, “a man with the Russian newspaper,” thus observing a distance between the narrator’s perspective and the man. But gradually, the man’s proximity to the authorial “I” (i.e. the narrator’s perspective) is revealed—first by the mention of a self-portrait and a mirror, then finally through a switch to the first person. At the same time, the protagonist Vasiliy Ivanovich, already familiar to the reader, is turned into a stranger, “the man next to whom I had sat down.” A dual shift occurs: the objective realistic narrative and its protagonist are suddenly

²⁴⁹Vladimir Nabokov, *Vesna v Fial'te* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978) 124.

²⁵⁰*The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Vintage, 1997) 404.

defamiliarized, revealed as an invention of a stranger, who at the same time is revealed as the story's author. From this moment on, the story changes its course: it is no longer about Vasiliy Ivanovich's sad and lonely life in Berlin, but about the author-narrator's labor and methods of putting together the story of Vasiliy Ivanovich. Connolly suggests that this story is a concentrated examination of the "relationship of the artistic consciousness to the subject of its own creative apprehension," in particular of the "treatment of one's own self as other." Such an attempt on the part of the artist to see himself from an outside perspective, to imagine the self as other, lies at the core of Fyodor's growth as an author in *The Gift*.

The narrative perspective in "The Recruiting" undergoes a transformation: first from an extrinsic omniscient voice to an intrinsic narrative presence (an unidentified narrative "I"), and then to an externalized embodied presence as the man with the local Russian newspaper who is finally revealed to be the authorial "I." As Connolly writes, Nabokov's narrator in this story "glides easily through an entire range of techniques for representing point of view and narratorial presence; he may be 'recruiting' these techniques for service in other texts, other fictions."²⁵¹ In particular, the sudden shift in the narrative perspective from "he" to the authorial "I" in "The Recruiting" is important to my analysis because it illustrates the relationship between an incidental character and the authorial "I" that is central to *The Gift*.

The "man with the Russian newspaper" also makes his way into *The Gift*, further connecting "The Recruiting" and its devices to the novel. In Chapter Two of *The Gift*, Fyodor rides a tram to one of the private lessons he gives to earn a living. He is bitter that his lessons rob him of time and interfere with his "gift" and is overcome with feelings of hatred for his Berlin surroundings and for the "vulgar" Germans, when "a lean man in a short coat with a fox-fur collar, wearing a green hat and frayed spats" sits down in front of him (*The Gift*, R97 E79).

²⁵¹ Connolly 185-188.

As he settles down, the man bumps Fyodor with his knee and with the corner of his briefcase, which makes Fyodor still more furious. He studies the man intently, recognizing in him all that he despises in Germans, “this poor, pitiful, expiring nation” (*The Gift*, R97 E79). But Fyodor’s fury is undermined suddenly when the man takes out a Russian newspaper from his pocket and coughs “with a Russian intonation.” Fyodor’s mood immediately changes: “That’s wonderful, thought Fyodor, almost smiling with delight. How clever, how gracefully sly and how essentially good life is!” (*The Gift*, R98 E80). This episode, like the scene on the bench in “The Recruiting,” points to a higher author. Fyodor the artist is suddenly himself shown as flawed and given to narrow-mindedness and unruly emotion. Here, he is revealed as a character existing within the masterwork of a “gracefully sly” author – the otherworldly consciousness that governs life. As in “The Recruiting,” the man with the Russian newspaper is once again a representative of this supreme author—his appearance breaks the illusion of false knowledge and instead reveals the unexpected proximity between self and other, between the bystander and the creator.²⁵²

In “The Recruiting,” the moment when the authorial representative enters the scene as the “man with the Russian newspaper” is when the story’s conceit is revealed. In the tramcar episode in *The Gift*, similarly, the appearance of the man with a Russian newspaper undermines Fyodor’s perspective to reveal a larger one, which subsumes Fyodor. The introduction of the seemingly random figure of the man with a newspaper actually shows the center of power and control that underlies Nabokov’s narrative world. The fictional plane of “The Recruiting,” and Fyodor’s fury-fueled narrative about the Germans, become distorted and flattened by this improbable visit from the authorial beyond. In a similar way, through Vladimirov in *The Gift*, the author crosses the border separating him from the characters. This moment also

²⁵² I thank Rebecca Stanton for pointing out the parallels between these two episodes.

foreshadows Fyodor's crossing of the same border in the opposite direction: his transformation into the author of *The Gift*.

In the context of *The Gift*'s intense critical conversation with the Russian literary tradition, the figure of Vladimirov echoes the influences of both Pushkin and Gogol. In Nabokov's authorial intrusion we recognize Pushkin's flair for literary allusion, his use of romantic irony, and his careful blurring of the autobiographical with the fictional in *Onegin*. At the same time, in the "incidental" Vladimirov, Nabokov pays homage to Gogol's obsession with detail and the poetry of the irrelevant in *Dead Souls*. As we have seen in Chapter One of this study, Gogol's incidental "young man" can be connected to the younger, naïve self of the Author in *Dead Souls*. Later in the novel, the Author abandons this younger part of himself in favor of a more central presence in the narrative: this older Author's disillusioned and moralizing voice dominates the novel's concluding pages. In *The Gift* and "The Recruiting," Nabokov, who appreciated Gogol's play with center and periphery, has created a complex rejoinder to Gogol's authorial self-representation in *Dead Souls*.

Self-Other, Son-Father

In *The Gift*, Nabokov explores the complex relationship between self and other, especially as he dramatizes the authorial task of observing and representing others as potential characters in his art. Related to this idea in the novel is Fyodor's search for a father figure. Personal at first, this search turns for Fyodor into both a literary and a metaphysical one. Fyodor's father, the famous naturalist and explorer Konstantin Godunov-Cherdyntsev, is presented as an alluring and mysterious presence in Fyodor's life. The figure of Fyodor's real father becomes merged in the novel with his "literary father"—Pushkin.

While writing the biography of his father, Fyodor struggles with representing and understanding him. Is it possible to turn the father into a character, to penetrate or invent his interiority? Is it fair or even possible to project one's self onto the father, to claim complete understanding of this imposing figure? At the same time, is it possible to *become* an author like the father—to name the un-nameable in nature as the elder Godunov-Cherdyntsev did as he travelled across Central Asia, or to create a new poetic language brilliantly merging poetry with the prosaic as Pushkin did in *Eugene Onegin*?

In his literary pursuits, especially in his attempt to write his father's biography, Fyodor wishes most of all to obtain the father's approval. When it is granted in Fyodor's dream in the final chapter, it is as if the last obstacle has been removed, enabling Fyodor to finally write *The Gift*. In a sense, it is also Pushkin's approval—that is, the Pushkinian standard of style and structural originality—that Fyodor is seeking in his most complex and ambitious literary project. The encounter between Fyodor and Vladimirov in the final chapter of the novel brings these important issues into focus, shining a new light on Fyodor's quest for a father-son reunion.

One of the unique features of *The Gift*, which entrances the reader from its opening pages, is the persistent fluctuation of the narrative point of view between the first and the third person. Already in the first paragraph of the novel, the impersonal third-person description of the Lorentzes is parenthetically interrupted by a voice speaking from the first-person perspective:

Тут же перед домом (в котором я сам буду жить), явно выйдя навстречу своей мебели (а у меня в чемодане больше черновиков чем белья) стояли две особы.

On the sidewalk, before the house (in which I too shall dwell) stood two people who had obviously come out to meet their furniture (in my suitcase there are more manuscripts than shirts [*The Gift*, R13 E11, Nabokov's emphasis]).

As we soon realize, the first-person voice is Fyodor's. Paradoxically, on a second reading of the novel, it becomes apparent that the third-person voice is also Fyodor's. The I/he switching grows more complex as the novel continues: for example, when Fyodor re-reads his book of poems and composes imaginary reviews of it in which he is referred to in the third person. Even more disorienting are the meetings of the Russian literary circle at the house of Alexandra and Alexander Chernyshevski: during Fyodor's visits, the reader meets other members of the circle and is granted access to their innermost thoughts, only to be startled by the realization that this interiority was imagined and projected onto them by Fyodor. In this way, Fyodor's relationships with others are those of extreme empathy (his "I" practically dissolves in the "I" of another) and, at the same time, of mastery: by narrating the other for us, Fyodor imagines and "creates" this person as if he were creating a character.

The tension between these two perspectives—*I* and *he*—can be explained by the *author* and *character* aspects of Fyodor, as he both participates in and narrates his life in Berlin. In his work about Nabokov's vision of the relationship between self and other, Julian Connolly claims that Nabokov's protagonists possess "two distinct components of identity":

One component of the self functions as the center of creative consciousness. [...] This component may be termed the "authorial" self: it represents the seat of authorial potential. The second component of the self is that which operates in the outside world and may be seen, evaluated and defined by an external other.²⁵³

This "bifurcation of identity" finds a particularly strong embodiment in the figure of Fyodor in *The Gift*. Connolly claims that Fyodor's identity combines within it the authorial and the character components, and it is at the end of the novel that "the authorial element within the figure of Fyodor leaves behind the character element and begins its ascent to a higher state of

²⁵³ Connolly 4.

authorial omniscience and control.”²⁵⁴ It is in the fifth and final chapter of the novel that this transition occurs—when Fyodor encounters the silent Vladimirov, begins to discern and shape the idea for *The Gift* during his visits to the Grunewald, has his second imaginary conversation with Koncheyev about Russian literature, and finally is reunited with his father in a vivid dream.

The complex interaction of the authorial and character planes in Nabokov’s fiction have led many critics to link these ideas to the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin.²⁵⁵ Bakhtin’s early unfinished essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” written in the early 1920s, discusses the authorial position vis-à-vis the hero in verbal art in terms of the self-other dichotomy. In Bakhtin’s model, the author is the “I” and the hero is the “other”: “only the other as such is capable of constituting the axiological center of artistic vision and, consequently, the hero of a work of art.”²⁵⁶ From the perspective of the “I,” the self has no aesthetic value, because the “I”-perspective is always incomplete. It exists only in the context of its unfolding life, its openness and endless search for meaning: “I do not yet exist in my own axiological world as a contented and self-equivalent positive given. My own axiological relationship to myself is completely unproductive aesthetically: for myself, I am aesthetically unreal. I can be only the bearer of the task of artistic forming and consummating; not its object—not the hero.”²⁵⁷ In other words, in order to create, the “I” must turn to the other.

For this reason, Bakhtin stresses the importance of “the supreme outsideness” of the authorial position in relation to the hero. The author must see the hero “as one who is going to

²⁵⁴ Connolly 199.

²⁵⁵ See Blackwell 44-46, Tammi 98-115, Levin 207-208, Connolly 113-116.

²⁵⁶ *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 188.

²⁵⁷ *Art and Answerability* 188 (Bakhtin’s emphasis).

die,” that is, to perceive the hero’s life and world as completed and complete, as opposed to the hero’s perspective on his own life as open and unfinished. To accomplish this vision, “one must clearly see in a human being and his world that which he himself is in principle incapable of seeing in himself, and do so while remaining in oneself and living one’s own life in earnest; one must be able to approach him not from the standpoint of a lived life, but from a different standpoint—from a standpoint that is active outside a lived life.” The author’s position outside the hero’s “lived life” thus guarantees a unique authorial insight into the hero, which is the kind of self-consciousness of which the hero himself is incapable.

This kind of “outsideness,” which is a mark of “the divinity of the artist,” is paradoxical because it relies on a fully external perspective as well as on “participation in the event of being.” In other words, the “I” must be both detached from *and* participant in the other: “the artist is...someone who knows how to be active outside lived life, [...] partakes in life from within and understands it from within, but someone who also loves it from without.” Because both “within” and “without” must be present in the author’s creative activity, Bakhtin suggests that the author must reside “on the boundary” of the world he is creating, “for his intrusion into that world destroys its aesthetic stability.”²⁵⁸

I have quoted Bakhtin at length here to show the extent to which his ideas coincide with those of Nabokov, especially with the paradoxical dualities of self-other and author-hero explored in *The Gift*.²⁵⁹ Boundary, authorial intrusion and the position of “outsideness” are

²⁵⁸ *Art and Answerability* 190-191 (my emphasis).

²⁵⁹ Nabokov is not known to have read any of Bakhtin’s works or to have met him, but the similarity of their thought may be traced back to some common sources. First, both were influenced by the same philosophical *Zeitgeist* of fin de siècle Russian intellectual thought. In particular, one must acknowledge the role of the Moscow Psychological Society, founded in 1885, as “the philosophical center of the revolt against positivism in Russian Silver Age” (Poole 319). In 1889, the Society began publication of *Voprosy filosofii i psihologii* (Questions of Philosophy and Psychology), the first professional philosophical journal in Russia, which methodically critiqued positivist thought and featured among its contributors such important Silver Age philosophers as Vladimir Solovyov and Sergei

concepts of paramount importance in the novel. Moreover, Fyodor's split between the authorial "I" and the character's "he" is the novel's main structural tension. Finally, the question of the authorial treatment of the hero "as one who is going to die" becomes problematic to Fyodor when he attempts to write his father's biography.²⁶⁰ It is precisely the fact that Fyodor's father could be either alive or dead, the open-endedness of his life, that does not allow Fyodor to create and complete an aesthetic rendering of him.²⁶¹ Because no one knows what happened to him, it is the elder Godunov-Cherdyntsev who can be said to exist "on the boundary" between life and death; he thus occupies an authorial position and cannot be turned into a hero. Adding to this

Bulgakov. Both Bakhtin and Nabokov were born in the 1890s and came of age at the height of the Russian Silver Age. The symbolist movement in particular, with its emphasis on the divine consciousness behind ordinary phenomena, may have informed the two-world (author-hero) models conceptualized by both Bakhtin and Nabokov in their work. Second, Nabokov may have been exposed to Bakhtin's ideas or the ideas of the German philosopher Max Scheler (who, as Brian Poole argues, had influenced Bakhtin's early work, particularly his ideas of "I" relating to another) indirectly through his close friend and mentor, the renowned critic and theorist Yulii Aikhenvald who was older and known to have more connections with the Russian intellectual circles. Conversely, Blackwell suggests that both Bakhtin and Nabokov may have developed similar ideas based on reading Aikhenvald's work or based on their common familiarity with romantic aesthetics. (See Blackwell 195n14, 25-36). Finally, one might argue that Arthur Schopenhauer's 1818 work *The World as Will and Representation*—especially its emphasis on the dual structure of the world and its conception of the world as a puppet show, in which individuals are controlled by a higher universal principle, the Will—is an important influence on both Nabokov's and Bakhtin's ideas about authorship and higher consciousness. For a fascinating study of Schopenhauer's influence on Nabokov, see in particular Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts, "If We Put Our Heads between Our Legs: An Introduction to the Theme 'Vladimir Nabokov and Arthur Schopenhauer'" in *Nabokov Studies Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2007) *Project MUSE*. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/>>. For more on the Moscow Psychological Society and its influence on the Silver Age, see Randall A. Poole, "The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society" in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (April 1999) 319-343. For Max Scheler's influence on Bakhtin, see Brian Poole, "From phenomenology to dialogue: Max Scheler's phenomenological tradition and Mikhail Bakhtin's development from 'Toward a philosophy of the act' to his study of Dostoevsky" in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester University Press, 1989) 109-136. I would like to thank Francisco Picon for sharing his expertise on Bakhtin and Nabokov with me and directing me to the sources and ideas cited above.

²⁶⁰ Alexander Chernyshevski's son Yasha, who had committed suicide, has several parallels with Fyodor and "looked like Fyodor," according to Yasha's mother. Greenleaf suggests that the name "Yasha" "could be calqued as the Russian pronoun 'ia' (I) with a diminutive suffix." Thus, Yasha is "a mockingly accurate simulacrum" of Fyodor himself "minus the genius." (Greenleaf, "Fathers, Sons, and Impostors" 150). Yasha's death, then, can be seen as the death of Fyodor's "I" (at least in part) and, for this reason, if we follow Bakhtin's logic, Fyodor *is* capable of achieving authorial "outsideness" in relation to himself. I want to thank Catharine Nepomnyashchy for this important insight.

²⁶¹ Justin Weir makes a compelling claim about Fyodor's resistance to completing his artistic works in *The Gift* precisely because they need to mirror the incompleteness of their heroes' lives. See Justin Weir, *The Author as Hero: Self and Tradition in Bulgakov, Pasternak, and Nabokov* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002) 100-103.

authorial dimension of the father, Boyd argues that Fyodor's beneficent fate (bringing him and Zina together) operates under the auspices of his father.²⁶² It is Fyodor's father, then, who "creates" Fyodor's life from an otherworldly realm, at the same time as Fyodor struggles to "create" the father in his art.

In his everyday life, Fyodor practices Bakhtinian "outsideness" when he delves into the psyches of those around him. For example, during the meetings of the literary circle at the Chernyshevskis':

И промеж всего того, что говорили другие, что сам говорил, он старался, как везде и всегда, вообразить внутреннее прозрачное движение другого человека, осторожно садясь в собеседника, как в кресло, так чтобы локти того служили ему подлокотниками, и душа бы влегла в чужую душу, -- и тогда вдруг менялось освещение мира, и он на минуту действительно был Александр Яковлевич или Любовь Марковна, или Васильев. Иногда к прохладе и легким нарзанным уколам преобразования примешивалось азартно-спортивное удовольствие, и ему было лестно, когда случайное слово ловко подтверждало последовательный ход мыслей, который он угадывал в другом.

And while the others talked on and he talked on himself, he tried as he did everywhere and always to imagine the inner, transparent motion of this or that other person. He would carefully seat himself inside the interlocutor, as in an armchair, so that the other's elbows would serve as armrests for him, and his soul would fit snugly into the other's soul—and then the lightning of the world would suddenly change and for a minute he would actually become Alexander Chernyshevski, or Lyubov Markovna, or Vasiliev. Sometimes a sporting excitement would be added to the seltzerlike effervescence of the transformation, and he felt flattered when a chance word aptly confirmed the train of thought he was divining in the other (*The Gift*, R47 E39-40).

In these exercises, Fyodor shows penetrating understanding of the other, while still retaining the totalizing external position of the Bakhtinian artist and "diviner." He imagines the other as an "armchair," that is, a completed structure and object. And yet he demonstrates a psychic relatedness to the other, and his divination is confirmed by the other's actions. Like Bakhtin's author, Fyodor is an observer situated on the boundary of the world he is about to create.

²⁶² Boyd 475-478.

The image of the armchair also recalls the moment in “The Recruiting” when Nabokov’s “authorial representative” reveals that he created the character Vasiliy Ivanovich from a variety of elements that all suggest the comfort and softness of an armchair—the blend of the chosen name and patronymic “is like an armchair,” the appearance of a stranger whom he notices in the park is “broad and soft, with a large cozy face,” and the same man’s posture is “comfortable and motionless” as he sits on a park bench.²⁶³ The connection between this scene in *The Gift* and the armchair motif in “The Recruiting” shows that Fyodor’s relationship with others often turns into practice in becoming an author. In this sense, his writing of the biography of Nikolai Chernyshevski represents the most challenging dimension of this authorial training—Fyodor explicitly refers to this project as “firing practice”—because Chernyshevski’s ideology and aesthetics are so completely alien to Fyodor. By setting out to understand someone so totally unlike himself, Fyodor gains the artistic mastery necessary to author *The Gift*.

April 1st, 192- —the date on which the action of *The Gift* begins—is a link not only to Gogol and the Russian literary tradition, but also to Nabokov’s biography. Nabokov’s father, the well-known progressive statesman Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, was buried in Berlin on April 1, 1922. He had died three days earlier, while thwarting an assassination attempt on P. N. Milyukov, the founder and leader of the Russian Constitutional Democratic party.²⁶⁴ In a diary entry, Nabokov later described his reaction to the news of his father’s death and travelling to the site of the assassination on the evening of March 28, 1922:

That night journey I remember as something outside life, monstrously slow, like those mathematical puzzles that torment us in feverish half-sleep. I looked at the

²⁶³ *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* 404.

²⁶⁴ See Boyd 189-195.

lights swimming past, at the whitish bands of lighted pavement, at the spiral reflections in the mirrory-black asphalt and it seemed to me that I was cut off from all this in some fateful manner—that the streetlights and the dark shadows of passersby were an accidental mirage, and the sole thing clear and significant and alive was the grief, tenacious, suffocating, compressing my heart.²⁶⁵

The loss of his father causes Nabokov to experience a new “outside” perspective on life; he is now “cut off” from everything, observing the night streets of Berlin as if from another plane of reality. The “mirrory-black asphalt” of the streets may also recall the “wide window behind which the night gleamed wetly black”—the window near which the novelist Vladimirov is seated during the Writers’ Union meeting in *The Gift*. The image of the dark reflecting city streets, the feeling of unreality, and the “fateful” separation from everyday life all signal a connection between the young Nabokov’s experience of loss and Fyodor’s encounter with Vladimirov in the scene of the writers’ meeting. Can Fyodor’s authorship be a way of regaining his father?

Nabokov’s painful experience of being “outside life” as a result of this loss is perhaps related to Fyodor’s ability to have that special insight into others, to occupy the space of authorial “outsideness.” With regard to his father, however, Fyodor finds himself locked out from such a privileged view. In Bakhtin’s words, an author’s task is to “vivify” his aesthetic object. For Fyodor, such vivification in relation to the father becomes problematic. As he works on the biography of his father, Fyodor is continually frustrated with the impossibility of imagining his father’s thoughts. His father appears to Fyodor in his memories “torturing, enrapturing me—to the point of pain, to an insanity of tenderness, envy and love, tormenting my soul with his inscrutable solitariness” (*The Gift*, R142 E115). Fyodor’s love for his father does not allow him sufficient detachment from him, preventing him from having the necessary authorial “surplus of vision” in relation to the hero. But there is also something about his father that prevents Fyodor from “inhabiting” his soul, as if lowering himself into an armchair, as he is

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Boyd 192 (Nabokov’s emphasis).

able to do with others in his life. Fyodor recalls his childhood when he secretly “looked through [his father’s] study window” (извне подсматривал) trying to understand that “haze, a mystery, an enigmatic reserve” that surrounded the elder Godunov-Cherdyntsev, a man who “possessed an aura of something still unknown” which “had no direct connection either with us, or with my mother, or with the externals of life” (*The Gift*, R134 E109). The father’s association with the mysterious and otherworldly, his disconnectedness from his family and the “externals of life” are in fact the qualities Fyodor is trying to achieve precisely in relation to the father himself.

In imagining his father’s expeditions, Fyodor tries to inhabit his point of view, gradually approaching it—at first imagining himself next to his father: “There were times when going up the Yellow River...he and I would take Elwes’ Swallowtail—a black wonder with tails in the shape of hooves” (*The Gift*, R142-143 E116). Then, only the “I” remains—Fyodor projects himself onto his father, narrating in the first person: “I looked in May for the slate-gray orange-spotted larvae for the Imperial Apollo and for its chrysalis,” “I found under a stone the caterpillar of an unknown moth,” “I headed for Lob-Nor in order to return from there to Russia” (*The Gift*, R143-146 E116-7). The illusion soon crumbles, however, and Fyodor finds himself back in his rented room where he “saw again the dead and impossible tulips of his wallpaper, the crumbling mound of cigarette butts in the ashtray, and the lamp’s reflection in the black windowpane” (*The Gift*, R146 E118). The mirror-like window confirms Fyodor’s failure—the imagined expedition was merely an exercise in solipsism, no true access to his hero has been gained. Later, admitting his inability to complete the biography, Fyodor writes to his mother about the impossibility of the task: “It seems to me a sacrilege to take all this and dilute it with myself. [...] I refuse to hunt down my fancies on my father’s own collecting ground. I have realized... the impossibility of having the imagery of his travels germinate without

contaminating them with a kind of secondary poetization” (*The Gift*, R161 E131). Like Fyodor, the elder Godunov-Cherdyntsev is a creator, but in a different realm. In his writing, Fyodor is unable to surpass the father’s authority, to match his position of mastery and “outsideness” in relation to the world of nature. Rather, as in his childhood, Fyodor remains sealed off behind the glass, looking in on his father’s realm and immobilized by wonder and admiration.

If Fyodor is unable to become an author in relation to his father, he faces an even bigger challenge in transcending himself. In order to write a novel in which he himself is the hero, he has to be able to achieve the authorial “supreme outsideness” in relation to himself, something Bakhtin posits as impossible. For this reason, we see Fyodor not only “inhabit” others as part of his authorial practice, but also speak from the perspective of some imaginary author in relation to himself. The most vivid example of this is the voice of the imaginary reviewer of Fyodor’s book of poetry in Chapter One. In a series of extended passages, this voice (imagined by Fyodor) discusses the poems in the context of Fyodor’s life, all the while referring to him as “the author” or “the young poet” (*The Gift*, R25-26 E21). This section is mirrored by the opening of Chapter Five where we read a series of not imaginary but published reviews of Fyodor’s book, *The Life of Chernyshevski*. Fyodor’s game of self-transcendence thus comes true in part; it is fully realized, however, only in his completion of *The Gift*. Yuri Levin also comments on Fyodor’s practice of looking at oneself as if from outside; in particular, he notes the variety of names used in relation to Fyodor throughout the novel. For most of the narrative, he is referred to as Fyodor Konstantinovich, but in scenes involving his father or mother, he is simply Fyodor (informal). And when describing a public poetry reading, the narrative voice becomes completely distant: “Last to appear was Godunov-Cherdyntsev.” Since the novel is narrated from Fyodor’s perspective, these name changes indicate his mastery of the “self-as-other” point of view. Levin

suggests that the Bakhtinian imperative of “other as hero” can be successfully violated only in a special case when “the hero is a writer...who simultaneously holds both an actively lived and actively creative position, one who has, due to his sheer imaginative force, ‘the surplus of vision and knowledge’ even in relation to himself.”²⁶⁶ While Fyodor can depict his father for us only in a suggestive, diffused, open-ended manner, his extraordinary gift allows him to recreate his own consciousness and his relationship with the world with unparalleled depth and originality.

Both Nabokov’s wife and son have claimed that the portrait of Fyodor’s father in *The Gift* captures something essential about Nabokov.²⁶⁷ Nabokov himself makes a similar suggestion in the Foreword to the English translation. As part of his rejection of any identification with Fyodor he writes, “my father is not the explorer of Central Asia that I still may become some day” (*The Gift*, R8 E7). Nabokov the naturalist may have a lot in common with Godunov-Cherdyntsev Senior, but we have also established that both he and his alter ego Vladimirov have a definite kinship with Fyodor. Nabokov himself can thus be identified with both the son and the father. The name “Vladimirov” (“the son of Vladimir”) is complex in this respect. First of all, etymologically, the Old Russian name Volodimer (Володимѣръ) combines the Old Church Slavonic root *vlad-* (владъ-) meaning “power” with the Gothic *-mērs* meaning “great.”²⁶⁸ Thus, Vladimir, or “great in his power,” is an apt name for a character whose presence amid characters in the narrative gestures toward the authorial presence beyond the boundaries of the fictional world. Second, Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov was himself both

²⁶⁶ Levin 206-208.

²⁶⁷ Alexandrov 108.

²⁶⁸ Max Vasmer, *Etymological dictionary of the Russian language*, 4 volumes (Heidelberg, 1950–58; Russian translation 1964–73).

Vladimir and the son of Vladimir. The novelist Vladimirov, therefore, whose portrait resembles Nabokov so closely, can be understood both as Nabokov's avatar (himself) or his "son"—a character he had created.²⁶⁹

Vladimirov is at once the son and the father, the creator and the creation. This connects him to Fyodor, who eventually "authors" himself, in a sense becoming his own father. At the same time, Fyodor is almost always referred to by his name and patronymic—Fyodor Konstantinovich—in the Russian text. His name is inseparable from his father's, which is confirmed by his climactic dream at the end of the novel, in which he encounters his father. In the dream, the name of Fyodor's former landlady, Klara Stoboj, is distorted into *Egda Stoboj*, which is a transliterated fragment of the Russian phrase *vsegda s toboj* ("always with you" [*The Gift*, R400 E321]).²⁷⁰ Significantly, *Egda* is also an archaic Russian word rooted in Old Church Slavonic, meaning "when" or "if"; this meaning further supports the Christian references in Nabokov's treatment of the father-son, author-character themes.²⁷¹ It was used in the liturgical context by the Russian Orthodox Church, as in the following opening of the third Antiphon of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: "In Your Kingdom remember us, o Lord, when you come into Your Kingdom" (Во Царствии Твоем помяни нас, Господи, егда приидеши во Царствии Твоем).²⁷² Fyodor's dream thus reassures Fyodor of his father's presence in his life: there is no separation by death since the otherworld, like the Kingdom of God, is omnipresent

²⁶⁹ Appropriately to this latter reading, Brian Boyd interprets this character as an intermediary figure, a device designed by Nabokov to distance himself from Fyodor. See Boyd 463.

²⁷⁰ The effect is erased in the English translation, which has simply "Frau Stoboj."

²⁷¹ See *Slovar' russkogo yazyka XVIII veka* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984) 7:58-59.

²⁷² Compare also Luke 23:42, "Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'" For the text of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, see *Vsenoshchnoe Bdenie, Liturgiia* (Moscow: Biblioteka "Blagoveschenie," 2006) <http://www.wco.ru/biblio/books/vsenoshcnoe_bdenie/H28-T.htm>. I am grateful to Irina Reyfman and Rebecca Stanton for pointing out this Christian connection in Nabokov's text.

and eternal. At the same time, this reunion provides the approval and release necessary for Fyodor to cross the final boundary into authorship—to become the author of *The Gift*, and of himself.

Other characters' names in the novel suggest similar son-father merging. The poet Koncheyev's name recalls *Konstantin*, the name of Fyodor's father, thus uniting Koncheyev and Fyodor in a father-son structure. The syllable *cher* links the Godunov-Cherdyntsevs with the Chernyshevskis (Alexander Chernyshevski is a father figure of sorts to Fyodor, at the same time as Fyodor makes the Chernyshevskis' tragedy the subject of his work; Fyodor thus authors and "fathers" both him and his namesake Nikolai Chernyshevski). Additionally, Monika Greenleaf links the name Godunov-Cherdyntsev to Pushkin's opera *Boris Godunov* and discusses *The Gift* in the context of the impostor theme in that work.²⁷³ These complex interpenetrating levels of kinship suggest the difficulty of separating father from son. Nabokov seems to have created an almost biblical father-son unity in the novel, one that echoes his personal tragedy. In 1922, Nabokov responded to his father's death with a poem titled "Easter," which was published on Easter Day in the Russian émigré newspaper *The Helm* (Рубль), founded and edited by the elder Nabokov until his death. In the poem, Nabokov imagines his father resurrected in the blossoming beauty of spring. A few weeks later, Nabokov returned to Cambridge for his final term. He wrote to his mother that he sensed his father's help in passing his examinations: "And before my exam, I looked on his portrait, as if on an icon, and I know that he helped me."²⁷⁴ In his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov describes his father as "one of those paradisiac personages, who comfortably soar... on the vaulted ceiling of a church, while below, one by one,

²⁷³ Greenleaf, "Fathers, Sons, and Impostors" 148.

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Boyd 194.

the wax tapers in mortal hands light up.”²⁷⁵ These Christian motifs of the divine father are an important part of Fyodor’s personal and artistic fate in *The Gift*.

In his interviews, Nabokov famously professed indifference to organized religion, instead alleging his own private access to mystical knowledge, which he never openly discussed but instead intimated in his fictional work. And yet, oblique references to Christian texts surface in *The Gift*. Alexandrov points out the association between water imagery and rebirth in the novel, specifically surrounding the figure of Fyodor’s father, which evokes the Christian rite of baptism.²⁷⁶ Similarly, in the figure of Vladimirov (and of Fyodor and his father), Nabokov alludes to the complex father-son unity of the New Testament.²⁷⁷ For example, the tension between the hierarchical and synthetic models of Father-Son in John’s Gospel and other writings has been a subject of intense critical attention. Some Johannine scholars posit that in the Gospel the Son “in origin and essence is equal to the Father,” while others claim that “this equality of divine nature between Father and Son is held in tension with John’s depiction in numerous texts of a hierarchical relationship between the two, in which the Son is perfectly obedient to the Father.”²⁷⁸ We may recall that Fyodor’s father was known to “name the nameless” in the world

²⁷⁵ *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Putnam, 1966) 65.

²⁷⁶ Alexandrov 110-112. (Cf. John 3:5: “Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’”). For a survey of Orthodox Christian (and some Judaic) motifs in Nabokov’s fiction, see also Samuel Schuman, “The Beautiful Gate: Vladimir Nabokov and Orthodox Iconography” in *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 32 No. 1 (Spring 2000) 47-66.

²⁷⁷ The persistent theme of the triangle—such as, for example, the “affinity” among Vladimirov, Koncheyev, and Fyodor, or the triple suicide pact that takes the life of Yasha Chernyshevski—may be taken for a parodic allusion to the Holy Trinity. Additionally, the plot of *The Gift* specifically alludes to three father-son pairs-- Alexander and Yasha Chernyshevski, Konstantin and Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, and Nikolai and Sasha Chernyshevski in Fyodor’s book *The Life of Chernyshevski*.

²⁷⁸ Rudolph Schnackenburg, “Excursus VII: The Notion of Faith in the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Gospel According to St. John* (trans. Hastings et al; 3 vols; Crossroad: New York, 1990) 2.177. Christopher Cowan, “The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel: Johannine Subordination Revisited,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 49 No. 1 (Spring 2006) 115-135 (116).

of nature (*The Gift*, R140 E113). And, since Fyodor is similarly destined to create through the medium of the word, a distinctly biblical tension arises between the two figures in Nabokov's novel, which is in part resolved through their "otherworldly" reunion in Fyodor's dream. The moment when Fyodor encounters "the son and father" Vladimirov is strange because it shows side by side two figures who may claim authorship of *The Gift*. Vladimirov's appearance in this scene points to the difficulty of separating son from father or separating oneself into the elements of author and hero, as Fyodor does throughout the novel. The detailed and detached third-person description of Vladimirov is Nabokov's way of showing us his own "self-as-other" perspective, now establishing a kinship of authorship and imaginative power between himself and Fyodor. It is here that an important shift occurs: the character Fyodor briefly joins the author Vladimirov-Nabokov near the window and then escapes outside, impatient to see Zina, his muse and ideal reader. The moment communicates the complexity of Fyodor's transition into authorship; it also prefigures Fyodor's reunion with the father, his "ascent to the higher realm of creative power," and creation of *The Gift*.²⁷⁹

In discussing father figures in *The Gift*, it is impossible to ignore the role of Pushkin. Indeed, it is Pushkin's prose that inspires Fyodor to undertake the writing of his father's biography. The more absorbed Fyodor becomes in this project, the more difficult it becomes to separate the influence of these two "fathers": as Fyodor works on the biography, Pushkin "entered his blood" at the same time as Pushkin's voice "merged with the voice of his father." In this moment, Fyodor also remembers that his own nurse "hailed from the same place that Pushkin's Arina came from" (*The Gift*, R115 E94). Here, father and son are each identified with Pushkin, united through Pushkin's poetic word.

²⁷⁹ Connolly 216.

If Fyodor finds it difficult to come to terms with his father's death, *The Gift* communicates the same unwillingness to accept Pushkin's death. Chapter Two, which focuses on Fyodor's work on his father's biography, describes his writing process side by side with the drafts and the sources for his work. In particular, it cites an excerpt from a memoir by one A. N. Sukhoschyokov, which Fyodor had found by accident while leafing through old Russian magazines. In the memoir, Sukhoschyokov describes a prank he had played on Fyodor's grandfather in 1858, when the latter had just returned to Russia after living abroad for over twenty years. When Cherdyntsev, Fyodor's grandfather, asks whether Pushkin is still alive, Sukhoschyokov replies "sacrilegiously" that he is. He then takes Cherdyntsev to see a theater production of *Othello* and points out to him an elderly man in the audience, claiming that it is Pushkin. While Cherdyntsev shows little interest, the prankster himself is transfixed by his invention:

В соседней ложе сидел старик... Небольшого роста, в поношенном фраке, желтовато-смуглый, с растрепанными пепельными баками и просестью в жидких, взъерошенных волосах, он преоригинально наслаждался игрою африканца: толстые губы вздрагивали, ноздри были раздуты, при иных пассажах он даже подскакивал и стучал от удовольствия по барьеру, сверкая перстнями. [...] Я не в силах был оторваться от соседней ложи, я смотрел на эти резкие морщины, на широкий нос, на большие уши... по спине пробегали мурашки, вся отеллова ревность не могла меня отвлечь. Что если это и впрямь Пушкин, грезилось мне, Пушкин в шестьдесят лет, Пушкин, пощаженный пулей рокового хлыща, Пушкин, вступивший в роскошную осень своего гения... Вот это он, вот эта желтая рука, сжимающая маленький дамский бинокль, написала "Анчар", "Графа Нулина", "Египетские Ночи"... Действие кончилось; грянули рукоплескания. Седой Пушкин порывисто встал и все еще улыбаясь, со светлым блеском в молодых глазах, быстро вышел из ложи.

In the neighbouring box there sat an old man... Of shortish stature, in a worn tailcoat, with a sallow and swarthy complexion, dishevelled ashen side-whiskers, and sparse, grey-streaked tousled hair, he was taking a most eccentric delight in the acting of the African: his thick lips twitched, his nostrils were dilated, and at certain bits he even jumped up and down in his seat and banged with delight on the parapet, his rings flashing. [...] I was quite incapable of tearing myself away

from the neighbouring box; I looked at those harsh wrinkles, that broad nose, those large ears... shivers ran down my back, and not all of Othello's jealousy was able to drag me away. What if this is indeed Pushkin, I mused, Pushkin at sixty, Pushkin spared two decades ago by the bullet of the fatal coxcomb, Pushkin in the rich autumn of his genius... This is he; this yellow hand grasping those lady's opera glasses wrote *Anchar, Graf Nulin, The Egyptian Nights*... The act finished; applause thundered. Grey-haired Pushkin stood up abruptly, and still smiling, with a bright sparkle in his youthful eyes, quickly left his box (*The Gift*, R118-119 E97).

This scene, in which an unknown “old man” is transformed by the sheer power of invention into Russia's foremost poet, the “grey-haired Pushkin,” should seem familiar by now. Like Nabokov’s “authorial representative” in “The Recruiting” and Vladimirov in Chapter Five of *The Gift*, this figure is a visitor from the poetic beyond. His unattractive features—the “sparse hair” and the ghostly grey and yellow palette that prevails in his physical description—recall Vladimirov’s “receding hair” and “greyish-yellow teeth.” Furthermore, Pushkin’s abrupt exit recalls Fyodor’s similarly abrupt escape from the writers’ meeting following his encounter with Vladimirov. At the same time, Pushkin’s energy and his “youthful eyes” remind us of Sedykh’s documentary portrait of the novelist Sirin—“a sportsman-like young man, a very nervous and impetuous one” who “speaks quickly and with enthusiasm.” In this vision of Pushkin, carefully hidden in an obscure memoir among other textual fragments in the novel, Nabokov plants the seed of his own complex self-portrait in *The Gift*, suggesting that both Fyodor and Vladimirov participate in this self-portrait.

Like Vladimirov, the figure of Pushkin transfixes his observer drawing his attention away from the stage, the central action of the scene—the performance of *Othello* and the theatrical proceedings of the writers’ meeting. (Pushkin’s self-identification with Shakespeare’s tragic moor is well known,²⁸⁰ in the Vladimirov scene, the center stage is occupied by Vladimirov’s

²⁸⁰ To be fair, Catherine O’Neil points out that, “although Othello provided an initial model for Pushkin to portray his African ancestor, he was never by himself the only aspect of the tragedy to occupy Pushkin’s mind. [...] There

farcical double, the writer Shirin.) “This is he”—the observer’s realization that he is in the presence of the immortal Poet—is equivalent to Fyodor’s “sideways glance” of recognition in the Vladimirov scene. The unprecedented authorial “he” in relation to both Pushkin and Vladimirov-Nabokov which links these two scenes raises a challenge to the Bakhtinian predicament of authorship: as Fyodor has shown, a hero can become an author only when his gift of imagination allows him to view himself as other.²⁸¹ Finally, the scene confirms one of Nabokov’s strongest beliefs—that the power of imagination can erase the boundary between earthly life and the otherworld, can bring mortals in contact with the immortal.

In the final paragraph of the novel (written in verse metrically patterned after Pushkin’s Onegin stanza, but made to look like prose on the page), we encounter a new voice – the “I” that claims to have completed writing *The Gift*. As the author parts with his creation, the narrated world of Fyodor and Zina recedes, and we come to view the novel from this new, elevated perspective:

Прощай-же, книга! Для видений -- отсрочки смертной тоже нет. С колен поднимется Евгений, -- но удаляется поэт. И все-же слух не может сразу расстаться с музыкой, рассказу дать замереть... судьба сама еще звенит, -- и для ума внимательного нет границы -- там, где поставил точку я: продленный призрак бытия синееет за чертой страницы, как завтрашние облака, -- и не кончается строка.

Good-by, my book! Like mortal eyes, imagined ones must close some day.
Onegin from his knees will rise - but his creator strolls away. And yet the ear cannot right now part with the music and allow the tale to fade; the chords of fate

was no Othello without Desdemona for Pushkin.” See Catherine O’Neil, “Pushkin and *Othello*,” *Under the Sky of My Africa: Alexander Pushkin and Blackness*, eds. Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, Nicole Svobodny, and Ludmilla A. Trigos (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006) 196-226 (218-219).

²⁸¹ Yuri Levin points out a (coincidentally) relevant quote in Bakhtin which can serve as a key to the novel’s title: “The aesthetic interpretation and organization of the outer body and its correlative world is *a gift* (дар) bestowed upon the hero from another consciousness—from the author/contemplator” (Bakhtin’s emphasis, *Art & Answerability*, 100). On the first reading of *The Gift*, we can witness Fyodor’s becoming one with this higher consciousness towards the end of the novel; on the second reading, we see him speaking from the higher consciousness throughout. This is why the novel’s structure has been compared to a Möbius strip (Davydov); it also explains the tension behind its father/son, author/hero dichotomies.

itself continue to vibrate; and no obstruction for the sage exists where I have put The End: the shadows of my world extend beyond the skyline of the page, blue as tomorrow's morning haze – nor does this terminate the phrase (*The Gift*, R415 E333, my emphasis).

The “I” of Fyodor/Nabokov and the “he” of his literary father Pushkin are merged once again in the image of the author who strolls away leaving his hero in an unresolved situation. Here, in particular in Nabokov's English rendition of this verse, we see *Onegin*'s creator encircled by declarations of Nabokov's authorial mastery: “I,” “my book,” “my world.” As he pays tribute to Pushkin, Nabokov finally exceeds the father—turning him into a mere fixture of his world.²⁸²

The Spectator and the Stage

I want to conclude this chapter with a discussion of Vladimirov's role as a spectator and of the significance of theatricality and spectatorship in *The Gift*. Greenleaf calls the scene at the Writers' Union where Fyodor encounters Vladimirov “the bacchanal” where “names of characters from different works and centuries of Russian literature (Fyodor, Luzhin, Charsky) mingle with their suddenly diminutive and distorted authors, Shirin, Vladimirov and the ‘repulsively small, almost portable lawyer Pyshkin’”; she also compares the scene to “Tatiana's equally wild and metapoetic name-day party” in *Eugene Onegin*.²⁸³ I agree with this carnivalesque reading highlighting the erosion of boundaries between characters and authors, especially in light of my argument that the scene signals a boundary crossing for Fyodor. It is as if in Vladimirov he has recognized a future self, the author of *The Gift*, and is compelled to approach him, and later *become* him. I disagree, however, with the reading of Vladimirov as a

²⁸² Greenleaf makes a related point about this finale: “As readers recognize the beloved meter and intonations surfacing through the modern prose in which they have been planted, it is up to them to decide whether Nabokov's artistic departure is in some ways a homecoming, a continuation of the Pushkinian essence of Russian poetry—or an act of *samozvanstvo* [imposture].” See Greenleaf, “Fathers, Sons, and Impostors” 158.

²⁸³ Greenleaf, “Fathers, Sons, and Impostors” 158.

“diminutive and distorted” author—in my view, his silence and marginality in the scene set him apart from the general folly. He is the observer to the theatrical proceedings of the meeting, at the center of which is Shirin—the inverted double of Vladimirov.

In contrast to Vladimirov, Shirin assumes an active and almost aggressive role in the scene, taking the stage, doing most of the talking, and trying to effect a political reorganization of the Writers’ Union. Shirin’s appearance is, like Vladimirov’s, described in detail, but he looks nothing like Nabokov in the 1930s: rather, he is “a thickset man with a reddish crew cut, always badly shaved and wearing large spectacles behind which...swam two tiny transparent eyes – which were completely impervious to visual impressions” (*The Gift*, R357 E288). Shirin’s blindness to the physical world is, like that of the similarly bespectacled Nikolai Chernyshevski, the trait singled out in *The Gift* as the one most antithetical to authorship and artistic insight. Shirin’s “transparent” eyes set him even more apart from Vladimirov. Transparency in *The Gift* is a mark of the character, not the author – Fyodor describes his imaginative gift as seeing another “as clearly as if he were fashioned of glass and you were the glassblower” (*The Gift*, R187 E152). Similarly, in *Invitation to a Beheading*, published almost simultaneously with *The Gift*, it is Cincinnatus’ opaqueness in a world of transparent figures that marks his artistic gift and allows him finally to see the menacing world around him as nothing but theatrical props and decorations. The crime for which he is sentenced to death is “gnostical turpitude,” which may be read as an equivalent of the Bakhtinian “surplus of vision and knowledge” possessed by the author in relation to the hero.

Vladimirov the spectator, then, is a figure of a completely different order than Shirin the political activist. Like Vladimirov, Fyodor refuses to participate in the politics of the Writers’ Union and states that “Koncheyev is right to stand aside from all this” (*The Gift*, R360 E290).

Koncheyev and Vladimirov, we may recall, are both individuals with whom Nabokov explicitly identifies in his Foreword to *The Gift*. Following their suit, Fyodor eventually disengages himself from the “bacchanal,” leaving the meeting to look for Zina. The theatricality of this scene and Fyodor’s escape from it recall the ending of *Invitation to a Beheading*, where Cincinnatus leaves behind the world of puppets and props and walks on to rejoin “beings akin to him.”²⁸⁴

In *The Gift*, the figure of the observer is synonymous with the artist; the artist’s powers of observation and his sensory responsiveness to his surroundings place him in contact with the otherworld. Thus Shirin’s “blissful incapacity for observation” and “complete uninformedness about the surrounding world – and a complete inability to put a name to anything” contrast sharply with Fyodor’s, and his father’s, intense attention to nature (*The Gift*, R357 E288). Fyodor’s communion with nature and the surrounding world in the Grunewald scenes, just when the idea for his next novel begins to germinate in his mind, is described explicitly in terms of theater and spectatorship. As he lies down by an old tree that seems “to beckon him – ‘Show you something interesting,’” Fyodor hears a song and sees a group of five nuns walking through the woods while picking flowers. This vision seems to Fyodor so carefully and beautifully crafted, “it all looked so much like a staged scene” – that he is filled with awe of its invisible creator:

How much skill there was in everything, what an infinity of grace and art, what a director lurked behind the pines, how well everything was calculated [...] How it had been mounted! How much labour had gone into this light, swift scene, into this deft traverse, what muscles there were beneath that heavy-looking, black cloth, which would be exchanged after the intermission for gossamer ballet skirts! (*The Gift*, R390 E313-314).

²⁸⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*, trans. Vladimir Nabokov and Dmitry Nabokov (New York: Putnam, 1959) 223.

The theater of nature puts the artist in communication with the infinite consciousness, which displays its creations for this privileged individual spectator. This divine author and his audience share a kinship, which is best expressed by Nabokov's description of his ideal reader: "[The artist's] best audience is the person he sees in the shaving mirror every morning. I think that the audience an artist imagines, when he imagines that kind of thing, is a room filled with people wearing his own mask."²⁸⁵ The spectator, then, is a reflection of the controlling author. Like Fyodor's "self-as-other" perspective, these two parts of the self combine into an all-embracing consciousness, the "one complete and free eye" of the artist (*The Gift*, R351 E283).

Nature and meaningless social rituals are opposed in the novel as higher and lower forms of theater. In Chapter Five, Fyodor, along with other émigré litterateurs, attends the funeral of his friend Alexander Chernyshevski. The funeral is explicitly compared to a "stage production," and its careful orchestration repulses Fyodor. At the conclusion of the service, as the mourners, "according to the scheme of the crematorium's master of ceremonies, were supposed to go up to the widow one at a time and offer words of condolence," Fyodor refuses to be part of the production and escapes "onto the street," as if stepping off stage (*The Gift*, R354 E284-5). As he tries to come to terms with the finality of his friend's departure, Fyodor absorbs the light and sounds of the spring day and realizes that this natural beauty is "but the reverse side of a magnificent fabric, on the front of which there gradually formed and became alive images invisible to him" (*The Gift*, R355 E287). Like the Grunewald scene, this episode is one of many in *The Gift* that posit the existence of the otherworld as a constant presence beneath the surface of everyday life. Thus death itself is completely misrepresented by the theatrics of the funeral house—as an artist, Fyodor learns to see death as but an entrance into the realm of infinite consciousness, not a departure but a return.

²⁸⁵ Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974) 18.

Nabokov uses theater as a metaphor to represent both the aesthetic otherworld and the Russian émigré world in Berlin. Nabokov values the position of the spectator and opposes it to the position of “actor” – someone actively involved in any kind of group production or socially and politically motivated action. One critic sees Nabokov’s dislike of social engagement as one consequence of V. D. Nabokov’s death and of its impact on Nabokov’s life. After this tragic event, “The self he had identified with his father (a man of action, political engagement, leadership, courage, and patriotic zeal) ‘died’ . . . and was replaced by an onlooker, an eye.”²⁸⁶ In addition, these feelings may be connected to the particular circumstances of V. D. Nabokov’s death, which took place in the Berlin Philharmonia Hall after a lecture delivered by Milyukov to an audience of Russian émigrés. As V. D. Nabokov and a friend were holding down the gunman who had shot at Milyukov following the lecture, a second gunman jumped on the stage and shot three times at V. D. Nabokov to free his accomplice. V. D. Nabokov died almost instantly from bullet wounds to his spine, lung, and heart. In his diary, Nabokov recalls glimpsing the site of the tragedy later that evening: “Through the open side door I saw the hall where it happened flash past. Some chairs were crooked, some overturned.”²⁸⁷ The images of a large concert hall, the audience fleeing in disarray, and a political zealot wielding a gun on stage must have haunted Nabokov’s memory ever since, and they are echoed in some of the most important scenes in *The Gift*. In these episodes, the spectator’s position is occupied by Nabokov’s “authorial representatives” or privileged characters, while the center stage is the

²⁸⁶Dean Flower, “Nabokov’s Private Eye,” *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring 1987) 165-171 (166).

²⁸⁷Boyd 190-93, Nabokov’s emphasis.

space reserved for parody of the political activist blinded by utopian ideas, of “the lover of mass audiences,” as Brian Boyd refers to another such myopic utopist, Nikolai Chernyshevski.²⁸⁸

Nabokov’s interest in spectatorship as an authorial stance and his aversion to social causes and activism were also rooted in a fundamental disagreement with many representatives of the Russian émigré community in Berlin about the meaning of the Russian literary tradition. Most émigrés defended the Chernyshevskian ideal of socially committed literature and declared Nabokov an “alien” and “un-Russian” writer because he refused to see art as a means to any social end. The writer and critic Georgiy Adamovich famously declared about Nabokov: “All our traditions end in him” (Все наши традиции в нем обрываются).²⁸⁹ The Chernyshevski tradition of literature as social instrument was so highly upheld among the émigrés, that the liberal journal *Contemporary Annals* agreed to publish *The Gift* only on the condition of omitting its entire fourth chapter (which contains *The Life of Chernyshevski*, Fyodor’s parodic biography of Chernyshevski). Nabokov later called this bizarre instance of censorship from the left “a pretty example of life finding itself obliged to imitate the very art it condemns,” because in *The Gift*, Fyodor encounters similar difficulties in publishing *The Life of Chernyshevski* in Russian émigré journals (“Foreword” to *The Gift*, R8 E7). Nabokov’s attitude in this debate, as the guardian of pure art and the defender of Pushkin (whom the liberal Russian emigration came to criticize as frivolous and apolitical), placed him in the margins of this small, already fragmented literary community.

Both Nabokov’s personal history and his philosophy of authorship inform the tension between center and periphery, action and observation, discernible in *The Gift* and his other works. Nabokov’s figured author Vladimirov stands on the boundary between the worlds of

²⁸⁸Boyd 457.

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Davydov, *Teksty-matreshki* 29.

creator and creation. His presence betrays the limits of the created world of the novel, at the same time as one privileged member of this world (Fyodor) is invited to join Nabokov's club. On another level, this authorial intrusion invites the reader to observe the world in a Nabokovian manner—to pay attention to hidden structures in our natural surroundings and assume a benevolent artistic force guiding our lives and eager to communicate. The all-seeing eye and the attentive spectator, the author and the audience, both participate in creating the world, and are “beings akin” to one another. The reunion with the father and the integration of Pushkin as both the creator and the hero of Nabokov's fictional world are also part of the reassurance Nabokov provides for his reader: art and imagination defy life's tragic finality, offering instead the promise of eternal closeness and communication.

Conclusion. The Figured Author and the Totalitarian Space

Писатель: Я писатель.

Читатель: А по-моему, ты г...о!

Писатель стоит несколько минут потрясенный этой новой идеей и падает замертво. Его выносят.

Writer: I'm a writer.

Reader: Well, I think you're s..t!

For a few minutes the writer stands dumbstruck by this new idea, then falls dead. He is carried out.

Daniil Kharms, "Four illustrations of how a new idea blindsides a person who is not prepared for it," 1933²⁹⁰

In this project, I have defined and analyzed a device that has scarcely been studied in Russian literature. Despite this lack of recognition, the figured author captures something essential about Russian culture. The tension—between self and other, actor and observer, center and periphery—that lies at the core of the figured author speaks eloquently to Russian culture's attempts at self-definition in various contexts of influence and oppression (such as, for example, Western thought, Tolstoy's powerful dogma, or the Soviet regime). The figured author is defined primarily in relation to the hero of the work; similarly, the Russian literary tradition often painfully defines itself in relation to another—particularly the West.

The device itself can be interpreted both through a Western lens and a specifically Russian one. An author among characters, the figured author is a character at odds with the rest of the fictional world. Thus, like the romantic heroes of Byron or Chateaubriand, he stands apart, an outcast in relation to other figures in the narrative. In another way, his presence in the text can be viewed as a mark of romantic irony. Like the narrative voices in the works of Sterne

²⁹⁰ Ed. A. Avdeev, *Daniil Kharms*, 2 volumes (Moscow: New York: Victori, 1994) 1:273. All quotations from Kharms's text are from this edition, unless otherwise noted. All further references to this edition will be given in the text.

and Cervantes, which constantly call attention to the artifice of their respective stories, the figured author is a device signaling the author's control of the narrative. From yet another perspective, the figured author can be analyzed in the context of the European modernist tradition. This character's status as a member of an audience (listener, reader, spectator), as we have seen in Chekhov, Bulgakov, and Nabokov, clashes with the romantic conception of the poet/author. Unlike the figured author, the romantic poet is an active figure who both lives and writes, converting his experience into art. The emphasis on the audience is part of a later current in Western culture, which emerges at the turn of the twentieth century. Impressionist and modernist art increasingly relies on the viewer or the reader to make sense of a diluted or fragmented picture of the world and thus participate in artistic creation. The Western literary theorists of the "death of the author," mentioned in the Introduction, were in many ways speaking to this growing role of the audience in twentieth-century art. The figured author in Russian literature, then, is a synthesis of modernist and romantic thought and, as such, can be viewed as part of the Western tradition.

But the specifics of Russian culture itself provide even stronger reasons for authorial self-figuration in the margins of narrative. Known for its cult of the poet and especially its cult of the *dead* poet, Russian culture has produced authors (and narrators) who are strikingly self-conscious, self-diminishing, or self-erasing. Critics have offered a variety of explanations for such a morbid obsession with selfhood and with the origin of one's own culture. Boym argues that it is Russian culture's recurrent "tension between poetic and revolutionary discourses" that informs this close scrutiny of the poet's self and biography.²⁹¹ Orwin attributes such literary self-consciousness to the cultural jolt and rapid westernization effected by Peter's reforms.

²⁹¹ Boym 122.

Galya Diment suggests that the origins of this phenomenon lie much deeper. The early Kievan Christians chose the “kenotic aspect of Christ,”—the relinquishing and “emptying out” of the self—as the focus of their religious discourse.²⁹² The princes Boris and Gleb were the first saints canonized in Kievan Rus; the accounts of the princes’ martyrdom and meek acceptance of death were some of the most popular among the saints’ lives written in the early Christian period. In Diment’s view, the remarkably strong emphasis that the newly converted Kievan Christians placed on humility tremendously influenced the Russian discourse of the self. In particular, it impeded the early development of autobiography in Russia, “discouraging any literary act of self-description as inappropriately ‘boastful,’” and likely contributed to other self-effacing and self-conscious aspects of Russian literature, like the figured author.²⁹³

In the context of this larger cultural tendency for self-questioning, I have illustrated the specific roles in which Russian authors cast themselves within their fiction and how their respective projects are rooted in the issues of their culture. Pushkin’s Author enters the frame of *Eugene Onegin* to assert his mastery of the Russian literary language and bring new life to it; Gogol’s Author in *Dead Souls* also attempts to create new forms for the Russian language while struggling to inhabit the role of Russia’s savior and moral guide. The emphasis on the audience in the case of Chekhov, Bulgakov, and Nabokov similarly takes on meanings that address specific problems of authorship in Russian culture. As we have seen, Chekhov’s impetus for casting the author in the role of a listener resulted from his confrontation with the overbearing morality of Tolstoy at the end of the nineteenth century, while Bulgakov wrote at a time when authors were being destroyed and silenced by the Soviet state; thus, his compassionate reader

²⁹² Galya Diment, *The Autobiographical Novel of Co-Consciousness* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994) 17.

²⁹³ Diment 17.

was necessary to guarantee the author's immortality. Finally, Nabokov found himself in an alien, marginal position in the Russian émigré circles in Berlin as a defender of Pushkin's art, as he saw it, against the proponents of socially committed literature. Thus his figured author Vladimirov is a silent spectator whose presence signals Nabokov's place as Pushkin's literary son, the true heir to the Russian literary tradition. In all these cases, donning the mask of a bystander or a member of the audience carried an important artistic message that was specific to each author's cultural moment and fit within the larger arc of Russia's kenotic authorial self.

I think that further study of the figured author will yield an even deeper understanding of the particular kind of self-reflexivity with respect to the literary tradition that is so prominent in Russian culture. In my view, an examination of this device in historical context would be especially fruitful. I have mentioned the adoption of Christianity and Peter's westernizing reforms as two historical events that may have contributed to the way the Russian authorial self may question or doubt its own existence or authority. Stalin's reign of terror, in my opinion, introduced a completely new paradigm into the story of Russia's literary self-effacement. As I have suggested in my analysis of Bulgakov's "Morphine," the Soviet state's attitude to the arts in the late 1920s and 1930s led authors to engage in literary self-mutilation and self-destruction—burning their own manuscripts, censoring or hiding their own work, which contributed to a feeling among authors of being "buried alive." Self-effacement and self-questioning was no longer a vague ancient flavor of the culture as a whole, but a strong traumatic response to the dangers and pressures of the immediate outside reality. In my opinion, a close examination of the figured author in this context is needed.

With such a project in mind, I want to outline some vistas for further study. For example, we might turn to the short prose of Daniil Kharms. Kharms's absurdist works tend to obscure

the boundary between dream and reality, reflecting a nightmarish world where arrests, gruesome violence, and death occur for no reason. In Kharm's 1939 novella "The Old Woman" (Старуха), the narrator is a writer who feels "a frightening power" within him and wants to write a story, but is unable to do so (1:298). As he struggles with writer's block, he is visited by an old woman. The woman enters his apartment and orders him to kneel and then lie on the floor face down, until he inexplicably loses consciousness. When the narrator regains consciousness, he discovers that the old woman has died. Agonized by the presence of her dead body in his apartment and by the prospect of being arrested for a crime he did not commit, the narrator at first thinks that he has dreamt the incident. "And so it was all a dream. But when did it begin? [...] God! The kind of thing one dreams in a dream!" he exclaims (1:301). The inability to separate dream from reality and the suggestion that reality may be a dream within a dream convey the surreal quality of the environment in which authors existed in the 1930s.

The writer's paralysis is another important theme in the novella. The idea for a story is ripe in the narrator's mind but he cannot write it down; the story suggests parallels between authorship and martyrdom in the Soviet Union:

Это будет рассказ о чудотворце, который живет в наше время и не творит чудес. Он знает, что он чудотворец и может сотворить любое чудо, но он этого не делает. Его выселяют из квартиры, он знает, что стоит ему только махнуть пальцем и квартира останется за ним, но он не делает этого, он покорно съезжает с квартиру и живет за городом в сарае. Он может этот сарай превратить в прекрасный кирпичный дом, но он не делает этого, он продолжает жить в сарае и в конце концов умирает, не сделав за свою жизнь ни одного чуда.

It will be a story about a miracle worker who lives in our time and doesn't make miracles. He knows that he is a miracle worker and can create any miracle, but he doesn't do it. He is evicted from his apartment, he knows that he need only move his finger and the apartment will remain his, but he doesn't do it; he meekly moves out of the apartment and lives in a shack in the suburbs. He can transform this shack into a beautiful brick house, but he doesn't do it; he continues to live in

the shack and eventually dies, not having created a single miracle in his life.
(1:298)

The miracle worker is an ambiguous figure. The fact that he has not worked one miracle in his life seems lamentable, and yet the miracle worker accepts his fate “meekly,” like the princes Boris and Gleb. Even though he knows his own power, he refuses to exercise it and dies without having fulfilled his calling. Is it that the circumstances of his time have broken his will to perform miracles? Does he view miracles as no longer needed, something fundamentally at odds with the time in which he lives? The miracle worker, briefly mentioned in “The Old Woman” represents the new type of figured author that emerges in the 1930s. He is a creator who is no longer relevant to the world; scarcely mentioned in the story, he exists only in the protagonist’s mind, and is referred to in the third person. Far from an authorial “I,” he is stripped of all authority and voice in the story. Further, he is imagined by the protagonist of the story and is thus posited as not real.

Like the miracle worker, the narrator of “The Old Woman” is himself a paralyzed author: in his writing, he cannot get beyond the first sentence – “The miracle worker was tall” (1:299). It is not difficult to make the connection between Kharms himself and his miracle worker. Kharms was known for his towering height. His friend and colleague Iakov Druskin makes the connection even more explicit; he writes about Kharms’s obsession with the idea of miracles: “Kharms had a sense of life as a miracle and he wanted to make his life into a miracle.”²⁹⁴ Druskin continues, “If a person’s life, at least by the end, becomes a kind of hagiography, in the case of Kharms this was true to the highest degree.”²⁹⁵ Kharms was arrested in 1941 (he had

²⁹⁴ Iakov Druskin, “On Daniil Kharms” in *Daniil Kharms and the Poetics of the Absurd: Essays and Materials*, ed. Neil Cornwell (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991) 22-31 (22).

²⁹⁵ Druskin 30.

been previously arrested in 1931 and spent several months in internal exile in Kursk) in front of his apartment building in Leningrad and was never seen again. He died in an NKVD prison in 1942.²⁹⁶ The portrait of the miracle worker in “The Old Woman,” one of Kharms’s last and finest works, speaks to the new self-image of the Russian author in the 1930s: that of a martyr whose will to live and create had been destroyed, of an authorial self immobilized, emptied out, erased from existence.

The plot of “The Old Woman” strongly evokes several major works of nineteenth-century Russian literature, in particular Pushkin’s short story “Queen of Spades” (Пиковая дама) and Dostoevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment* (Преступление и наказание).²⁹⁷ In each of these earlier canonical works, the male protagonist enters the abode of an old woman and causes her death (Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov murders the pawnbroker, while Pushkin’s Germann threatens the old countess with a pistol causing her to die of fright). Kharms’s story, however, has a reversed structure: the old woman enters the narrator’s apartment and inexplicably dies there, leaving the innocent narrator in fear of being arrested for murder. The victim is no longer the old woman but the writer. By “quoting” these staples of the Russian literary tradition and reversing their plots in a way that underscores the narrator’s passive role in this situation, Kharms illustrates the writer’s vulnerable position in his time, the inevitability and the irrationality of his demise. According to Chances, in this way Kharms underscores the discontinuity between the 1930s Soviet reality and the Russian past: “Looking at the past, we

²⁹⁶ According to the archive of the Science and Information Center “Memorial” (Научно-Информационный Центр «Мемориал») in St. Petersburg, Kharms was assigned to compulsory psychiatric treatment and died in the prison hospital on February 2, 1942. See the article “Kharms, Daniil Ivanovich” at <<http://lists.memo.ru/index22.htm>>.

²⁹⁷ Ellen Chances discusses this connection in detail; furthermore, she links “The Old Woman” to several other prominent works in the Russian nineteenth-century canon, such as Gogol’s short stories “The Nose” (Нос), “The Overcoat” (Шинель), and his *poema* *Dead Souls*, as well as Dostoevsky’s novella *Notes from the Underground* (Записки из подполья). See Chances, “Daniil Charms’ ‘Old Woman’ Climbs Her Family Tree: ‘Starucha’ and the Russian Literary Past,” *Russian Literature* XVII (1985) 353-366.

see, does not provide an answer. There is no rational continuity. Past and present, coexisting in ‘The Old Woman,’ end up in a senseless dead-end of the Stalinist society of the 1938 and 1939.”²⁹⁸

Kharmis was unable to publish his prose in his lifetime, except for his children’s stories. These stories, obliquely directed to adult audiences as well, show more signs of authorial self-erasure. In a 1935 story called “A Fairy Tale” (Сказка), a little boy named Vania tries to write three stories (about a king, a robber, and a blacksmith), but each time his friend Lenchka interrupts him after the first sentence and tells him that such a story has already been written. Lenchka then tells Vania these existing stories; in her stories, the plots revolve around unmotivated violence, death, and a failed attempt to get started on an endeavor. When Vania finally decides to write a story about himself, Lenchka once again tells him that the story about him already exists. Vania is incredulous, but Lenchka insists and tells him to pick up the latest issue of the children’s magazine *Siskin* (Чиж) to read “A Fairy Tale.” In a larger “adult” sense, then, the story is about the “de-authorizing” of Vania: his unsuccessful attempts at writing and his weak claim to his own identity.²⁹⁹ In one of the stories told by Lenchka, a blacksmith forging a horseshoe swings his hammer so violently that the head of the hammer flies off the handle and out the window and proceeds to wreak havoc all around town. After killing four pigeons, breaking through the window and a wall of the fire chief’s house, toppling a lamppost to the ground, knocking an ice cream man off his feet, the object finally strikes the head of one Karl Ivanovich Shusterling, a random man in the street. This character is the only character to have a full name in a story that gives no specific information about any other characters. Thus even

²⁹⁸ Chances 363.

²⁹⁹ For a detailed analysis of this story, see Charles Isenberg, *Telling Silence: Russian Frame Narratives of Renunciation* (Northwestern University Press, 1993) 3-8.

though he is a mere bystander, Karl Ivanovich is at the same time marked as very different from the rest of the characters in the story.

“Karl Ivanovich Shusterling” is an alias under which Kharms published several pieces in *Siskin*. The story, then, uses an authorial surrogate once again to suggest an unfathomable (absurd) violent attack perpetrated against authors. Discussing this episode, Isenberg speaks of the story’s “political unconscious” because it is “a work that uses the resources of nomination only to call attention to this passerby Karl, with his markedly German name, who is struck in the head by a flying object whose name just happens to designate a smaller version (the *molotok*, “hammer”) of the Russian proletarian emblem, the sledgehammer, or *molot*.”³⁰⁰ While Isenberg sees this scene as an example of a “covert attack on a male authority figure,” I view it as Kharms’s commentary specifically on the state’s destructive attack on the independent author, as another illustration of “de-authorizing.” Another of Kharms’s children’s stories, “A Mysterious Occurrence” (Загадочный случай), confirms this reading. In this story, Karl Ivanovich Shusterling is once again cast as a passive, third-person presence. The story opens with a first-person narrator lying on the sofa and “shaking with fear” because of a bizarre occurrence. The narrator explains that, after he wiped the dust off the portrait of his friend Karl Ivanovich Shusterling and hung the portrait back on the wall, his “feet froze and [his] hair stood on end” because the image in the portrait had changed:

Вместо Карла Ивановича Шустерлинга на меня глядел со стены страшный, бородатый старик в дурацкой шапочке. Я с криком выскочил из комнаты. Как мог Карл Иванович Шустерлинг в одну минуту превратиться в этого странного бородача? Мне никто не может объяснить этого...
Может быть, вы скажете мне, куда исчез мой дорогой Карл Иванович?

Instead of Karl Ivanovich Shusterling, a frightening bearded old man in a stupid hat looked at me from the wall. I screamed and ran out of the room.

³⁰⁰ Isenberg 6.

How could Karl Ivanovich Shusterling turn in an instant into this strange bearded man? Nobody can explain this to me...
 Maybe you can tell me where my dear Karl Ivanovich had disappeared to? (1:76)

Karl Ivanovich is literally erased from the portrait; his vanishing eerily foreshadows Kharms's own disappearance after his arrest and echoes millions of other such "mysterious occurrences" in the 1930s. The narrator's paralyzing fear, as well as his need for an explanation of this event, mirrors the fates of the relatives and loved ones of those arrested during the Stalinist purges, including Kharms's wife Marina Malich. In a 1941 letter, following her husband's arrest and disappearance, she wrote, "I am losing my mind, how can I get in touch with him" (2:300). The recurrent silent figure of Karl Ivanovich Shusterling, then, is another example of Kharms's figured author. Like the miracle worker in "The Old Woman," this character is barely present in the narrative and is attacked, exiled, and erased by an impersonal "mysterious" force. Even his third-person existence in the narrative, his already passive and de-authorized status as "he" rather than "I," does not exempt Kharms's figured author from being removed: evicted from his apartment, exiled from the city where he lives, his image erased from the memory of those who loved him.

Kharms's use of marginal third-person characters hints at the authorial presence in his works in subtle, ethereal ways. This comes, of course, at a time when, in the words of Boris Eikhenbaum, "the lyric 'I' became almost taboo" in Soviet literature.³⁰¹ Among other authors of the 1930s, we may recognize modifications of the authorial cameo in Mikhail Zoshchenko's third-person narrative mask of *avtor* (author). Critics have commented extensively on Zoshchenko's tragic "literary dualism" – the conflict between his own interest in literary experimentation and deeply psychological subjective narrative and the Party demands he faced to

³⁰¹ Boris Eikhenbaum, "O Mandel'shtame," *Den' poezii* (Leningrad, 1967) 167.

produce positive “constructivist” works extolling the virtues of the new Soviet man.³⁰² In one of his major works *Youth Restored* (Возвращенная молодость), published in 1933, he explores the psychological issues that interested him, but discusses them using an ironic narrative mask. His narrator speaks in a voice Zoshchenko had popularized in his bestselling satirical short stories from the 1920s, a voice stylized as that of a crude, uneducated, and naïve Soviet citizen. But now, in *Youth Restored*, this same narrator consistently refers to himself as “author” and almost exclusively speaks about himself in the third-person. For example, he prefaces the stories he is about to tell in the following way:

Автор просит у этих лиц извинения за то, что он, работая в своем деле, мимоходом и, так сказать, как свинья, забрел в чужой огород, наследил, быть может, натоптал и, чего доброго, сожрал чужую брюкву.

The author apologizes to these personages for the fact that he, while doing his business, casually, and, so to speak, like a pig, wandered into someone else’s backyard, left footmarks, perhaps even dirt and maybe even gobbled their turnips.³⁰³

Here, and throughout the work, Zoshchenko is compelled to avoid speaking in the first person and to conceal his voice behind the carefully crafted third-person mask of “author.” The comical speech of this narrator functions to deflect attention from the work’s interest in psychological analysis and instead to create an association with Zoshchenko’s highly popular and officially sanctioned works of the 1920s.

Zoshchenko’s last major work, the deeply personal *Before Sunrise* (Перед восходом солнца), completed a decade after *Youth Restored*, is a continuation of the questions raised in the earlier work. Zoshchenko himself explicitly makes this connection in his foreword to *Before Sunrise*. In contrast to *Youth Restored*, however, *Before Sunrise* is narrated in the first person

³⁰² Vera von Wiren, “Zoshchenko in Restrospect,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (October 1962) 348-361 (349).

³⁰³ Mikhail Zoshchenko, *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 t.* (Leningrad, 1987) 3:6.

and in Zoshchenko's own autobiographical voice, which carefully explains the author's motivations for the serious psychological introspection to follow. The author frames his investigation into his own lifelong depression by his discussions of the theories of Freud and Pavlov. *Before Sunrise* was published serially in 1943, but was severely attacked by Soviet critics, labeled "highly subjective," and finally withdrawn from publication after its second installment. It was subsequently suppressed from publication until 1972, fourteen years after Zoshchenko's death. In contrast to *Youth Restored*, then, *Before Sunrise* is a bold attempt to reclaim the authorial "I," an enterprise that was harshly punished by the Party government, in particular by the public denunciation of the work by Andrei Zhdanov in 1946. Zoshchenko's ensuing fate as a blacklisted author in the Soviet Union is a vivid illustration of the dangers of trying to reverse the emptying out of the authorial "I" in the context of Stalinist artistic doctrine. Kharms's and Zoshchenko's use of the authorial "he" seems to reflect the authors' self-negation in their work to illustrate or circumvent the taboos imposed on them by Russian "literature as institution" of the 1930s and 1940s. The authorial figurations in their works hint at what it means to be an "absent" author in the context of the Stalinist regime. Thus the motivation for underscoring one's own authorial absence during this period differs, for instance, from Chekhov's motivation to reduce his perceived presence in his art and from Nabokov's multiple self-figuration in *The Gift*.

A new attitude to the reader emerges among authors in the 1930s and is reflected in the literature of this period. In the age of denunciations and of the proletarian mass reader who, in tandem with the government, placed restrictive demands on artists, authors like Kharms and Zoshchenko no longer identify with the reader (unlike Bulgakov and his compassionate reader in

“Morphine”).³⁰⁴ In Kharms’s 1933 mini-play “Four illustrations of how a new idea blindsides a person who is not prepared for it” (Четыре иллюстрации того, как новая идея огорашивает человека, к ней не подготовленного), the reader states his negative opinion of the writer in uninhibited and obscene terms, thus literally causing the latter to “fall dead.” This comical exaggeration nevertheless communicates the destructive and dictatorial power the reader now possesses in relation to the author. And so the figured author is no longer in the position of the audience. Instead, this figure is now marked by lack or disintegration, his existence questioned or conditional. It is a third-person presence in the narrative, a figure that struggles to assemble its own identity and voice and is constantly threatened with destruction and effacement.

The works of Zoshchenko and Kharms show new ways of representing authorship in the context of political oppression. A link could be extended also to the work of Joseph Brodsky, whose vocation as a poet was found offensive by Soviet officials in the 1960s, leading to his arrest (on a charge of “social parasitism”), a humiliating trial, a hard labor sentence, and a later exile to the West. From a theoretical perspective, Brodsky’s experiments with authorial figuration can also be viewed through a postmodernist lens, as seen for example in the 1980 poem *Folk Tune* (also known as, “It’s not that the Muse feels like clamming up...” [“То не муза воды набирает в рот...”]).³⁰⁵ Here, Brodsky “invites the reader to erase the boundary between the author and everything else” in the poem’s final stanza:

³⁰⁴ Evgeny Dobrenko examined letters and statements made by early Soviet readers that reflected the mass opinion both on the elements of old pre-revolutionary culture and art they viewed as undesirable and on those elements of which they wanted to see more in literature and theater. After analyzing such statements, Dobrenko concluded that “the demands of [the mass reader] coincided almost completely with the demands of state power” (799). These included the demands for literature and art that “teach” the reader/spectator something useful, are accessible to the reader and are “without tricks and cleverness,” that are “realistic, yet optimistic and heroic” (784-786). See Dobrenko, “The Disaster of Middlebrow Taste,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 94, No. 3 (Summer 1995) 773-806.

³⁰⁵ Brodsky, Joseph. *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1965). Translated by the author in *To Urania: Poems* (MacMillan, 1992) 63.

Навсегда расстаемся с тобой, дружок.
 Нарисуй на бумаге простой кружок.
 Это буду я: ничего внутри.
 Посмотри на него—и потом сотри.

We are parting for good, my friend, that's that.
 Draw an empty circle on your blue pad.
 This will be me: no insides in thrall.
 Stare at it a while, then erase the scrawl.³⁰⁶

Here, in a farewell reminiscent of the finale of *Eugene Onegin*, the lyric “I” is quite literally emptied out and transformed, within the space of two lines, into an inanimate “it” (“he” in Russian). The kind of self-erasure implied in the use of figured author as a device is taken to its extreme here, illustrating postmodernist interest in simulacra or “authentic images of an absent reality,” as well as in the disintegration of the concept of authorship and creative originality.³⁰⁷ A further look at the authorial figurations in the works of Zoshchenko, Kharms, and Brodsky would thus give us a better understanding of the dynamics of self-effacing and self-emptying in the Russian twentieth-century literature.

The works I have examined in this study dramatize authorship as a central theme. In a sense, they apply the predicament of Russian authors to the whole of human existence. They ask questions about how to use language, how to think freely, how to deal with chaos and still preserve compassion, how to form a self that is separate from another, and how to make sense of inexplicable forces of destruction. The mechanisms employed by these authors to address such problems—self-interruption, self-inflation, adopting the perspective of another, or imagining one’s own end—seem to me quite recognizable as very human attempts at self-growth and

³⁰⁶ I thank John Wright for this example and the interpretation, quoted here from a personal e-mail.

³⁰⁷ Mikhail Epstein, “After the Future: On the New Consciousness in Literature,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 90.2 (Spring, 1991) 409-444 (440).

psychic survival in the face of terror. I hope that my analysis has also shown how pronounced these particular human issues have long been in Russian culture, and how well they have been reflected in the literary device of the authorial cameo over the last two centuries.

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